

Gateway Films & Ratio Film
Present

ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON

STARRING

LEO GREGORY
TERRY STONE
JAMIE FOREMAN
GEOFF BELL
ROLAND MANOOKIAN
HOLLY EARL
NADIA FORDE
KATE BRAITHWATE
JOSH MYERS
ANDY BECKWITH
ALI COOK
JUSTIN SALINGER



For the first time ever, the violent reign of two of London's most notorious gangsters, Jack 'Spot' Comer (Terry Stone) and Billy Hill (Leo Gregory), is grippingly brought to the big screen in a sweeping saga of myth, madness, mayhem, manipulation and dishonour among thieves.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON charts the epic rise and legendary fall of a nationwide criminal empire that lasted for three action-packed decades from the late 1930s. The one-time friends and partners in crime turned bitter enemies oversaw a fledgling East End and Soho

underworld **Billy Hill (Leo Gregory) & Jack Comer (Terry Stone)**

responsible for brutal protection rackets, vicious lawbreaking, shocking corruption and glamorous associations, which paved the way for the notorious Kray twins to exert their dominance over the capital's gangland realm.

'Peaky Blinders' meets *Legend* in **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON**, the no-holds-barred true story detailing the provocative and compelling battle to become the King of London's Underworld, a larger-than-life history that has remained one of Great Britain's most dynamic, thrilling and untold tales. Now visionary director Simon Rumley (*Red, White & Blue, Crowhurst, Fashionista*) makes the truly fantastic chronicle about the founders of British organized crime an in-depth exploration of the mobster myth and psyche, a unique viewing experience and must-see for all True Crime fans.

Gateway Films & Ratio Film presents **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON**, starring Leo Gregory (*Stoned, Green Street*), Terry Stone (*Rise of the Footsoldier, Bonded By Blood, Fanged Up*), Jamie Foreman (*Layer Cake Gangster No.1: The Beginning*), Geoff Bell (*Kingsman: The Secret Service, Rogue One*), Holly Earl ('Cuckoo', *Queen of the Desert*), Nadia Forde ('I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here!'), Kate Braithwaite (*Little Deaths, Self Made*), Roland Manookian (*RocknRolla, The Football Factory*), Josh Myers (*The Fall of the Krays, Anti-Social*), Andy Beckwith ('Game of Thrones', the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series), Ali Cook ('Emmerdale', *The Anomaly*), Doug Allan ('The Royals', *The Guvnor*) and Justin Salinger (*Crowhurst, 'Humans'*). Joining an eclectic ensemble drawn from all strata of the entertainment and sports worlds are comedian Simon Munnery, boxers Joe Egan, Steve Collins and Frank Buglioni, footballer Jamie O'Hara and Union J's JJ Hamblett.

Shot entirely on location in and around London, the period gangster drama is directed by Simon Rumley (*The Living and the Dead, Johnny Frank Garrett's Last Word, Crowhurst, Fashionista*) and co-written by Will Gilbey (*Rise of the Footsoldier, A Lonely Place to Die*), Simon Rumley and Terry Stone. Producers are Terry Stone (*Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning, Plastic, Away*) and Richard Turner (*Nativity!, The Messenger*). Executive producers are Jezz Vernon & Chris Howard. Co-producer is Tiernan Hanby (*Beautiful Devils*). Heads of departments include Director of Photography Milton Kam (*Crowhurst, Fashionista, 'American Playboy: The Hugh Hefner Story'*), Costume Designer Michelle May (*Dealer, Touchpaper*), Makeup

Designer Emma Slater (*Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning*) and Production Designer Anna Mould (*Level Up, Aux*).

LONG SYNOPSIS

Not For Publication

London's East End, Sunday October 4th 1936. In the Battle of Cable Street, a clash between the Metropolitan Police, shielding the British Union of Fascists march led by Oswald Mosley, and various anti-fascist demonstrators including local Jewish groups, one man is prominently vocal in his hatred of the Blackshirts.

That's petty criminal Jack 'Spot' Comer (TERRY STONE) who runs a protection racket safeguarding the Jewish shopkeepers of Brick Lane and knows his clientele will closely be watching his protest reaction. For causing so much trouble during the demonstration Jack is sentenced to six months in Wandsworth Prison.

In another cell is career offender Billy Hill (LEO GREGORY) awaiting sentencing for his role in a daring Hatton Garden jewel robbery. When Odd Legs (ALI COOK), one of his faithful henchmen, threatens a witness to the heist and tells her not to identify Billy as the mastermind, he escapes jail – and immediately robs the same establishment again.

To ensure he will have no territorial problems with Mr. Sabini (ADAM SAINT), head of the crime gang dominating the London underworld, in partnership with Mr. White (JAMIE FOREMAN) and his son Harry (JUSTIN SALINGER) on racecourse protection rackets, Billy greases his palm with a percentage of his ill-gotten gains.

After taking girlfriend Aggie Pickett (HOLLY EARL) to the cinema, he heads to The Sleepers' Inn public house where he teaches the police informer who put him in custody a lesson – by razoring V signs on his cheeks to show gangland crime lords he's a snitch.



(l-r) Andy Beckwith, Terry Stone & Josh Myers

Jack is released from prison and heads to The Nag's Head pub where his closest friends Moisha (JOSH MYERS) and Sonny the Yank (ANDY BECKWITH) give him a hero's welcome back. Jack is approached by Darky Mulley (GEOFF BELL), owner of illegal Soho gambling clubs and racecourse rackets, who hires him to handle the lowlifes trying to muscle in. One of Jack's first tasks is to deal with anti-Semite thugs in Botolphs bar, the knuckle-duster fight being witnessed in awe by Billy and henchmen Odd Legs and Bear's Breath (JOE EGAN), there to plan to rob a furrier.

At the Alexandra Park Race Track, Jack intimidating the bookies on Darky Mulley's behalf attracts the unwanted attention of Mr. White who threatens him to back off with

a revolver. Knowing he will never shoot him – murder carrying the British death penalty by hanging – Jack escapes instead with a ferocious beating. Delighted knowing this mauling is a sure sign he's keeping the Sabinis and Whites on their worried toes, Jack pulls off a daring raid on the London County and Westminster Bank.



Billy Hill (centre) and his gang

Meanwhile, Billy proposes marriage to a thrilled Aggie and then carries out another raid on a jeweler's shop. Caught in the act, he's sentenced to two years in prison watched by his completely devastated fiancée. An assassination attempt on Jack's life in Botolphs puts him on further notice that the Sabinis and Whites see him as a major menace to their livelihoods.

But then the Second World War on Germany is declared and Jack is conscripted into the Army. As all Italians are rounded up and arrested as a result, the Sabini reign comes to an end, and because Billy only has one year left to serve on his sentence, by blanket royal decree he's let out of prison early to finally marry Aggie.

After seriously injuring his drill instructor Jack is pronounced 'mentally unstable' and, discharged from active service, takes back Botolphs from Mr. White's enforced management. Billy in the interim has wasted no time in making the war pay and his gang, masquerading as air raid wardens during the blackouts, continually ransacks shops and local businesses.

An altercation with Mr. White's nephew Bobby Warren (JJ HAMBLETT) at Botolphs not only puts Jack on collision course with the old criminal guard, but also marks the first time he meets Billy, determinedly moving in from the outer felony circle. But Mr. White's sudden death from a heart attack means Jack's main nemesis is now his incompetent son Harry who vows to destroy him after gate crashing the funeral wake.

Rearrested again Billy is sent to Wandsworth prison where as the inmate barber he meets 'Mad' Frankie Fraser (ROLAND MANOOKIAN), bonding with him when he realizes they share the same birth date and a similar violent modus operandi.

Understanding he will only become the new King of London's underworld by carrying out one of the biggest, audacious and most talked about heists ever, Jack steals ration coupons from the Romford Food Office worth hundreds of thousands of pounds on the black market. It's the biggest raid up to that time in British history.



Roland Manookian as Frankie Fraser

The war is over at last. At the Botolphs celebration party Jack meets exotic dancer Tiger Lilly (SHEREEN GUERLIN BALL) who moves in with him. The races back on at Alexandra Park, Jack and Harry White's heavies face off with the latter being the furious loser. Because he wants to be part of all the exciting illicit action, Billy has written a letter to Jack from prison asking to join his network. When Jack meets him at the prison gates on release and offers him a job based on his vicious reputation, Billy knows his swaggering star is finally on the rise.

To celebrate Billy has sex with prostitute Gypsy (KATE BRAITHWAITE), a serious relationship grows and he soon realises his love for Aggie is over.

At the races Jack introduces Billy to loan shark and bookie enforcer Albert Dimes (DOUG ALLAN). Neither men know it, but they will later be playing a key role in each other's future. At Jack's new West End gambling venue, The Modernaires club, Billy is attacked by Harry's mob and told he wants his arch enemy out of Soho. Billy asks Frankie Fraser to torture bodyguard Big Bill (STEVE COLLINS) by turning him into a human dartboard to find out where his boss Harry hangs out. Later at The Nut House pub Billy slashes Harry's face to pieces.

However Jack's enterprises are starting to lose cash, his expenses are mounting and he's paying more hush money to the police to turn a blind eye to his increasingly celebrated exploits. Another West London bank robbery is carried out but Jack takes a bigger cut, much to the chagrin of his crew and Moisha worries their loyalty is being tested too much by their boss' greed. Jack then puts Moisha into hospital when he tries to stop him strangling Tiger Lilly over her constant multi-sexual escapades.

At The Modernaires Aggie finally sees Billy with Gypsy and recognizes they are deeply in love. But rather than scream and shout over his wanton infidelity decides to turn it to her advantage. Aggie has had enough of being a bored housewife in the background - she wants to run the club. And it's there that Jack meets palm reader Rita (NADIA FORDE) and falls hopelessly in love with her.

When Gypsy is beaten up by her pimp Belgian Johnny (DOMINIC KEATING) Billy puts him hospital with 54 facial stitches. Threatened with deportation by the police unless he informs on Jack, Belgian Johnny accepts a pay-off but tells Jack that Billy hates him and is after his empire. Shocked, Jack orders Billy to make The Modernaires pay or else he's out on his ear.

Attacked by Jack and Sonny the Yank at the races, Dimes decides to join forces with Billy and Frankie. As Jack marries Rita, Billy opens a new club, The Star Basement, which becomes instantly successful with the new and fashionable socialite glitterati.

And when Billy gets a 'Daily People' journalist to write a glamorous profile on him, and eventually a ghosted bestselling autobiography, Jack is furious and finally understands that his one-time minion is hell-bent on taking over his golden patch.

Then Billy pulls off the biggest heist in history. The Eastcastle Street Mailbag Robbery nets him £287,000 and Jack grasps the fact it's the beginning of the end. Humiliated by Billy when he demands a piece of the action, the new King of the Underworld deigns to give Jack full control of Botolphs as a sop. In a rage Jack trashes The Modernaires and watches Botolphs go up in flames in retaliation, defying Frankie when told to retire before it's too late.



Eastcastle Street Mailbag Robbery

The final nail in the coffin comes when Dimes tells Jack he's finished at the races. This precipitates a notorious fight outside a central London Frith Street greengrocer shop that makes tabloid headlines and puts both men in hospital. Billy meets Rita for the first time when he attempts to slash Jack's throat in the hospital ward. It's there she tells him they should all act like adults, not trumped up schoolboys.

In court, neither Jack nor Dimes will identify each other as the culprit, and business continues as usual. Dimes successfully runs the races and Billy everything else, while Jack grasps his power is on the decline and he's stony broke. It's then that Moisha hands him a bank savings book, something his friend has been paying into knowing Jack wasn't being prudent with his earnings. But still Jack won't let go of his hatred towards Billy and his meteoric rise up the criminal ranks. So Jack hires three Teddy Boys to shoot his rival.

Failing miserably, the teenage trio is tortured by Frankie into confessing who employed them. As Darky Mulley pulls the plug on the ailing Botolphs, offering Jack and 8-months pregnant Rita the tenancy of The Gladstone pub (now The Macbeth) as their only source of revenue, the duo are savagely assaulted by Billy's thugs. Rita has had enough and in court identifies Frankie and Bobby Warren as the main

accomplices in the aggressive battering. Both men are sentenced to seven years in jail.

It's now 1956. Back at The Modernaires, a couple of hooligans are punching their way through a bloody brawl. Their names are Ronnie and Reggie Kray and they desperately want to work for their idol, Billy Hill...

ONCE UPON A TIME... A BRIEF HISTORY

JACK 'SPOT' COMER

Born on 12 April 1912 in London's Mile End, Jack Comer was the son of Polish immigrants. He claimed he was given the nickname 'Spot' because he was always on the spot when trouble needed sorting out. More likely though, it was the childhood alias given for the mole on his cheek. At 15 he became a bookie's runner, then a Petticoat Lane protection racketeer, later helping up-and-coming gangsters intimidate the old guard out of their nightclubs, gambling dens and racecourse pitches. He made a fortune running the Botolph Club in Aldgate and anyone who crossed him was met with instant and savage retribution. Wage snatches and gold bullion heists featured heavily in Comer's line of work, none of which could be achieved without high levels of violence, gang warfare, police bribes and double dealing. Jack and Rita had two children but their marriage did not last. Once his protégée Billy Hill took over his mantle as King of the London Underworld, Jack slipped into a life of obscurity, working as a fruit seller and a barman, but never returning to crime. He died in poverty March 12, 1996, aged 83.

BILLY HILL

Billy Hill was Britain's first celebrity gangster. Born on December 13, 1911, in London's Seven Dials, he grew up in an established criminal family and committed his first stabbing at age 14. Starting out as a house burglar he soon specialized in smash-and-grab raids targeting furriers and jewelers. During World War II he moved into the food and petrol black markets and supplied forged documents for deserting servicemen. By the early 1950's Billy controlled London's gambling rackets and masterminded a daring heist that set the template for The Great Train Robbery. In 1955, he wrote his memoir 'Boss of Britain's Underworld' and retired gracefully from his life of crime once the Krays and Richardsons came onto the scene. Spending much of his remaining time in Tangier where Gypsy ran the infamous nightclub Churchills, he died January 1, 1984, aged 72, his fortune intact and his time in jail minimal compared to his many contemporaries.

FRANKIE FRASER

Born December 13, 1923, as Frank Davidson, it was his sadistic temper that dubbed him 'Mad' Frankie Fraser and the main reason he spent 42 years in prison for numerous violent offences. Certified insane on three occasions, one for attempting to hang the governor of Wandsworth prison from a tree, at least two Home Secretaries considered him the most dangerous man in Britain for over 40 unproven killings. After building a reputation as Billy Hill's enforcer, he became a torturer and hitman for the South London Richardson gang, his main source of income the operation of one-armed bandit fruit machines in Soho. Achieving a dubious cult status in later life as

an author, after-dinner speaker, television pundit and tour guide, Fraser died November 26, 2014, aged 90.

ALFRED WHITE

Alfred Henry White was born in London's Islington in 1887 and headed the White Family street gang until his untimely death in 1942. One of the most ruthless and vicious London gangsters between the World Wars, he was the main force behind the Sabini gang of Clerkenwell, which he partnered in terrorizing bookmakers on racecourses. He was also a local protection racketeer who extended his operations into West End clubland. When White tired of his association with the Sabinis, he transferred his operations to greyhound racing tracks and became part owner of Hackney Stadium.

CHARLES SABINI

Charles 'Derby' Sabini, born Ottavio Handley in Saffron Hill, London, 1888, was the leader of the feared Sabini family and self-proclaimed King of the Racecourse Gangs. He dominated the London underworld and racecourses throughout much of the early 20th century due to varied criminal activities including extortion, theft and nightclub operations. The Sabinis had many partners, including the White family, and imported Sicilian gunmen for intimidation purposes. Notorious for razor attacks on witnesses to their crimes, the Sabini family had extensive police and political connections. But World War II threatened their powerbase because the Sabinis' alliance with Jewish bookmakers couldn't feasibly continue after the rise of Fascism in Italy and the subsequent anti-Semitism infecting London's Italian community. After the war, his empire was taken over by the White family and eventually Jack Spot and Billy Hill.

ALBERT DIMES

Born in South Lanarkshire in 1914 to an Italian father and Scottish mother, George Albert Arthur Dimeo moved to London's Clerkenwell then dubbed 'Little Italy'. After a life of petty crimes and assault convictions he became Billy Hill's loan-sharking and racecourse protection racket enforcer. It was his infamous 1955 knife fight with Jack Spot in Soho that put him in the tabloid limelight, a position he used to broker a 1966 deal between the New York mafia and the Corsican Francisci brothers regarding investment in London casinos. An associate of Charlie Richardson, his presence in Soho delayed the Kray twins from moving into the area for several years. Dimes died of cancer in 1972.

ONCE UPON A TIME... THE BEGINNING

"**ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** was always on the cards for me", explains producer, co-writer and star Terry Stone. "Ever since I was a young boy I had been told my family was closely connected to Jack Spot. But I never really found out what exactly. Then when I got into movie producing, my father mentioned the subject of Jack again and told me his story would be a great subject for a film. So I finally did some major research and realized he was right. Jack's life and times covered everything: he was The Man in the 1940s and 50s, his world was the melting pot of organized crime and he became one of the most powerful gang bosses in Britain – amassing incredible wealth, and being associated with a string of women, throughout his 30-year career. Sergio Leone's *Once Upon A Time In America* is one of my

favourite movies and I was convinced here was the British equivalent. I couldn't believe anyone hadn't seen the cinematic potential in the subject matter before".



Stone continues, "The idea began forming in 2010 and I wrote a first draft screenplay by 2011. Then Will Gilbey, whom I worked with on *Rise of the Footsoldier*, took a pass and tidied it up. But we couldn't get the film off the ground at that time. Everyone kept telling me, who wants to see a period crime thriller? So I put the whole concept on the back burner knowing its time would come. Then along came the hit TV series 'Boardwalk Empire' and 'Peaky Blinders', followed by *Legend* starring Tom Hardy as the Kray twins, proving there was indeed an appetite for such period gangster epics. That's when my co-producer Richard Turner and I started to seriously think about reviving the project and set about making it happen".

Terry Stone as Jack Spot Comer

Co-producer Richard Turner added, "Terry and I have worked together now for nearly ten years. We met on *Shank*, got on well and decided to create a more formal business relationship. Since 2010, the **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** project had gone in many different directions and we needed to hone and finesse it into an epic drama that encompassed violence and humour with a strong emphasis on both male and female characters. Terry wanted to make 'The gangster film of all British gangster films' and we knew we'd have to find a major talent to pull that off".

It was executive producer Jezz Vernon who suggested Stone and Turner take a look at Simon Rumley as their possible director. Stone comments, "Simon is well known for his niche suspense and horror thrillers, 'extreme dramas' he calls them, and the moment we met him we knew he was the man for the job. He was looking for a project to break him out of his comfort zone and had never directed a gangster film before, and we wanted someone with a different mindset who could heighten **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** and elevate it into something extraordinary. It was clear his past work proved he wasn't frightened of the violence it entailed".

Richard Turner clarifies, "The focus was lifted from being solely Jack 'Spot' Comer's story and became a two-hander with Billy Hill in the mix. That way it became a far more potent double Rise and Fall saga encompassing a whole wealth of historical detail, true-life events and real people. Working with Simon was a revelation as he fulfilled our brief to the letter and came up with research even we didn't know about. He brought a unique character to the film always with his eye on the period budgetary concerns and the overall idea to fill the gap between 'Peaky Blinders' and *Legend* with compelling and provocative myth-making of his own".

"Every red-blooded filmmaker has grown up watching gangster movies", confides writer/director Simon Rumley. "From the obvious American ones like *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas* to the British classics *Brighton Rock* and my all-time favourite, the pinnacle of the genre to my mind, *Performance*. I see **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** as the natural progression from where I've come from artistically. All my

movies have been ‘extreme dramas’ whether in the horror, thriller or heightened reality genre. And gangster movies are the best examples of that because you can go from emotional drama to horrific violence in a flash. I’ve done period films before – *Johnny Frank Garrett’s Last Word* and *Crowhurst* – but never in these British decades, and I’ve always dwelt on love, loss, threat and passion. **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** felt like the perfect fit and the perfect time in my career when I need to be more commercially minded. So Terry, Richard and myself found each other at precisely the right time”.



Three leading ladies: (l-r) Gypsy (Kate Braithwaite), Aggie (Holly Earle) & Rita (Nadia Forde)

Rumley adds, “I didn’t know anything about Jack ‘Spot’ Comer or Billy Hill when Terry and Richard approached me about this project. So I did a lot of research and was just amazed no one had thought of putting these characters and this milieu on screen before. That was an exciting prospect in itself! Here was a cultural treasure trove that British history seems to have excised from all memory. Let’s face it Jack and Billy are just two of the most brilliant characters any writer/director could wish for. You spend your whole life dreaming someone will come along, hand you a script, ask you if you would like to direct it and that’s what happened here. It took each of us ten minutes to decide we could work together quite easily and I realized both Terry and Richard were a duo I could trust completely with an amazing track record. If they said it was going to happen, it was. And it did”.

Rumley continues, “It was clear from the start where the story should go in my mind. Billy Hill gets to the top of the criminal tree and stays there until he sees his time is up and leaves at exactly the right time. Jack didn’t do that. He desperately clung on to power even though he could see the writing was on the wall. That’s what interested me the most in their stories – the almost Shakespearean lust for power at all costs. I want people to feel sorrow when they watch the conflict between the two unfold. Sorrow for a way of life that was quickly vanishing. Sorrow for Jack’s blinkered view of what life is really all about. And sorrow for the death of honour among thieves, a code of conduct that was stamped on by The Krays”.

What was vastly important too was playing fair with the female characters and giving them their due as Rumley explains, “Gangster movies usually show the women as tarts, cheated on floozies, rape victims or simply ‘er indoors’. I wanted to subvert that

while remaining true to the tropes of the genre. I had to make the females gutsy because they all emerged from the Second World War with a totally different way of looking at their lives. While their men had been away at the front – or in jail – they had to cope and survive the best way they could. After the war was over, they couldn't go back to the old normal. You don't usually see strong women in these movies and that needed to change because, let's face it, they changed their men irrevocably”.

Producer Richard Turner agrees. “Simon was adaptable to any initial reservations we had. He stripped the swearing and bad language out because it didn't feel right in the circumstances. It was his attention to detail that struck me even though I was a little worried about the level of violence he added to the script. But when he assured us it would all be about context and getting the performances right, I understood what he meant – that the audience had to believe they were in the midst of the elegant carnage for it to be effective and powerful. I do feel Simon is stretching the gangster genre here and exploring territory very few directors have ever done before”.

“Everyone has seen enough screen violence these days”, observes Simon Rumley. “You don't need to see too much, just the right amount to make a massive impact. I've always been of the view that you must show something really hardcore to keep the threat simmering under the surface for maximum overall effect. We know Jack used a cutthroat razor to inflict slashes on his victims' buttocks so they couldn't sit down for weeks or the stitches would open. But I show the cuts to their faces so everyone would know they had snitched. The one unique set piece I've included is the human dartboard torture, which comes directly from lyrics in the David Bowie song “Station to Station” and was also an occult Alesiter Crowley ritual. You won't have seen anything like that before!”

Simon Rumley concludes, "Having spent the last decade or so writing and directing thematically disparate but collectively 'extreme dramas', it makes absolute sense for me to progress to the gangster genre where love, lust, greed, paranoia, betrayal and violence are every day occurrences. The story of Jack 'Spot' Comer, Billy Hill and their respective battles to become King of London's Underworld has remained one of Britain's most dynamic, thrilling and untold stories. I'm putting their names firmly in the deserved spotlight, exploring this fabulous story in depth, with a psychological dexterity to make **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** a unique viewing experience and a truly great British film."

ONCE UPON A TIME... THE CASTING

With an edgy script and a dynamic director on their side, producers Terry Stone and Richard Turner turned their attention to casting **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON**.

Producer Richard Turner comments: “It struck us if we were going to make ‘The British Gangster Movie Of All British Gangster Movies’, we should take a look back at the last 30 years of the genre and identify who was outstanding in the key ones. Jamie Foreman in *Layer Cake*, Geoff Bell in *The Business*, Andy Beckwith in *Snatch*, Roland Manookian in *The Football Factory*, you get the drift. We knew we could offer such high calibre character actors a great script they could really get their teeth into and that is exactly what happened. They also jumped at the chance and to work with Simon whose reputation preceded him, everyone had heard about and before we knew it we had assembled an absolutely fantastic cream-of-the-crop cast”.



Leo Gregory as Billy Hill

Leo Gregory plays Billy Hill and the *Green Street* and *Stoned* star wanted to be involved in **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** the moment he read the script as he explained, “I’ve known Terry for ages, we’ve worked together in the past, and I was keeping tabs on this project over the many years it has been bubbling away. Billy was the first celebrity gangster, he’s even given a name check in the 1959 Peter Sellers comedy *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.*, which must have tickled him something rotten. He relished his notoriety and was one of the first people to realize that fear could solely be instilled via newspaper headlines. You didn’t have to put too much energy into your violent actions if you just hit page one. Because he looked a bit like movie legend Humphrey Bogart, Billy modeled himself on Hollywood gangsters and Chicago mobsters in mannerisms, attire and attitude. Billy loved those aesthetics and the movie quality to being a gangster. In my opinion he always acted like he was shooting a movie throughout his entire charmed life”.

Gregory continues, “While a lot of material exists on Jack ‘Spot’ Comer and many of the more infamous peripheral characters, there are very few books or documentation on Billy. Unlike when I played doomed Rolling Stones singer Brian Jones in *Stoned* and had so much to go on, here I had virtually nothing. So I was freer to interpret his idiosyncrasies the way I wanted to without anybody breathing down my neck to complain. The one question I would ask Billy now if I had the chance would be, did he move in on Jack’s territory because of design or mere opportunism? That’s the core query to me. Billy saw Jack for what he was, a lot of bluster, a lot of show. If Jack had stayed as the speaker for the East End Jewish minorities, his life and career would have been a lot longer. Billy saw the chinks in Jack’s armour and waited for him to overstep the mark because he had the brains and tools to take control.

Jack blamed Billy entirely for his downfall but what helped me most get a handle on my character was seeing how complimentary the Krays were about him. They knew he could handle himself when called upon to be either a bull in a china shop or the ultimate diplomat”.

It was Leo Gregory who first suggested to director Simon Rumley that Terry Stone would be the perfect person to play Jack ‘Spot’ Comer.

Rumley continues: “Leo has an extraordinary screen presence and we needed someone who could match his natural danger and threat but also be a kind of foil. There aren’t many actors in the UK who in reality could do this but I’d seen a couple of Terry’s films and felt he had a great naturalism which could lend itself to both aggression and pathos, both of which were, in my mind, key elements to portraying Jack. Leo and Terry were both keen and the rest, as they say, is history.”

Stone adds: “I had originally thought of playing the role of Albert Dimes but when Leo mentioned I had all the qualities for Jack I was surprised at first as it hadn’t crossed my mind. I didn’t want to force myself on Simon and be accused of landing the part solely because I was the producer so I had him assure me he was okay with it and that he thought I was up to the demands of doing a good job. In my bones I knew I could play Jack with the sincerity and bravado needed. I’ve been obsessed with the Krays since childhood and I’ve been around London for most of my life. Starting out as one of the UK’s top rave promoters I’ve mixed with many underworld types so I really do know the characters and the environment”.

He reflects: “What I loved most about the script is the irony of it all. Billy must be the only gangster in the world who got out of the business without getting killed and keeping all his money. In contrast Jack became a broken man and died in penury. When Jack got to the top he didn’t realize he had to treat people right to stay there. That was his big mistake. He didn’t care about anyone else but himself and actually thought Billy should be looking after him because he owed him. He meets Rita on his decline and when she gets pregnant, it’s a game-changer. But that was too little too late for Jack’s big ego and in many ways ruined everything”.

For ‘Cuckoo’ and *Queen of the Desert* actress Holly Earl, the fact her character had both femininity and strength was the main attraction in taking the key role of Aggie Pickett, Billy Hill’s resigned wife. She outlines, “Aggie had a wonderful character arc that was obviously going to be a thrill to play. She starts off as this naïve young girl who falls in love, but all the while she has to figure Billy out. Then she has to figure out exactly what she wants from the doomed relationship and becomes a totally independent woman as a result. Aggie is the strong woman behind the man, as has been the case since time began. And while she and Billy had a genuine affection for each other, first love and all that, it was their eventual partnership agreement that meant they stayed rock solid through it all”

Earl continues, “I knew nothing about any of the characters in the script. There’s a lot out there about Rita and Gypsy but practically nothing on Aggie. So I made a few assumptions and leaps of faith regarding her whole outlook. I don’t think she was attracted to Billy just because she was posh and he was a bit of rough. It was more to do with her parents’ loveless marriage because she didn’t want to end up like them. The 1930s was an exciting time in Britain, life was full of possibilities and Aggie saw Billy was a fun guy with money, who could offer her a good life. Clearly she wasn’t a

stupid person otherwise she would never have bargained to make her life better after their separation. She needed provision for her future and if that meant becoming part of The Firm, then so be it”.

She smiles, “Billy was no fool either! She knew where the bodies were buried and once Billy became a tabloid headliner, he wouldn’t want any unsavoury, off-message gossip being spread around. Okay, he admired her, but he set her up for life as a precaution more than anything else. Another major attraction for me was the period detailing. The three-decade era over which **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** takes place was one of the most poised and elegant in recent history. I’m a sucker for Golden Age movie glamour and couldn’t wait to take my part in what’s destined to be a British classic”.



Nadia Forde felt a huge responsibility when she landed the role of Rita Comer. She clarifies, “Rita existed, she had her own life story and you have to stick to the facts. I did plenty of online research and found out loads of information because her romance with Jack was such a big deal at the time. I can’t tell you how thrilled I was to find Rita was from Dublin, not too far from where I was born, and that was a great help in finding the heart of the part for me. Simon’s screenplay had enough empty spaces to fill in so it didn’t feel too rigid and that’s why I was excited about making my feature film debut with such a formidable part”.

Andy Beckwith as Sonny the Yank

Forde carries on, “Rita is the only main player who has a moral compass. There are no grey areas with her - they are simply black and white. She obviously was besotted with Jack and when you love someone that much you fight for them, the reason why she stops the never-ending cycle of honour among thieves, takes the courtroom stand and names the thugs who beat them up. When Rita comes into Jack’s universe, he softens and becomes more human, while she comes into her own as a successful wife and mother. The fact she had such an enormous impact on Jack says everything about her mindset and strength of character and why I knew Rita would be an exhilarating challenge to play”.

Cast as Jack ‘Spot’ Comer’s two main henchman are Andy Beckwith and Josh Myers. “I’m Sonny the Yank”, says ‘Game of Thrones’ and *Pirates of the Caribbean* series actor Andy Beckwith. “But he wasn’t American and his real name was Bernard Schack. I think all the mobster names at this time – from Islington Alan and Electric Alfie to Belgian Johnny and Elephant Dave – owed their existence to American gangster movie influences. They all thought they were playing in movie versions of their lives and had the nicknames to match. Sonny is Jack’s right-hand man but deep down he’s not really happy with his boss because he didn’t look after him while he was in prison. It’s that underlying tension between the two best friends that was exciting to explore”.

Beckwith continues, “Sonny the Yank is a man of few words so it meant minimal dialogue to learn. That doesn’t mean taking a step back as my character is all in the stance, the look and the attitude. Also you have to work a lot harder with fewer lines. I

decided to grow a moustache to give Sonny a unique look and although it gave my wife a laugh when she first saw me in costume – she said I resembled pianist Ron Mael from the Sparks pop band! – I think it looks debonair and in keeping with his station as a goon with style”.



Josh Myers plays Moisha, Jack’s other main bodyguard, and *the Anti-Social* star elucidates, “Moisha Blueball actually because he had one discoloured testicle, but we never mention that in the movie! Terry asked me to consider the role when we were working together on *Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning* and the moment I read the script I signed up. I’d read the book ‘Hit ‘Em Hard: Jack Spot, King of the Underworld’ by Wesley Clarkson, so I knew the background and machinations that got Jack to become the main man in London crime. Jack is a father figure to Moisha, our bond goes deep, and he makes sure no one touches his boss. If anyone tries, he gets very, very violent indeed. I love working with Terry so this was a no-brainer and I was even more pleased when I was given more lines”.

Josh Myers as Moisha

Billy Hill’s bodyguard counterparts to Sonny the Yank and Moisha are Odd Legs and Bears Breath, played by Ali Cook and Joe Egan respectively. “Odd Legs is Billy’s main muscle who protects him and keeps him out of trouble”, describes TV magician Ali Cook, star of ‘Emmerdale’ and *The Anomaly* who met Terry Stone when they appeared together in the 2012 racehorse comedy *Outside Bet*. “Odd Legs had a limp in real life, hence the nickname, but that was excised from earlier script drafts – thank heavens! I mean, a getaway driver not be able to walk doesn’t make any sense really. Intimidating looks are my forte and that’s what was mostly needed here. It was hard to find actual photos of the real Odd Legs but when I did I realized I was taller than the small and wiry person he was in life”.

Cook maintains, “I loved Simon Rumely’s script because it had a folklore aspect to it, an almost Homeric myth angle. It’s a classic heroes’ Rise and Fall; Jack becomes the King of Soho at the outbreak of the Second World War, Billy wheedles his way into his inner circle and takes over. Complete with hints of romanticism like all the best fables. Just as he did with all the other actors, Simon called me up when I was cast to talk about the role and he told me what set Odd Legs apart from the rest of his gangster brethren was his ability to be professionally violent. He could switch between being charming and being terrifyingly menacing on and off in a second. It was just business. It is strangely liberating to play a real tough guy, a nasty bully, because it’s the complete opposite of what I am. Honest”.

Golden Gloves Champion boxer Joe Egan was Mike Tyson’s sparring partner for two years and entered show business when director Guy Ritchie cast him his *Sherlock Holmes* series. Since then Egan has never looked back and jumped at the role of Bears Breath when his old friend Terry Stone asked if he’d consider it. “I was worried about not doing enough research into the real character”, ponders Egan, “But I had met Mad Frankie Fraser for real and knew a lot about the crime lords running London so I decided to take a punt. Why was he called Bears Breath? Who knows? Perhaps

it had something to do with him being built like the proverbial ****house. I've never been a baddie in real life so it's great to play the tough guy and when I knew I'd be working mostly with consummate professional Ali Cook, I figured I'd be in safe hands and he'd help me out".

Joe Egan isn't the only sports personality featured in the film as the champion joins Steve Collins, playing Big Bill. Known as 'The Celtic Warrior', Collins is the most successful Irish boxer in professional boxing history. Boxer Frank Buglioni, the current holder of the British light heavyweight belt, plays Elephant Dave and professional English footballer Jamie O'Hara and 'Celebrity Big Brother' contestant, plays Grinning Mike. Producer Terry Stone explains, "The criminal personalities of Jack Spot's day built their reputations through word-of-mouth and newspaper headlines and became infamous as a result. We thought it would be a great idea to have the smaller yet pivotal parts played by current well-known people".



Doug Allen as Albert Dimes

Billy Hill's marriage with Aggie is torn apart when he develops a serious relationship with prostitute Gypsy, nee Phyllis Riley. One of the few actors in **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** to have worked with director Simon Rumley before (on *Little Deaths*, her very first feature film), Kate Braithwaite was eager to tackle the demanding role. She laughs, "After what Simon put me through in the 'Bitch' segment of the *Little Deaths* anthology, believe me nothing else could be too outrageous! Nudity doesn't bother me and it was Gypsy's psychology that interested me the most. You think she's being degraded by what she's forced to do as a job, until the mask is lifted and you see she's in complete control of the situation and her destiny. She was well known in real life for not taking prisoners or suffering fools gladly and if you look at contemporary pictures of her I think you can see with crystal clarity her true grit and determination. She was the epitome of the British gangster's moll".



Justin Salinger (Harry White) & Jamie Foreman (Alf White)

Layer Cake & *Nil By Mouth* actor Jamie Foreman portrays Alf White, the partner of Mr. Sabini in the domination of London's criminal underworld. "I'd met Terry Stone years ago at an illegal boxing match", recalls Foreman. "He was just starting out in the business and I advised him about agents and other related stuff and followed his career with interest ever since. When he asked me to appear in *Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning* it turned into a nice little gig, so when he also offered me Alf White in a gangster epic he was producing I didn't hesitate over saying yes to that either. It meant I'd be working alongside many old mates and the joy of having that enthusiastic atmosphere to look forward to every day was a major plus".

"I'm a good friend of 'Derby' Sabini's great-grandson Nicki and knew all about the family business", outlines Foreman, "So when I needed information about Alf I didn't have to look too far. By all accounts he was a very clever man, went to a good grammar school, had a knack for moneymaking and was well respected in his time frame. But of course he had larceny in his blood, which you had to have because these were dangerous times if you lived in that world. From what I can gather Alf and Sabini shared the control, there was none of this, little boss, big boss divide, they were both powers behind the throne. Because of the way the script has been written to mythologize these individuals, I read Alf in Dick Turpin/Robin Hood terms even though they were definitely big fish in a small pond. Whether British history likes it or not these people are a part of the authentic social fabric of London and putting their stories on screen is actually a privilege".

Unfortunately Harry White didn't live up to the high standards of his magnetic father. "Which is where it all fell apart", says Justin Salinger, the actor playing Harry, and another who has worked with director Simon Rumley before in *Crowhurst*. Salinger continues, "I had done a lengthy audition process for *Crowhurst* and got to know Simon very well because of that. So I had no hesitation at all when he offered me this role. Harry is desperately trying to follow in his father's footsteps and be the man Alf

wants him to be. But he doesn't have the same know-how, charisma, command, authority or intelligence and that has made him angry. The fact no one takes him seriously leaves him frustrated and desperate, and because he's trying so hard all the time his feelings of castration gets worse. He has such big shoes to fill and because violence does not come easily to him, his rivals see him as weak and ineffective. He fails continuously and that's why he doesn't last long once his father is out of the picture. In other words what a glorious part to play".

Salinger adds, "Unlike with Donald Crowhurst I didn't do much research into Harry White. I did a little reading obviously to get an initial handle on the man but everything was in Simon's script for me. It was such a great piece of writing, richly focused, on the nose, brilliantly economical and electrifyingly dynamic that I didn't feel under any pressure to further my Harry knowledge. I also wanted to bring some of my own wrinkles to the character rather than shoehorn him into a precise place in history. I didn't want to be blocked by too much information because that can often be self-defeating for an actor".



JJ Hamblett plays Bobby Warren

Another White family member is Bobby Warren, Alf's nephew, played by JJ Hamblett, Union J boy band member since 2011 and a further actor from *Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning* actor. "Bobby is a jack-the-lad, a serial womanizer who get beaten, bruised and battered almost on a daily basis", remarks Hamblett. "Essentially I get caught in the middle of the power-struggle between archenemies Alf and Jack. I knew the role would stretch my acting abilities and the fact it was a period drama with that 'Peaky Blinders' vibe was the icing on the cake because I look great in high waisted trousers!"

When Billy Hill is sent to Wandsworth prison for the second time, he meets one of the most infamous British villains ever – 'Mad' Frankie Fraser. "And I'm convinced I got the role because I look like him", smiles Roland Manookian, star of *RocknRolla* and *The Football Factory*. "Only joking, the resemblance is just a coincidence. Frankie was at the vanguard of a new wave of criminal that was emerging just after the

Second World War. Prior to his arrival on the scene killing someone was a capital punishment and meant the death penalty. But Frankie came along, didn't care because he was essentially a sociopathic murderer, and became the most feared member of Billy Hill's gang. Frankie represents a hugely significant moving forward in the London crime scene. He was also known as the Poison Dwarf for being a menacing thug, a human Rottweiler, and that's what made him so very dangerous. Because Frankie was such a high-profile real character I did little research mainly because I didn't want to offend his family in any way. My knowledge of him is just the pre-requisite for any true blue South Londoner".

When Terry Stone stepped into the role of Jack 'Spot' Comer, it meant the Albert Dimes part he was originally down to play was free. "And that was the role I wanted", recalls Doug Allan, whose recent appearances include 'The Royals' and *The Guvnor*. "Terry had sent me the **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** script and said, pick any available part you want. Albert Dimes was my first choice so I was thrilled when Terry bowed out to play Jack. I sort of look similar to him too I suppose. Dimes figures prominently in Jack's story because of the legendary Soho fight that made both men front page headline news. Jack never recovered from that folkloric moment and it was such a defining one that I couldn't resist playing my part in it. Dimes operated smoothly on his own in the beginning and was smart as they come. He instantly recognized the same qualities in Billy Hill and once he saw the power-shift taking place picked the winning side for his own survival. Dimes had a full and very long life and Simon has written him as eloquently deadpan, which was all I needed to play him. I didn't delve into his background too much because it can get top-heavy that way. I wanted to keep it simple and luckily that's exactly the way Simon wanted me to approach the role".

"I couldn't be more thrilled with the level of cast we managed to assemble", beams producer Terry Stone proudly. "There's not a weak link in our cast. Luck shined on us as each actor had their character sorted and grounded in reality and we knew the ensemble anchored by director Simon Rumley would be upping their game as a result. Before Simon came on board **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** was more a gangster melodrama, now it's a high-end crime epic with the talent chosen bringing an incandescent pulse to the ambitious project".

Simon Rumley adds, "Some of our choices may cause a few raised eyebrows but I've ensured everyone has a good solid presence. From the actors Terry hired before I came on board and the ones from my repertory company I edged in to the incredible supporting cast and the assorted sports personalities it's all boiled down to texture and tone. Everyone fits, and the dynamic between charismatic Leo Gregory and the magnetic Terry Stone crackles with a wonderful energy that has to be seen to be believed. Things happen for a reason and this is one of those happenings where we've had enormous good fortune with every actor".

ONCE UPON A TIME... THE LOOK

To depict in all its period glory the violent reign of two of London's most notorious gangsters, director Simon Rumley turned to a crack team of Heads of Department for the crucial look and design. "This is the ninth film I've made with director of photography Milton Kam", comments Rumley. "I've often given him some seemingly impossible demands but he's always come through and made me proud. Lesser cinematographers might not be able to cope with my working methods or pace, but

we make a dream team. I wanted a muted palette to begin with before Jack makes the grade. As his journey becomes bigger, we move into richer, more colourful vistas. Using natural lighting, silhouettes and mist diffusion. The intention is to create a juxtaposition of sophisticated elegance against the grit and grime”.

“The way Simon described the look to me was slicker, more Hollywood”, remarks Milton Kam, the award-winning cinematographer of *The Living and the Dead*, *Red, White & Blue*, *Crowhurst* and *Fashionista*. “I’d just come from working on ‘American Playboy: The Hugh Hefner Story’ before starting on **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** and I could apply what I’d learned on that to give the look here more snappy polish combined with the trademark Rumley naturalism. It’s always exciting to work with Simon because he makes films that push people to their limit and by extension that pushes me too. His style has evolved over the years while remaining true to his unswerving approach to the material”.

Kam continues, “What I have tried to do is emulate the time periods as they would have looked in British movies of the era. I did a lot of research into British *film noir* and have deliberately gone in that loads-of-contrasts, shadowy and moody direction. The sources of back lighting in the mid-20th century were much more natural than the incandescent light bulbs we use now. So I have made use of candles, mining lamps, matches and torches, especially for the London Blitz total blackouts. I’ve used a lot of smoke diffusion and a haze machine, what was once called the Hollywood black magic filter, to take the edge off the digital imagery and give it an extra layer of luminous atmosphere. Our aesthetic is best explained as gazing into an old aquarium, an almost diorama link to the radiant past”.

Kam adds, “I’ve always operated the camera on Simon’s movies. Here I’ve had an additional camera giving me the ability to cover scenes quickly from different angles. Because I understand Simon’s sensibility, and we have an, almost, telepathic shorthand between us, it’s best I do it myself. This gives his films an energy and dynamism that has perfected his technique. Sometimes doing the same shot eight times in a row going backwards up some stairs is challenging. But we are mythologizing infamous characters here and anything I can do to help Simon craft *The Godfather* British style is worth the extra effort”.

To get the right period detailing for her sets and locations, production designer Anna Mould researched museums in the East End of London, the world famous V&A in South Kensington, the BFI library and trawled the web for photographic inspiration. Mould art directed *Level Up*, *The Time of Their Lives* and *Aux* and met producer Terry Stone when he promoted her to production designer on *Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning*. Mould declares, “I found it very useful to watch contemporary interviews with Jack Comer and the other characters to understand the milieu in which they lived, see their real flats, how they were decorated, understand their tastes and see what having money does to them. I’ve done period movies before but it was this particular story that really excited me because I wanted to see how I could achieve the look of something like *The King’s Speech* with ingenuity and invention”.

Mould found herself having to dress a lot of public house interiors and spaces that were turned into nightclubs, “Which was fine, I just had to remember the time period I was in at any given moment. One of the main problems was recreating London after the Blitz because there was basically nothing left. But when it was decided to keep all our locations actually in London we had to cheat that with a lot of creativity. For

example, covering up the contemporary metal fences with handmade wooden ones at Windsor Race Course. It was the same with the gambling scenes; the dice, playing cards and alcohol all had to look right and that was often hard. We had to build a lot of props from scratch including the banners, the Adolf Hitler puppet, all kinds of signage, the bookie stands, the racing blackboards - and the money. All the vintage pound notes for the Post Office robbery were cut out by hand: 287,000 of them! It had to be done this way on our budget because 'authenticity' was key to the drama. **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** was a huge challenge but a deeply satisfying one".

Augmenting Anna Mould's production department in her own fashion is costume designer Michelle May. Winner of awards for her commercial work with IKEA and John Lewis, May has over 20 years experience in the field and couldn't wait to begin work on **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON**. She says, "Simon Rumley gave us a list of films to watch for reference purposes. They included the classic Ealing Comedy *The Ladykillers* (1955), from which I took the scarves around Alec Guinness and Peter Sellers' necks being used as robbery masks, *I Was A Criminal* (1945), *Turn the Key Softly* (1953) and obviously *Brighton Rock* (1947). I looked at photographs of all the real events the story touches on, like the Cable Street riots and the actual court cases, and found the Jewish Museum in Camden Town enormous help. Plus I watched Pathe newsreels for the horseracing so I could ensure all the bookies and Tic-tac men costumes were genuine. And I have a vast library of books I always peruse anytime I need to do period clothes research".

May continues, "Jack Comer always wore fantastic suits because his started off protecting Petticoat Lane tailors and being smart was key. And he always wore a trilby hat - he never changed his look throughout his life. Those old school gangsters never did because they were so enamoured by the Hollywood image of tough guys. So he was an easy character to dress. Billy Hill was even more tapped into the glamour of violence and I had both his and Jack's suits specially made by Chester Cordite in Muswell Hill who specializes in making modern-looking vintage menswear complete with period features, old fabric but with contemporary tweaks. The 'Make Do And Men' ethic of the Second World War was over, looking dapper was all the rage and I felt each of the gangster tribes would have a kind of collective Rat Pack vibe. Braces, belted high waists, snazzy ties that kind of sartorial finessing. I'd shake it up a bit by having Odd Legs in a leather jacket because I thought a few members would have their own separate style and identity within the group".

She adds, "All the actors had their own ideas regarding their costumes, especially Leo Gregory, Geoff Bell and Jamie Foreman. I'm not the person wearing the clothes so I listened because they had to be comfortable in them. I noticed that as soon as Terry Stone put on his suit, he held himself in a different way and walked with a certain spring in his step. My clothes are there to help the actors breathe life into their characters, any changes they wanted to make that easier was fine by me. I had to swap hats on JJ Hamblett for that reason. For the background extras, mostly elderly men as all the youngsters were away at war, I recycled many outfits hired from costumiers for that fundamental post VE Day/'Dad's Army' feel".

Michelle May also had a particular vision for the three main female leads as she details: "Floral, quirky and straight laced were the concepts for Aggie, Gypsy and Rita respectively. Aggie was young, sweet and innocent so she was my floral character, until she wises up to the hard facts of her life. Her dress patterns change once past

seeing her husband Billy and his mistress Gypsy together for the first time. Because there are loads of visual references to the real Gypsy she was relatively easy due to her reliance on loads of jewelry, hoop earrings and out-there colour schemes like bright greens and purples. Gypsy was my wanton Joan Collins-type from *Turn the Key Softly*. Rita is the homemaker and the one who wants to be normal. Her life with Jack wasn't what she signed up for and her clothes in contrast to his are off-the-peg department store, slightly frumpy. But I found some terrific vintage 1950s maternity clothes for Nadia Forde used during Rita's pregnancy. I was blessed with the actors, they all rocked up well and were a total delight to costume".

ONCE UPON A TIME... THE SHOOTING



Simon Rumley, Director

ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON began six weeks of principle photography in the spring of 2017. Location shooting ranged all over the Greater London environs from selected East End sites, garage interiors in Dalston and public houses in London Bridge's Borough Market to Windsor Race Course, Woolwich old station and Stratford Town Hall. Director Simon Rumley points out, "The accepted wisdom is that you can't shoot London-based movies in London anymore. You have to go to places like Leeds, Bradford or Dublin. But I didn't want to do that as there is no place like London and you can't really replicate its atmosphere or ambiance. It was a lot to contend with I know, and we had to keep checking for 'Free Wifi' signs, but it worked out in the end with London thankfully becoming a vital component in the city's own history".

For each of the actors the rehearsal period Simon Rumley insisted on just prior to the main shoot proved vital. "It was a wonderful process", recalls Terry Stone. "We all hung out with each other, constantly went over scenes seeing where they could be improved and got familiar with every aspect of our characters and their relationships

to the others. It was something new to me but it built up a strong team spirit, confidence and belief in the work”.

For Holly Earl it was invaluable in making sure the chemistry between Leo Gregory and her worked. She laughs, “The first scene we did in rehearsal made me realize there was a connection, we looked each other in the eye and there was a spark. Leo is so charming I didn’t have to try too hard. Rehearsals are invaluable because you learn a lot more about your character and some things occur to you never would have thought of. For some actors it’s all about their wardrobe, but while the period clothes are important, I prefer to get into character with actions that have a basis in my own life. You have to be truthful and that is the way I approach my craft”.

Justin Salinger couldn’t make the rehearsal period because of a filming schedule clash. “But because I’d worked with Simon before I knew what he wanted from the elongated telephone calls we had. I’m the sort of actor who likes to be told specifically what’s required and Simon told me exactly that. I feel safe with that approach and knew I could bring Harry White to tail-between-his-legs life. It’s harder to bring a cameo role like Harry alive because you have to make a massive impact in every moment. It’s a challenge I thrive on and thanks to Simon I know I made my mark here”.

“After the long conversation I had with Simon about Rita, he suggested I go on a date night with Terry”, recalls Nadia Forde. “So we went to dinner and spent time getting to know each other and relating on both the friendship and human levels. We discussed our childhoods, our upbringing, where we both come from and hopefully where we are going. The barriers were lifted on that dinner date and I think you can see how comfortable we are together in our very first scenes. Which was arguing, fighting and then making love. It was zero to 60 in ten seconds but we had a laugh and he’s a great screen husband to have”.

“From the moment we set foot on set I could tell Simon ran a tight ship”, remarks Terry Stone. Leo Gregory adds, “My first scene on the first day of shooting was with Roland Manookian as Frankie Fraser and I knew immediately how controlled Simon was. From that day forward I referred to him as Simon Fincher! I liked the way Simon clearly had a precise vision on the floor. I noticed him take different stances and angles to what many would have seen as a well-thumbed visual approach. Filming the violence was an interesting learning curve too as the tangible darkness brought into the scenes is quite astonishing. Simon understands all the degrees between love and hate and managed to put that across so we will stick out from the crowd”.

Ali Cook agrees, “**ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** isn’t about mindless violence it has a real sense of characters, accuracy and social change. It’s the real deal and Simon’s experience has really shone through. He’s shot fast, got on with it and called ‘Cut’ when he has the footage he wants. Then it’s move on. My favourite scene? Where Billy’s gang pretend to be air raid wardens and steal everything from the local shops. We are seen as heroes because we then sell it cheap to our neighbours who are all sick of the rationing. The locals liking villains is an idea going back to the legend of Robin Hood and I liked the way Simon used old folkore to create a new myth”.

“Every actor has come on to the studio floor prepared and ready”, comments Josh Myers. “Each worked out their own back-stories and did their homework. It was why I

could call on a real emotional response in my major scene with Jack where I hand him a savings book Moisha has been keeping in his name. By this time Jack is basically on his backside, has nothing to call his own and absolutely no money coming in. Dimes runs the racetrack, Billy everything else, and he thinks he's penniless until Moisha tells him he's been saving on his behalf for a rainy day. Terry and I smashed the tearful scene thanks to Simon's expert guidance".

Jamie Foreman concurs, "Simon's directing methods took me by surprise the first day I was on the set due to his innovative way of working. Once I saw the merits of stripping the action down to its key moments I started to enjoy it enormously. It's been a great experience for me as I've never worked in this style before but I bought into his clear commitment and felt very comfortable. You could see all the actors thinking, well, if he's going to go the distance so will I. I can see why Simon has been so successful in the thriller genres, his code of conduct, shrewdness and desire to make a gangster movie for the ages is admirable".

"It's been a great experience all round" concludes Simon Rumley. "Terry Stone and Richard Turner took a chance with me, but once they had made the decision allowed me to carry out my vision to make something ambitious, something bold and decisive, an epic crime story overflowing with depth, levity, violence and every conjugation of human life. I think it will appeal to fans of the genre and those interested in important London history. Every film has enormous challenges and this has been no exception but it encompasses the whole lot – births, marriages, deaths, friendships, betrayal, doomed idealism, redemption and destiny. If people say it's a brutal, intriguing and moving chronicle of British criminal life with lasting moments, I've done my job".

"It has been great to see my dream project unfold before my eyes after all these years", beams producer/actor Terry Stone. "The cast and crew have been exceptional and Simon Rumley has been a joy to work with. He's hands-on, wants everything perfect and he stuck to that approach through thick and thin. His tenacity has been incredible and he's like a dog with a bone, he never took no as an answer and worked very quickly. From the moment we met I had no second thoughts about his ability to pull the demands of this grand design off. His commitment has gone beyond the call of duty and shaped **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** into what I know will be a high class, high gloss epic about an important time in our capital city few know about. Putting any British feature together is a stressful minefield and often in life you just have to go with your gut, stop messing around and get on with it. Everything happens for a reason and **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** was clearly our shared destiny".

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

TERRY STONE – Jack 'Spot' Comer

Terry Stone started out as a rave promoter, co-founding One Nation and Garage Nation, before becoming an actor and producer. Notable for his role as corrupt cop DS Andy White in the BAFTA-nominated *Rollin With The Nines* (2006) and as Tony Tucker in the 2007 blockbuster *Rise of the Footsoldier*, Stone began his acting career on television in 'The Bill', 'My Family' and 'Eastenders' before making his feature film debut in *Hell to Pay*. Other selected acting credits include *The Big I Am* (2009), *Doghouse* (2009), *Bonded By Blood* (2010), *Anuvahood* (2011), *The Holding* (2011),

Plastic (2013), *Rise of the Footsoldier III* (2017): *The Beginning* (2017) and *Fanged Up* (2017). Selected producer credits are *Rise of the Footsoldier 1 & 3*, *Anuvahood*, *Saving Santa* (2013) and *Away* (2016).

LEO GREGORY – Billy Hill

Leo Gregory won critical acclaim for his role as The Rolling Stones group member Brian Jones in *Stoned* (2005). His other feature film appearances include *The Hooligan Factory* (2014), *Wild Bill* (2011), *Goal III: Taking on the World* (2009), *The Big I Am* (2009), *Reverb* (2007), *Perfect Creature* (2006), *Green Street* (2005), *Suzie Gold* (2004) and *Octane* (2003). Television credits include 'Strike Back: Legacy', 'The Musketeers', 'Mr. Biggs', 'Silent Witness', 'Cracker' and 'The Jury'. He is also the voice of Travis in the 2015 videogame 'Need For Speed'.

HOLLY EARL – Aggie Pickett

Rising star Holly Earl is best known for her roles as Elena on ITV's 'Benidorm' and Nita Clements in the BBC medical drama 'Casualty' as well as parts in 'Doctor Who', 'Cuckoo' and 'Skins'. She made her television debut at the age of four, playing Robson Green's daughter in 'Touching Evil' and in 2012 made her stage debut as Bertha in 'The Father' at the Belgrade Theatre. She later received an Ian Charleson Award nomination for her role in that play. Holly made her film debut in *Possession* (2002) alongside Gwyneth Paltrow and followed that with roles in *Dracula: The Dark Prince* (2013) and Werner Herzog's *Queen of the Desert* (2015) opposite Nicole Kidman, Robert Pattinson and James Franco.

NADIA FORDE – Rita Comer

An Irish model, singer and actress of Italian descent, Nadia Forde participated in the fourteenth series of the hit ITV show 'I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!', finishing in ninth place. She has appeared in her own show 'Nadia Goes to Hollywood', 'Nadia: Chasing the Dream', 'Keep it in the Family' and 'Dance Mums'. After starring in the short *The Courier*, she makes her feature film debut in **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON**.

KATE BRAITHWAITE – Gypsy

Actress, model and dancer Kate Braithwaite appeared in director Simon Rumley's 'Bitch' segment in the feature film *Little Deaths*. Other credits include *The Purple Plain*, *Self-Made*, *Panic*, *The Callback Queen*, *Big Baby* and the TV series 'Waking the Dead'.

JAMIE FOREMAN – Mr. White

Jamie Forman is best known for his roles as Derek Branning in the long-running BBC TV soap opera 'Eastenders', Duke in *Layer Cake* (2004) and Bill Sikes in Roman Polanski's *Oliver Twist* (2005). He played opposite Ray Winstone and Kathy Burke in Gary Oldman's *Nil by Mouth* (1997) and also featured in *Elizabeth* (1998), *Gangster No. 1* (2000), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), *The Football Factory* (2004), *Inkheart* (2008), *Ironclad* (2011) and *Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning* (2017). Other notable television appearances include 'Doctor Who', 'Law and Order: UK', 'Birds of a

Feather', 'The Bill' and 'The House of Eliott'. His recent work for BBC Radio includes 'Wes Bell', the six-part series 'Hazelbeach' and 'Home Front'.

ROLAND MANOOKIAN – Frankie Fraser

Born in Bermondsey, London, Roland Manookian is most notable for his role as Zeberdee in the 2004 hit *The Football Factory*, and as Craig Rolfe in the hugely successful *Rise of the Footsoldier*. Other credits include *Rocknrolla*, *Goodbye Charlie Bright*, *The Business*, *Big Fat Gypsy Gangster*, *No Reasons* and *Dead Cert*. He has also appeared in episodes of 'The Bill' as Ben Glover.

ANDY BECKWITH – Sonny the Yank

Andy Beckwith is best known for his role as Errol in Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* (2000), for his portrayal of Rorge in the acclaimed HBO series 'Game of Thrones' (2012–2014) and as Clanker, a member of the Flying Dutchman's crew, in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2006/7) franchise. On film Beckwith has also appeared in *Hell to Pay* (2005), *Les Misérables* (2012), *Pierrepont* (2012), *Ironclad: Battle for Blood* (2014), *The Infiltrator* (2016) and *Show Dogs* (2017). His numerous television credits include 'Eastenders', 'By Any Means', 'Whitechapel' and 'Grantchester'.

JOSH MYERS – Moisha

After making his feature debut in *Psychosis* in 2010, Josh Myers has never looked back. The grandson of veteran UK film distributor Michael Myers, whom director John Carpenter named his *Halloween* maniac after in gratitude for supporting his early career, Josh's film credits include *Anti-Social*, *Green Street 3: Never Back Down*, *White Collar Hooligan 3*, *Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning*, *Screwed*, *The Fall of the Krays*, *Bonded by Blood 2*, *Ripper* and *Fighting With My Family*.

DOUG ALLEN – Albert Dimes

Doug Allen has appeared in a variety of British television series and in film, but remains best known for playing the role of Nathan Williams in the BBC soap opera 'Eastenders' and the role of Alton More in the Steven Spielberg produced miniseries 'Band of Brothers'. Other notable film credits include *Gangster No. 1* (2001), *The Firm* (2009), *Screwed* (2011) and *Anti-Social* (2015), and television, 'The Royals', 'Sherlock' and 'The Halcyon'.

ALI COOK – Odd Legs

English actor and comedy magician Ali Cook is best known for writing and starring in seven British television magic shows for Channel 4, Channel 5, and Sky1. A headliner on the British stand up comedy circuit, he began as a sketch actor on Jerry Sadowitz's television sketch show 'Jerry@Trick' before moving on to co-write and star in such TV series as 'Monkey Magic' and 'Psychic Secrets Revealed' with Derren Brown. Other appearances on television include 'Mr. Selfridge' and 'Emmerdale'. Film credits include *The Anomaly*, *Get Lucky*, *Outside Bet* and *The Messenger*. In 2011, Cook was an executive producer on *Dark Tide*, starring Halle Berry.

JOE EGAN – Bear's Breath

In 2008 Joe Egan made a successful transition from the boxing ring, where he won seven Irish titles, to movie hard man, appearing in several independent films and television dramas, including 'Hustle'. Mike Tyson's sparring partner for two years Egan's acting career went from strength to strength, his big break when personally approached by acclaimed filmmaker Guy Ritchie to appear in *Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*. Quickly gaining a reputation for having a great on-screen presence, Egan has appeared in more than 40 movies including *Cass*, *Dead Man Running*, *Strippers vs. Werewolves*, *The Magnificent Eleven* and *Fanged Up*.

GEOFF BELL – Darky Mulley

Geoff Bell is most notable for his performances in *Mike Bassett: England Manager*, *Green Street*, *The Business*, *Wild Target*, *Solomon Kane*, *Tormented*, *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, *Suffragette*, *Rogue One* and *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*. He has appeared in many films, mostly as a cameo appearance or in a supporting role including *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *Stardust*, *RocknRolla* and *War Horse*. On television Bell appeared in 'Five Daughters', 'Top Boy', 'Comes A Bright Day', 'The Great Fire', 'Whitechapel' and 'The Level'.

JUSTIN SALINGER – Harry White

After graduating from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 1996, Justin Salinger has since appeared in numerous high-profile movies and television productions. His feature film credits include Simon Rumley's *Crowhurst*, *Everest*, *Heartless*, *Robot Overlords*, *Creature* and *Velvet Goldmine*. On television he has been seen in 'The Eichmann Show', 'Doctor Who', 'Humans', 'The Windsors', 'Rillington Place', 'Ripper Street', 'Doc Martin', 'The Mill', 'Foyle's War' and 'Waking the Dead'. Selected theatre credits include 'Medea', 'The Birthday Party', 'Privates on Parade' and 'The Homecoming'.

JJ HAMBLETT – Bobby Warren

Jamie Paul "JJ" Hamblett is the oldest member of the group Union J and was one of the three original members of Triple J. He was a jockey until he was 21, riding in 270 races, winning 24 times, and has ridden horses for the Queen. The boy band Triple J changed their name to Union J in 2011 and consisted of members JJ, Josh Cuthbert, Jaymi Hensley, Casey Johnson and George Shelley, the latter added to the group in 2012 through the ninth series of 'The X Factor', in which they finished fourth. They subsequently signed a record deal with RCA Records, and released their debut single "Carry You" in June 2013, their self-titled debut studio album, 'Union J', followed in October 2013 peaking at Number 6 on the UK Albums Chart. In April 2014, Union J left RCA and signed with Epic Records. Their second studio album 'You Got It All – The Album' was released in December 2014. JJ's feature film credits include *Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning* and *Tango One*.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

SIMON RUMLEY –Director, co-writer

Unique screenwriter, director and author Simon Rumley is described by Screen International as "One of the great British cinematic outsiders, a gifted director with the

know-how to puncture the conventions". After starting out as a runner, Rumley began writing short and feature scripts, like *Club Le Monde*, and directed *Strong Language* and *The Truth Game* released through the BFI at London's National Film Theatre. His feature breakthrough came in 2005 with *The Living and the Dead*, which premiered at the Rotterdam International Film Festival and played over 40 festivals worldwide. Since then his distinctive work has played to universal award-winning acclaim on the burgeoning festival circuit and includes *Red White & Blue*, the seminal British psychosexual horror anthology *Little Deaths*, the 'P for Pressure' segment in *The ABCs of Death*, *Johnny Frank Garrett's The Last Word*, *Crowhurst* and *Fashionista*.

TERRY STONE – Producer, co-writer, star - see Cast Biographies

RICHARD TURNER – Producer

Richard Turner is the producer of the documentaries *King of Clubs*, *To Be Frank*, *Sinatra at 100* and *Hooligan*. His feature film credits as producer and executive producer include *Fanged Up*, *Away*, *The Messenger*, *Freak of Nurture*, *Best Laid Plans* and *Nativity!*

MILTON KAM – Director of Photography

Milton Kam's work as a cinematographer includes over 20 feature films. His most prolific collaboration is with British director Simon Rumley, with whom he has made *Red White & Blue*, *Little Deaths*, *The ABCs of Death*, *Johnny Frank Garrett's The Last Word*, *Crowhurst* and *Fashionista*. Other selected feature film credits include *Foreign Letters*, *Punching at the Sun*, *Daylight Robbery*, *Shadows in the Sun*, *Tomorrow Ever After* and *Vanaja*, which won the Silver Bear at the 2007 Berlin Film Festival, followed by two nominations for the 2008 Independent Spirit Awards, including one for Best Cinematography. For television Milton has lit the documentaries 'American Playboy: The Hugh Hefner Story', 'Roman Empire: Reign of Blood' and 'American Genius'. In between features and documentaries, Milton also shoots corporate campaigns for clients such as Stanley Black & Decker and commercials for global brands like Coca Cola, Canon, and ING, as well as music videos. In his free time Milton works on creating a photo book, which explores the lives of the indigenous people in Suriname.

ANNA MOULD – Production Designer

Anna Mould is and Art Director and Production Designer with extensive experience in music videos, commercials, shorts and feature films. Selected credits include *Aux*, *The Time of Their Lives*, *Level Up*, *White Island*, *Breakdown*, *Legacy*, *Red Kingdom Rising*, *Notes on Blindness*, *Hollow*, *The Treehouse*, *Dirty Money* and *Rise of the Footsoldier III: The Beginning*.

MICHELLE MAY – Costume Designer

Michelle May is an award winning Costume Designer with over 20 years experience working in commercials, television and film. After graduating from Wimbledon School of Art in Costume Design in 1994, Michelle began her costume career in theatre and TV, working on various productions including 'Eastenders' and 'Brookside' before moving into commercials. She has twice won the coveted Craft Award for Best

Costume, in 2016 for her work on the 'IKEA Wonderful Everyday' commercial and 'Always A Woman' John Lewis commercial. Michelle's features experience began with assisting on *Love, Honour & Obey* and the shorts *Touchpaper*, *Geoffrey's Belt* and *Dealer*. Michelle's commercial portfolio also included campaigns with such other world-renowned brands as Heineken, Kronenbourg, Audi and Nike. **ONCE UPON A TIME IN LONDON** is her first feature film solo credit.

ENDS