

## ACORN PRODUCTIONS LTD ANNOUNCES TWO MAJOR NEW BBC1 DRAMAS FOR AGATHA CHRISTIE'S 125<sup>th</sup> CELEBRATION YEAR

**RLJ Entertainment oversees extraordinary raft of developments across platform, bringing the Christie brand to new audiences**

Acorn Productions Ltd today (Friday 28 February) announces that BBC1 has commissioned two significant new drama adaptations to bring Agatha Christie masterpieces to a new generation:

- A new adaptation of ***And Then There Were None***, Christie's most successful work and one of the best-selling crime novels of all time, will be written by **Sarah Phelps** (*Great Expectations*, BBC; *Oliver Twist*, BBC) produced by **Mammoth Screen** (*Parade's End*, *Blandings*, BBC; *Endeavour*, ITV) in partnership with Acorn Productions and is slated for broadcast at Christmas 2015.
- Meanwhile, crime-fighting duo Tommy and Tuppence will return to our screens in a 1950s-set six-part adventure thriller series called ***Partners in Crime***, starring **David Walliams** as Tommy. This brand new adaptation will be produced by **Endor Productions** (*The Escape Artist*, *Restless*; *State of Play*, *The Girl in the Café*, BBC) in partnership with Acorn Productions and the first three episodes (TX autumn 2015) will be written by award-winning author, playwright and director **Zinnie Harris**.

These two major new BBC1 dramas are just part of an extraordinary raft of developments as **RLJ Entertainment**, of which Acorn Productions Ltd is a subsidiary company, reinvents the Christie brand across a range of platforms, bringing Christie – the best-selling novelist of all time – to a new generation of crime fans.

Initiatives include a recently announced feature film (a star-studded re-make of *Murder on the Orient Express* from Fox produced by Ridley Scott, Mark Gordon and Simon Kinberg); Hidden Object tablet games, such as the 2013 release of *Dead Man's Folly* that has seen some 200,000 downloads in the first few weeks of release and an average rating of 4.5 stars; and forthcoming announcements for West End theatre.

Meanwhile, Acorn Productions and Agatha Christie Ltd are investing heavily in keeping the Agatha Christie brand fresh and engaged with its audience. The new Agatha Christie website was launched in September last year as the definitive guide to Christie's stable of world-famous detectives, and a global hub for a fan community across the world. Further phases are to be rolled out throughout 2014. Alongside this the official social media channels converse with a hugely international fan base, achieving an audience of close to 1.6million and growing, on Facebook alone.

**Hilary Strong, MD of Acorn Productions**, said: "We are delighted to unveil these two major new dramas for BBC1. They are an integral part of our plans for the Christie brand and demonstrate the scale of our ambition at Acorn Productions Ltd for the portfolio of works that we own. With Christie's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year, we are developing innovative new content on all platforms – publishing, digital and theatre – with new adaptations of her timeless stories.

"In addition to our publishing, digital and theatrical business, RLJ Entertainment is resourcing Acorn Productions to become a major player in British drama production. Our immediate access to RLJ Entertainment's US distribution network and funding means that Acorn Productions is ideally placed to produce or co-produce fresh new content for the UK, US and world markets."

**Mathew Prichard, Chairman of Agatha Christie Limited** and grandson of Agatha Christie said: “It is fantastic that, in her all-important 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, my grandmother is to be welcomed with such enthusiasm to the BBC: a wonderful new home for her much-loved characters and their stories, and one which she would be delighted with. The commitment to these productions from all those involved is great to see, and I’ve no doubt will result in compelling new adaptations, to be enjoyed by fans old and new.”

**Basi Akpabio, Creative Director of Acorn Productions**, said: “The Agatha Christie estate has an extraordinarily deep well of stories and characters to work with and offers endless possibilities for creative renewal. *And Then There Were None* is Christie at her darkest and most frightening – the ultimate justice meted out for secrets and crimes. This promises to be fast-paced drama at its best and we’re thrilled to be working with Mammoth Screen and writer Sarah Phelps. Meanwhile, Christie herself said that the books featuring amateur sleuths Tommy Beresford and Prudence Cowley were the ones she most enjoyed writing, so we are looking forward to collaborating with Endor Productions and Zinnie Harris to bring them to a whole new generation of fans.”

**Damien Timmer, joint Managing Director of Mammoth Screen**, said of *And Then There Were None*: “We want this to be the definitive adaptation of one of the most strikingly original and influential novels of the 20th Century, and we’re so pleased to have the extraordinarily talented Sarah Phelps writing the screenplay. *And Then There Were None* is arguably Agatha Christie’s masterpiece, and it’s a privilege to be bringing it to the screen.”

**Hilary Bevan Jones, co-founder of Endor Productions**, said of *Partners in Crime*: “To reimagine the iconic Christie characters Tommy and Tuppence and their adventures for a new television audience is a fabulous opportunity for all of us at Endor. Our incredible creative team of David Walliams, Zinnie Harris and Claire Wilson are crafting a drama that promises to be both thrilling and fresh.”

**David Walliams** said: “In bringing these thrilling stories to the screen, it is our ambition for Tommy & Tuppence to finally take their rightful place alongside Poirot and Marple as iconic Agatha Christie characters. I was first drawn to the delicious notion of a married couple solving crimes together, and the more I read of the Tommy & Tuppence novels and short stories I realised they are among Christie’s very best work.”

Acquiring, licensing and distributing iconic brands to new audiences is part a major drive from the US entertainment mega-group, RLJ Entertainment Inc (NASDAQ: RLJE), owned by Robert L. Johnson, to invest in British drama imports for North America and beyond.

“What we are doing with Christie is, itself, part of a growth strategy for RLJ Entertainment; now a one-stop-shop for development, production, licensing and distribution,” explained Hilary Strong.

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Notes to editors

**Acorn Productions Ltd** is the UK based rights holding production arm of RLJ Entertainment, Inc (NASDAQ: RLJE) a premier independent owner, developer, licensee and distributor of entertainment content and programming in

primarily North America, the United Kingdom and Australia with over 5,300 exclusive titles. Acorn Productions Ltd manages the literary and media rights to Agatha Christie's works around the world, on behalf of Agatha Christie Ltd. All licensing arrangements are run through Acorn Production's offices in the UK. Acorn Productions Ltd also manages all rights to period UK detective drama *Foyle's War* and develops unique drama programming for the UK and US markets.

#### **'And Then There Were None'**

First published in 1939, 'And Then There Were None' ('ATTWN') is the world's best-selling mystery ever and one of the best-selling books of all time. It has sold over 100 million copies to date, making it Christie's most successful work, and remains on the curriculum and recommended reading lists in schools around the world.

'ATTWN' has been adapted more often than any other Christie work, including hit stage productions on both the West End and Broadway in the 1940s and a new version of the play written by Kevin Elyot and directed by Steven Pimlott, which opened at the Gielgud Theatre in 2005.

Film adaptations include Rene Clair's iconic 1945 US production, the George Pollock release in 1965 and the Peter Collinson directed 1974 movie set in the Iranian desert. In the UK, the BBC adapted the novel for TV in 1949 and ITV did so again in 1959. It has also inspired several movies and TV iterations including the CBS show 'Harper's Island, Survivor' and an episode of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. There was even an episode of 'Family Guy' called *And Then There Were Fewer* that parodied the novel.

Event drama of the highest order, this BBC1 commission is a new telling for a new generation of Agatha Christie's extraordinary and ingenious masterpiece. Featuring an ensemble cast of world class acting talent this is Christie at her darkest and most frightening – the ultimate justice meted out for secrets and crimes. This promises to be fast-paced drama at its best.

This will be treated as a major TV event with 3 x 60' episodes broadcast on BBC1 over three consecutive nights in 2015. (A 2 x 90' mini series and a 4 x 45' mini series will be produced specifically for international broadcasters)

#### **'Partners in Crime'**

First published in 1922 ('The Secret Adversary'), Tommy Beresford & Prudence 'Tuppence' Cowley stumbled into detective work accidentally and soon became full-time sleuths. Agatha Christie cast the couple in four full-length novels as well as a collection of short stories entitled 'Partners in Crime' (1929). Tuppence is a charismatic, excitable and impulsive individual who acts as the perfect partner to the less imaginative, more methodical Tommy. In the original books, Christie developed the relationship between Tommy and Tuppence as well as ageing the couple from "bright young things" of the 1920s ('The Secret Adversary', 1922) to mature sleuths in their 70s ('Postern of Fate', 1973).

Tommy and Tuppence were portrayed by James Warwick and Francesca Annis, first in the feature-length *The Secret Adversary* (1982), and then in the 10-episode hour-long series Agatha Christie's *Partners in Crime* (1983).

Tuppence was also portrayed by Greta Scacchi in 2006 in an episode from the *Miss Marple* series (based on 'By The Pricking of My Thumbs'), this time with Tuppence and Miss Marple carrying out the detective work together whilst Tommy (Anthony Andrews) is away on MI6 business.

In 2005 the French director Pascal Thomas adapted the novel 'By The Pricking of My Thumbs' under the title *Mon Petit Doigt M'a Dit*, starring Andre Dussolier and Catherine Frot and set in France. A follow-up feature film named 'Partners in Crime' (*Le Crime est Notre Affaire*) was released in 2008 with a storyline based on a Miss Marple story, '4.50 from Paddington'.

This new BBC 1 adaptation for 2015, *Partners in Crime*, sets the amateur duo in 1950s Britain, a country facing up to the looming threat of the Cold War. In search of adventure they stumble into a world of undercover agents, mysterious evil masterminds and diabolical political conspiracy.

**RLJ Entertainment, Inc.** (NASDAQ: RLJE) is a premier independent owner, developer, licensee and distributor of entertainment content and programming in primarily North America, the United Kingdom and Australia with over 5,300 exclusive titles. RLJE is a leader in numerous genres via its owned and distributed brands such as Acorn (British TV), Image (feature films, stand-up comedy), One Village (urban), Acacia (fitness), Athena (documentaries)

and Madacy (gift sets). These titles are distributed in multiple formats including broadcast television (including satellite and cable), theatrical and non-theatrical, DVD, Blu-Ray, digital download and digital streaming.

Via its relationship with Agatha Christie Limited, a company that RLJE owns 64% of, RLJE manages the intellectual property and publishing rights to some of the greatest works of mystery fiction, including stories of the iconic sleuths Miss Marple and Poirot. RLJE also owns all rights to the hit UK mystery series *Foyle's War*.

RLJE leverages its management experience to acquire, distribute and monetize existing and original content for its many distribution channels, including its branded digital subscription channels, Acorn TV and Acacia TV, and engages distinct audiences with programming that appeals directly to their unique viewing interests. Through its proprietary e-commerce web sites and print catalogs for the Acorn and Acacia brands, RLJE has direct contacts and billing relationships with millions of consumers.

Companies interested in taking a license to adapt Agatha Christie's works into films or games, license stage plays, translate and publish new editions of her novels and short stories or quote from her writings should contact Acorn Productions Limited.

### **Mammoth Screen**

Mammoth Screen is one of the UK's leading independent production companies. Recent BBC shows have included *Blandings II* for BBC One, the award winning *Parade's End* (HBO/BBC2) and *Best Possible Taste – the Kenny Everett Story* for BBC4. Current shows in production include *Remember Me* and *Poldark* for BBC One, *ALT* for E4 and *Endeavour II* for ITV.

Mammoth Screen's Michele Buck, Karen Thrussell and Damien Timmer executive produced Agatha Christie's *Poirot* for ITV - the final run of the series tx'd in 2013 to great acclaim.

### **Endor Productions**

Founded by acclaimed Film and TV industry leader Hilary Bevan Jones, Endor has rapidly grown to become one of the most successful and influential independent drama production companies in the UK.

Recent credits include legal thriller THE ESCAPE ARTIST from Spooks creator, David Wolstencroft, starring David Tennant and Toby Kebbell, and William Boyd's RESTLESS for BBC1, starring Hayley Atwell, Charlotte Rampling, Rufus Sewell, Michelle Dockery and Michael Gambon. Upcoming productions include TUBBY AND ENID, a feature length musical for the BBC, written and directed by Victoria Wood, and starring Imelda Staunton and Michael Ball, and ROALD DAHL'S ESIO TROT, adapted by Richard Curtis and Paul Mayhew-Archer, starring Dame Judi Dench and Dustin Hoffman.

An ambitious international TV and film development slate includes deals with major UK and US broadcasters and partnerships with leading creative talent including William Boyd, Neil Gaiman, David Wolstencroft, Fiona Seres, Julian Farino and Kelly Marcel.

Endor is a partner company in the Red Arrow Entertainment Group, which is backed by Germany's Pro7Sat1 Group.

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