



# Unity in Love

A dark comedy of romantic obsession, sexual repression, and Hitler

Based on a true story

## Unity in Love

Unity Mitford, the well-bred daughter of England's Lord and Lady Redesdale and one of the famed "Mitford Girls," develops a romantic obsession for Adolf Hitler and sets out to win his heart. The degree to which she accomplishes this goal will determine the path of World War II, the future of two nations, and the way forward for the Twentieth Century.

It is a true story.

And it has yet to be told...



Unity Mitford with Adolf Hitler (c.1936)

## Why This Story? Why Now?

Research and writing on *Unity in Love* began 15 years ago. We have held onto the project until we were certain that the timing was right. The time is now.

A great deal has been written recently about the loss of social memory, the passing away of the generation that lived through World War II. Cinematically, the result of this has been a rush of successful independent films, each seeking to find those stories that are soon to be lost. These have taken the form of specific historical examinations (Olivier Hirschbiegel's *Downfall*, Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, Morten Tyldum's *The Imitation Game*) to fictional works (David Ayer's *Fury*, Paul Verhoeven's *Black Book*, the German television series *A Generation*) to bold reinventions and fantasias (Wes Anderson's *Grand Hotel Budapest*, Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*). In each case, these films have been successful because they have exploited an adult market niche, one which is bored with the usual big screen fare and looking for something that appeals to deeper historical interests. Just as important, each of these films has had an international appeal, one that allowed them to tap into both the lucrative American and European markets.

*Unity in Love* fits comfortably into this niche. Like the specific historical examinations, it tells a true story through the accumulation of facts and the ability to create living characters out of historical figures long since confined to the dry status of icons. Just as telling, though, is its connection to reinvention. *Unity in Love* is told entirely from the point of view of the title character at the moment that an eight year-old, self-inflicted bullet is swelling inside her brain. This allows the real events to take on the air of fantasy.

The largest purveyor of such films has been Europe. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, there has been a growing interest, even obsession, with examining the relationship between each nation and the war. For this reason, a good deal of European television money has gone into international productions that examine this theme. *Unity in Love* is poised to exploit this financing. The requirement for such financing is a guaranteed percentage of shooting in the country from which the financing is secured.



The "Mitford Girls" with brother Tom and parents, Lord and Lady Redesdale (c. 1928)

## **Who Is The Intended Audience and How Will It Reach Them?**

*Unity in Love* is intended for educated adults, above the age of 25. According to MPAA U.S./Canada Theatrical Market Statistics, Attendance Demographics, the 25-39 year old demo accounts for 28% of the tickets sold while those above 40 purchase 30%. This gives *Unity in Love* a market reach of 58% of the ticket buying public (the much-vaunted 18-24 demos most sought after by Hollywood and many independents only represents 19% of the tickets sold).

Given the subject matter and the difficulty of penetrating multiplexes with non-traditional or independent fare, the most practical and potentially effective path for *Unity in Love* is through the art houses. These appeal more broadly in subject matter than multiplexes despite having fewer screens.

This benefits *Unity in Love* in an interesting way, one that is provided by the very uniqueness of the story and the approach. The overwhelming number of independent productions seeking space in a crowded marketplace falls between the stools of the multiplex and the art house. These films tend to be designed as action or romantic comedies meant to capture some of the dollars generally reserved for Hollywood products. The battle, though, is a losing one. In order to secure space in a multiplex and to have an appeal to the audience familiar with these genres, the independent must first play the game by Hollywood's rules – romantic comedies require two stars of equal caliber while action films demand a star and a heavy effects budget. Since most indies cannot afford these, they are quickly left behind. Their films also fail to get a foothold in the art houses because of their lack of originality. Art houses need something different, something with an approach unique enough to intrigue an audience. Recent art house hits include *Birdman*, *The Imitation Game*, *American Hustle*, *Whiplash*, *Nightcrawler*, *Silver Linings Playbook*, and *12 Years a Slave*. Each of these began their life in the art house. It was their success in these venues that allowed them to expand into the multiplexes.

The current plan for moving *Unity in Love* into this marketplace:

- 1) Selling foreign distribution rights to interested countries (Western European nations being the obvious parties). This provides some capital for the production while also securing theaters in selected foreign markets.
- 2) Industry-related film festivals (i.e., Cannes, Sundance, Toronto, Palm Springs, etc.). This is where distributors, bookers and sales agents seek out new and unique films. It is also where deals for VOD, cable and video can be signed for the time following theatrical distribution.
- 3) Consumerist film festivals (Chicago International Film Festival, Montreal World Film Festival, Telluride, SXSW, etc.). This is where key awards are won and word of mouth is easiest to establish.

In this best of all possible worlds, *Unity in Love* can go into production in the summer and fall of 2017 and be ready for the 2018 festival season beginning with Sundance and SXSW. These are the two premiere stateside festivals for independent film.



Unity with "Rolf" (c. 1936)

## How Will This Story Be Told?

*Unity in Love* is a dark comedy. As such, it is important to “keep a straight face.” This means that the humor is not in the comedy acting of the players, but in their ability to play the absurdity without consciously telegraphing the jokes. Simply put, the humor is in the situations, not in the way the characters react to them.

The key to understanding the visual approach is to recognize that we are seeing the world through the eyes of a naïve young woman, one who is intensely romantic yet deeply sexually repressed. She is also looking back on the events of her life at the moment of her death and is therefore rationalizing her actions and trying to see herself as the heroine of her own story.

The movie visualizes this by opening in a hospital room with a series of confusing images, ones seen by Unity’s mind rather than her eye. The bullet she shot into her brain eight years earlier is moving. This will not only cause her death, but it will also “rip open” her mind and let her memories pour out. These memories and the fact that they are coming from a fevered and rationalizing brain will control the narrative and its visual style for the entirety of the film. One example is the use of her deathbed. As she enters a new memory, her hospital bed is transported to each new location and she enters the story through this. And always with her at these junctures is a silent, adoring Hitler, ever faithful and at her beck and call. It is only at the very end of her story that she must confront the devastating reality of his feelings for her with one last moment in the bed.

*Unity in Love* respects the timeline of Unity’s life. In terms of reality, there are only a few minor alterations of location and time. Timelines, though, are factual, not truthful. The true story of Unity will never really be known – Did she sleep with Hitler? Did she have his “love child”? Was she a virgin? All of these have been theorized, but no proof exists. Our goal is not to give the definitive life story of this individual, but to present an

examination of what happens when romantic obsession collides with sexual repression and to tell this tale within the timeline of her life.

To tell this story, some CGI will be needed, but this will be used sparingly. Our goal is to tell the story in real exterior settings (studio work will be done in Chicago) to give the film a verisimilitude that tends to be defeated by an excessive reliance on effects.



Unity Mitford at the 1936 Nuremberg Rally

## How and Where Will We Seek Financing?

There are three sources of income to be sought for *Unity in Love*:

- 1) Through the sale of foreign rights. This is helpful but not necessarily lucrative. Our hope would be to make up approximately 3-5% of the budget through this avenue. The real advantage here is that it will guarantee distribution in key markets.
- 2) Through European sources. Our hope would be to use these sources to make up approximately 30% of the budget. Monies raised through this route could also open us up to reduced permit costs, in-kind services, and lower-cost production personnel. Most important, these provide tax incentives of between 20% and 50% depending on the country. These would help to keep or even lower the bottom line.
- 3) Individual investment. The majority of the money will come from this area. Ways in which investment can be structured:
  - a. An initial investment of \$150,000 to cover the cost of pre-production. This investor will also receive a negotiated percentage of the return after recoupment that would be greater than the percentage of funds provided for the film. This will hopefully increase the motivation to come in early. Monies raised will be used to set up an LLC, handle development and

script costs, do location scouting, permit attainment and casting, and all other activities associated with pre-production.

- b. Near the completion of pre-production, we would return to the initial investor to seek additional funding. This allows the investor the opportunity to assess further risk based on our performance to this point.
- c. The creation of investment groups, each seeking a specific percentage of the budget. One possible breakdown could be four groups, ones to raise money for pre-production, production, post-production, and marketing. Percentage of return in this situation would be based upon the amount raised by each group.

While research and conversations have already been started with Germany, Belgium and the Czech Republic, one thing is certain: In order to secure foreign rights and European funding, it is necessary to have commitments for at least 30% of the budget from investment sources. For this reason, it is necessary to raise money here before we can mount a campaign to secure foreign support.

## The Team

The producer, director and writer of *Unity in Love* have a combined 95 years of experience in both theatrical and motion picture storytelling. Just as important, their work has been in the independent community from which this film will spring. This means solid adult-oriented storytelling skills, effective management of low budgets, and proven track records with the paths through international film festivals as well as both theatrical and online distribution options.



**Michael Caplan** (Co/Producer) is an award-winning independent film director, producer and educator. He most recently directed and wrote *Algren*, a feature length documentary that explores the life and legacy of Nelson Algren, the National Book Award-winning author of “The Man With the Golden Arm” and “Walk on the Wild Side.” The film

premiered in 2014 at the Chicago International Film Festival with sold out screenings, and rave reviews, from the Hollywood Reporter to the Chicago Tribune. It also screened at the Music Box Theatre as part of an inaugural documentary series at the famed art house theatre in Chicago.

Caplan also directed and wrote *A Magical Vision*, a film that spotlights internationally acclaimed magician, philosopher, and guru of the magical arts, Eugene Burger. Burger has traveled the world for the last 30 years, speaking to magicians, academics, and the general public about the experience of magic. The film premiered at the Gene Siskel Theatre in Chicago in 2008 and was an award winning film at international film festivals.

Prior to this, Caplan directed and wrote *Stones from the Soil*, which was shown on national PBS in 2005. The film is a personal documentary about a unique school in 1930's Germany, in which a small group of Jewish teenagers were trained to become the vanguard of a new society. One of those teenagers was the filmmaker's father, Rudolph Caplan. *Stones From the Soil* is a tribute to his father, a reflection on memory and an important preservation of a formerly untold story from the Nazi era.

As a producer, Caplan has guided three feature films, including *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, acclaimed by The New York Times as "praiseworthy, intense, frenetic, frank, and touching... preserving not just a performance but the spirit of a time."

Caplan is an Associate Professor in the Cinema Art + Science Department at Columbia College Chicago, where he teaches documentary and narrative film production as well as creative producing classes.



**Ron Falzone** (Co-Producer/Screenwriter) is an award-winning screenwriter and Associate Professor in Cinema Art + Science at Columbia College Chicago as well as a member of the faculty of the Harold Ramis Film School at Second City. His short script, *Typing*, was produced by Zaxie Films in 2010, and his feature screenplay, *Close Quarters*, was produced by Nefarious Productions in 2011, both directed by Jack C Newell. The latter was nominated for six 2012 Midwest Film Awards, including Best Film and Best Screenplay. Falzone is a twelve-time Artist in Residence at The Ragdale Foundation and a recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Artist Fellowship in Screenwriting as well as IAC Finalist Awards for his screenplays *Hope's Dash* and *Unity in Love*. His



feature screenplays *Coriander* and *a Penny's Worth of Lonesome*, *Hope's Dash*, and *Loop'd* are currently under option. Films he has written and/or co-produced have been screened at festivals around the world including the Cannes Film Festival Short Film Corner, the Friars Club Comedy Festival, Chicago International Film Festival, Big Bear Lake Film Festival, Kansas City Film Festival, and Montreal World Film Festival.

Falzone worked as a producer, writer and director in professional theatre from 1972 until 1991. During this time, he was responsible for over seventy main stage productions at theatres from Boston to New York City to Chicago. From 1980 to 1982, Falzone served as artistic director of Chancel Players and filled the same position for the next two years at Open Circle Theatre Company. In 1985, he was appointed artistic coordinator for Chicago's famed Organic Theater Company where he developed The Greenhouse, a nationally recognized arts incubator. In 1987, Falzone became producing director for City Lit Theater Company where he guided the ten-year old company through its first announced season. His most unique production was *Outta' Joint*, an original musical created in collaboration with maximum-security prisoners at Illinois' Stateville Correctional Center.

Falzone holds a B.A. in Film from Columbia College Chicago and an M.F.A. in Directing from Northwestern University.



**Jack C. Newell** (Director) is a Chicago-based award-winning director and producer of films that have screened at various international film festivals including Montreal World Film Festival, Chicago International Film Festival, Cannes Film Festival Short Film Corner, Boston Film Festival, and the Gene Siskel Film Center.

Newell began his filmmaking career directing numerous shorts, including *Typing* featuring *SNL*'s Tim Kazurinsky and Steppenwolf Theater's Francis Guinan and written by Ron Falzone. His first feature, *Close Quarters*, also written by Falzone, screened at improv and film festivals worldwide and can now be seen on Amazon Instant Video. He is currently promoting the release of *Open Tables*, a film he wrote and directed that is set in some of the world's top restaurants and filmed on location in Chicago and Paris. Newell's ongoing projects include the documentary film, *How to Build a School in Haiti*, a story about the construction of an elementary school in rural Haiti following the devastating 2010 earthquake. He is also in post-production on a mid-length documentary,

*Courses.* This film is an intimate portrait of Chicago chef Jake Bickelhaupt and how he evolved in less than a year from running an illegal restaurant out of his home to being a celebrated two Michelin Star culinary celebrity.

Beyond his film interests, Newell is also working with Seth Unger to produce Wabash Lights, an interactive light installation that will be a part of the soon-to-be refurbished Wabash Avenue streetscape in Chicago's Loop.

Newell holds a BA in Film from Columbia College Chicago where he also served for several years as an Adjunct Faculty member in the Directing concentration. He is currently the Program Head of TV, Film & Digital at The Second City Training Center.

### **Consultants**

The following Europe-based filmmakers have agreed to consult as needed for this production as we move forward:

**Margarethe von Trotta:** One of the leading lights – and the only female member – of the influential New German Cinema movement of the 1970's. Today, she is widely respected as one of the pre-eminent feminist filmmakers in world cinema. Her films examine the role of women in society, particularly in relation to historical events. Like *Unity in Love*, her films *Rosa Luxemburg*, *Rosenstrasse* and *Hannah Arendt* all deal with women who must come to terms with their relationship to historical events so much larger than themselves.

**Pablo Berger:** Frequently referred to as Spain's "next Pedro Almodovar," Berger was educated at New York University but chose to return to his home country to help build the film community there. Winner of numerous international awards, his first film, *Torremolinos '73*, was nominated for Best Director and Best Screenplay at the Goya Awards (Spain's equivalent of the Academy Awards). His most recent film, *Blancanieves*, a silent retelling of *Snow White*, won an astonishing ten Goyas including ones for Best Screenplay and Best Picture. It was also Spain's selection for the 2013 Best Foreign Language Academy Award.

**Felix Moeller:** Acclaimed filmmaker and film historian, Moeller is considered to be among the most important historians of German film during the Hitler era. His documentary, *Harlan: In the Shadow of Jew Suss* (about Nazi filmmaker Veit Harlan) and his book, "The Film Minister: Goebbels and the Cinema of the Third Reich" are considered fundamental works on the topic.

Preliminary Budget, Screenplay and work samples are available on request.