

# NANKING



After years working his way through the industry on numerous award-winning projects, including *Twin Towers* and *A Time for Justice*, co-director **Dan Sturman** chats with *Moving Pictures* about *Nanking*.

on a stage, reading the words of these individuals.

It wasn't so much about incorporating celebrities, per se, but incorporating what we hope are a group of first-rate actors who really made these people from 70 years ago come alive again.

**GETTING STARTED** The film is a *Schindler's List* story. It's about a group of guys and a handful of women – a group of Westerners – in the City of Nanking who, when the Japanese were approaching, said, "Rather than fleeing with everybody else, we are gonna stay behind and try to protect Chinese civilians."

They set up a safety zone and they put themselves in harm's way. The result is that they ended up saving thousands of lives by just simply being there and trying to prevent the Japanese from marauding more than they actually did.

None of them are alive. There is virtually no footage and very few photographs to expand of any of these people. So, the question is, "How do you tell their story?"

**THE UNDERTAKING** A handful left extremely detailed and, frankly, incredibly powerfully written diaries, letters. We [also] combed archives in the United States, in China, in Japan, in Korea, in Taiwan, and we ultimately

assembled thousands of pages of written material, contemporaneous material, including Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal transcripts.

Taking this written material, we condensed it into a narrative stage play that sort of tells the story and, in an effort to then present that information in a way that hopefully would make it come alive for our audience, we had actors [Woody Harrelson, Mariel Hemingway, Stephen Dorff, Jürgen Prochnow]

**LESSONS LEARNED** Until I started this project, I didn't even know that there was actually a Tokyo War Crimes Trial. A lot of the things that happened in Germany after the war, also happened in Japan.

One of the more fascinating things I took away from the film was there were a lot of parallels with Katrina in New Orleans. Basically, the Japanese were approaching the city, and Nanking was a city of around a million people. Everybody with any resources fled the city. By the time the Japanese arrived, it was only the poorest of the poor, and they really suffered the brunt of the occupation.

**FROM START TO SUNDANCE** We started writing the treatment in July of 2005. We're having a music performance by the Kronos Quartet in early January, and we do our sound mix immediately after that. [Laughs] We will finish the film about three or four days before Sundance opens, so it's really kind of a dash to the finish.

–**Elliot V. Kotek**

