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David Boies Dabbles in Hollywood Through Film Company

Nell Gluckman, The Am Law Daily

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Some lawyers invest in wine, others in art. David Boies invests in major Hollywood films.

About three years ago, the chairman and founder of Boies, Schiller & Flexner teamed up with Zack Schiller, son of the firm's other founder, Jonathan Schiller, to create the Boies/Schiller Film Group. The duo has backed several films, including a Western called "Jane Got a Gun," starring Natalie Portman and Ewan McGregor that is set to come out on Sept. 4.

"I've always been interested in films," says Boies, who, when donning his attorney hat, represents film companies such as Sony Pictures Entertainment and The Weinstein Company. "Then, about three years ago or so, it seemed like a sensible time to take my interest and actually do something with it. We've had a couple of good films and we've got some more in the mix. It's fun."

Boies/Schiller Film Group may not have won any Oscars over the weekend, but it did help produce the 2013 thriller "Escape Plan." It is also working on a remake of the 1985 film "Fletch," according to Schiller, who has been in the film industry since 2001. He says they also sold a pilot of a comedy that he authored to NBC.

The law firm Boies Schiller doesn't have a financial stake in the company, but Boies has attracted a group of investors and is the main decision-maker on the business side of the operation. He says he's also been able to put his legal skills to use.

"A lot of what goes on in Hollywood is what they call out there 'business affairs,'" says Boies, who himself has been portrayed in productions such as HBO's "Recount" and the play "8." "Lawyers would call it negotiation and contract drafting. There's a lot of that, particularly nowadays, because so much of movie producing today involves a series of sometimes reasonably complicated arrangements."

Putting out a movie means negotiating contracts with different distributors in dozens of countries and managing a complicated cash flow arrangement that comes from multiple financers.

Schiller says it's nice to have easy access to sound legal advice from Boies, as well as his own father and brother. (Joshua Schiller made partner at Boies Schiller in December.)

Though his company is not officially linked to the firm, it's branded with the two formidable legal names in part "so that people understand that while I'm a small operation, if people don't abide by the fee documentation and the spirit of the deals, there's a caged gorilla in the back of the office," says Zack Schiller. "That makes sure everyone's going to do what they're supposed to do."

Schiller says that kind of clout is important in the film industry, where “people will not necessarily abide by what they’ve agreed to.”

“Jane Got a Gun” is no exception. The movie was filmed in 2013 after a succession of its key players backed out, including former director Lynne Ramsey and would-be stars Jude Law and Bradley Cooper, according to The Hollywood Reporter. The industry publication credits Boies with rescuing the $25 million film by agreeing to finance it.

“That movie was creatively a top-notch project,” says Schiller. “Besides that, when we came on board, it was a bit distressed. We saw value there.”

Boies and Schiller hired director Gavin O’Connor and brought on film company The Weinstein Company, who will co-release the film with Relativity Media. Schiller describes the project as one of “the hardest things I’ve ever had to do my professional career.” But he adds, “David seems to thrive in those situations.”

Boies, a big fan of Westerns, says though the project was interesting, “I would I just as soon have my next film be not quite as interesting. There were some difficult moments along the way.”

Film producer Bob Weinstein, who heads The Weinstein Company with his brother, Harvey, praised Boies and Schiller for reviving “Jane Got a Gun.”

“David and Zack are a great producing team,” he wrote in an email to The Am Law Daily. “They brought us ‘Jane Got a Gun’ and in doing so forged a stellar working relationship with our company top to bottom.”

“Everyone who knows Zack loves him,” Weinstein added. “David Boies is the personification of integrity, and that gives them a tremendous advantage in our business.”

Schiller, 36, started his career in the film industry working for Adam Sandler’s production company, Happy Madison Productions, which he says “was like being the ball boy of the [Chicago] Bulls during the [Michael] Jordan era.”

After eight years, he went off on his own and sold some scripts before partnering with Boies.

“There’s probably no lawyer in America that has the breadth of relationships he has in the film business,” he says.

He adds with a laugh: “In case the legal stuff doesn’t work out, this is a nice backup plan for David. It gives him a cushion.”

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