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Film Production in Austria. Memorandum to Capt. Robert Lawrence, Foreign Films, Inc. [u.] Memorandum to Kurt W. Grimm, Zürich/Vienna.

Mann, Klaus

Zürich, Rom, 1946-01-20

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MEMORANDUM TO CAPT. ROBERT LAWRENCE, FOREIGN FILMS, INC.

SUBJECT: Film Production in Austria

A revival of the once famous and successful Austrian film production seems to be in the making, under the leadership of the well-known director and actor, WILLI FORST.

During my recent stay in Zurich, Switzerland, I came in contact with an Austrian banker, Dr. KURT GRIMM, who takes an active interest in the movie industry of his country. GRIMM asked me whether I would like to work for the Austrian film. In the course of our conversation, I told him about the collaboration between FOREIGN FILMS and Rossellini's Italian group -- which gave us the idea that an arrangement of a similar kind might be possible between WIEN-FILM, on the one hand, and your organization, on the other. A few days later, GRIMM went to Vienna, where he discussed this possibility with some of the leading men of the Austrian film production. Upon his return to Zurich, he told me that the Austrians, in principle, would be very interested in such a proposition, and that, as far as he (GRIMM) could see, there would be no technical or legal difficulties.

The next ^{question} ~~subject~~ GRIMM and I discussed was that of ^a ~~sub~~ject which might be suitable for a joint Austro-American production. We agreed that a musical comedy in the traditional "light" Viennese vein would be definitely in poor taste, considering the grim experiences Austria has recently passed through and the gravity of her present plight. Nor could we

imagine a political theme, in the line of ROMA, CITTA APERTA or THE LAST CHANCE, as the Austrian history of the last ten years is almost completely lacking in any features that would lend themselves to that kind of glorification or dramatization. In short, we could not agree upon any particular subject suitable for our purposes. GRIMM assured me, however, that almost any subject suggested by me, and acceptable to the American partners, would be all right with the Austrians.

Subsequently I talked over the matter with my sister, ERIKA MANN (now in Germany and Austria as a special correspondent of LIBERTY Magazine). Together we had the idea that a film on the life of WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART would be exactly the kind of thing the Austrians ought to produce, at this point. MOZART is probably the greatest genius Austria has ever given to the world. His fame is universal -- his music loved everywhere. His biography is rich in both tragic and serene elements: there is romance, comedy, a colourful historical background -- and, above all, there is music! Of course, the film would have to include samples of MOZART's operas, symphonies and concertoes. These musical illustrations have to be presented by an outstanding musician. The greatest MOZART conductor of our time is BRUNO WALTER. (Even TOSCANINI admits that he cannot compete with WALTER when it comes to conducting MOZART!) WALTER happens to be an old friend of my family and myself. So I wrote to him -- outlining the MOZART film the way I visualize it, and asking him, first, whether he would be interested in taking care of the musical part; second, whether he would be willing to help us in writing the script. (For WALTER is not only an interpreter of MOZART's compositions but also an expert in all matters con=

cerning MOZART's life.) A few days later, I received a cable from New York which reads as follows:

FIND IDEA ATTRACTIVE SUGGEST VERBAL DISCUSSION IN BEVERLY HILLS WHERE I SHALL BE FROM JUNE TO SEPTEMBER STOP INTERESTED IN COOPERATION BUT NOT BEFORE SPRING 1947 UNTIL THEN FULLY OCCUPIED GREETINGS BRUNO WALTER

So that's how the matter stands. In the near future I intend to go to Vienna in order to discuss the ^{project}~~idea~~ with Dr. GRIMM (who will be there about Easter), WILLY FORST, and others. I don't know how much of a financial contribution the Austrians would expect from FOREIGN FILMS; but I have pointed out, in my initial memorandum to Dr. GRIMM, that in the case of the current Italian production your investment amounts to approximately 10 % to 20 % of the total costs. In the case of the MOZART film, the most important dollar-expense would be BRUNO WALTER's fee -- to which has to be added my own fee and that of my sister (for I would like to write the screen script in collaboration with her). I suppose these three fees combined might amount to a sum between \$ 20,000 and 30,000; but I wish to emphasize that this is a very approximate, tentative guess -- by no means a definite estimate. Nor do I know whether the Austrians would be satisfied if FOREIGN FILMS covered only the fees for WALTER and for the script authors; but maybe they would -- especially if your organization also contributed some technical material not available or very expensive in Austria.

What I would like to know (and should find out before going to Vienna) is, whether your organization would be interested,

in principle, in partly financing a film on the life of MOZART -- to be produced in Austria, under the direction of WILLY FORST, with BRUNO WALTER as conductor and general supervisor, and with ERIKA MANN and me as the authors of the screen story. (The cast, of course, is to be all-Austrian; as for the orchestra, we couldn't find a better one than the VIENNA PHILHARMONICS.)

May I ask you, in concluding this memorandum, to treat this whole proposition with the utmost discretion. Also, will you please make it clear to your collaborators, both here and in New York, that the matter must not be mentioned to anybody outside of the inner circle of FOREIGN FILMS, INC. Any premature publicity could not but have the most disturbing consequences,

KLAUS MANN,

ROME, 25 MARCH, 1946

Lawrence

("Mogart")
KIVAN NIVIN

sentences.

These sentences could not but have the most disturbing con-
sequence of the inner circle of foreign firms' inc. and the
new York, that the matter shall not be mentioned to anyone
outside the circle of those who are in control of the
whole situation with the utmost discretion. Also, will you

may I ask you to consider this memorandum to clear this
ALVIN B. HIGGINS.

as for the sentence, we should find a better one than the
screen story. (The case of course, is to be all-American
and with KIVAN NIVIN and me as the authors of the
of MIGHTY POWER, with NIVIN NIVIN as conductor and General
POWER -- to be produced in America, under the direction
in America, in which the picture is to be on the title of

Memorandum

TO: DR. KURT W. GRIMM, ZURICH/VIENNA

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN FILM PRODUCTION

This is, in short, the idea I brought up in our recent conversation:

I am connected with an American organization by the name of FOREIGN FILMS, INCORPORATED, with offices in Rome, Italy (Via Regina Elena 68) and in New York (15 West 73rd Street). The president of that corporation, ROLAND GEIGER, used to specialize, before the war, in the distribution of foreign films, particularly French productions, but is now taking an active interest in the production of new European pictures. As pointed out in the enclosed newspaper clipping (from The Stars and Stripes, Mediterranean Edition), GEIGER's group is just now financing -- partially at least -- a new movie venture in Italy. The film to which the newspaper story refers ("Seven from the United States") is to be based on a script written by me, in collaboration with an Italian author.

Now, I am reasonably sure that I could arouse the interest of FOREIGN FILMS, INC., in the production of Austrian films as well -- especially if I, as an author, were connected with the enterprise. I am not in a position to say, offhand, how much money the corporation might be willing to invest in such a venture; but I know that in the case of the new Rossellini production FOREIGN FILMS is contributing a considerable part of the total costs and takes care, in particular, of all those expenses for which American currency is needed.

These are the points about which I would like to get definite information:

Would Allied authorities permit FOREIGN FILMS, INC. to invest any money in the production of a new Austrian film?

Would the Austrians in charge of the new Austrian movie production be interested in any proposition of that kind?

Would I be allowed, under present regulations, to work as a screen-writer on such a joint American-Austrian production, even though I am an American citizen? (Naturally, my fee would be paid for by FOREIGN FILMS, INC. -- not by the Austrians.)

If all these questions can be answered in the affirmative, I would, first, discuss the whole matter with GEIGER upon my return to Rome; second, outline a synopsis of the screen story, maybe in collaboration with my sister, Erika Mann; third, try to come to Vienna -- with GEIGER or with "plein pouvoir" from him -- to talk over the matter there with all those concerned.

Klaus Mann
Zurich, 20 Jan., 1946

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