



Emma Appleton (left) and Stefanie Martini.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE



The Camera Never Lies

How David Bowie fits into **LOLA's** Second World War-set found footage film

FOUND FOOTAGE MOVIES HAVE virtually become a genre in themselves over the past 25 years. But while most are patched together from old VHS or iPhone clips, few make use of unearthed footage from eight decades ago. That's the conceit behind *LOLA*, a low-budget but toweringly inventive feature from first-time director Andrew Legge about two sisters who, during the early days of the Second World War, create a machine that can intercept broadcasts from the future.

"I liked the idea of doing a period found footage movie," Legge tells Red Alert. "I loved the idea of these sisters outside the time they're in. And I loved the idea of doing a time travel

movie but a slightly different version, as *LOLA* isn't a time machine."

The seeds of *LOLA* lie in a 2009 short written and directed by Legge, titled "The Chronoscope". That film, presented in documentary style, told the story of a fascist group in '30s Ireland who steal a device that can see into the past.

"I like the idea of exploring time travel," explains Legge, "but in a way where you can't actually travel in time, you can just get information through it. In 'The Chronoscope' there was a plausibility, getting information

from the past – more than in *LOLA*, where it's from the future."

Filmed using vintage 16mm Bolex and Arriflex cameras (with the various newsreel scenes shot on a '30s Newman Sinclair 35mm wind-up), *LOLA* looks every bit as authentic as Legge must have hoped when he originally came up with the idea of a '40s-set found footage flick.

"It's a bit of a camera geek's dream to hold these cameras," he enthuses. "Some of them didn't work, which was hilarious. We were doing one scene when [actor] Stefanie [Martini]





The sisters get glammed up for a musical number.

was operating the Arriflex and the lens fell off, so we had to gaffer-tape it back on!”

As the found footage within the movie is mostly filmed by the sisters, Legge was keen for his lead actors to operate the cameras themselves. “That was, for me, a deal breaker,” he says. “When I pitched the film to the actors, particularly to Stefanie, it was like, ‘We’re going to show you how to operate them.’ She was very into that. I wouldn’t have cast her if she hadn’t been. That was always baked into it, because I wanted it to feel real. If you’ve got the cinematographer operating it’s just not as real. It’s much harder for the actors, with the eyelines.”

As the LOLA machine picks up broadcasts from the future, some of the film’s most striking and memorable images involve seeing David Bowie’s otherworldly visage glimpsed in a ’40s setting, or a Bob Dylan poster stuck to a wall in the women’s wartime home. Legge decided to limit LOLA’s forecasts to as far forward as the ’60s and ’70s, and not to include

“I loved the idea of a time travel movie, but a different version”

footage of 21st century faces like Donald Trump or The Weeknd.

“It’s just the music that I like,” says the director. “You write about what you’re into and I love David Bowie. That was the main reason for Bowie and not a modern band. People like Bowie and Bob Dylan, they’re so iconic and also it’s 20 years ahead when you’ve got this massive cultural revolution that happened as a result of the Second World War.”

Aside from clips of the ’60s and ’70s, the film also makes use of archival footage from the ’40s, much of it digitally doctored to illustrate how some of the women’s LOLA-sourced intelligence has changed history as we know it. Legge says he and his researchers spent around three months sifting through reams of old

newsreel footage for use in the movie. “It’s all available to watch online, so you can go on to various websites like AP and ITN and Pathé and put in your keywords,” he says. “The Hitler stuff was particularly hard. I wanted him looking at LOLA and reacting, so we were going through hundreds of minutes of him. The sequence in the film is of him in a Volkswagen factory and I think he’s actually reacting to a Volkswagen Beetle.”

As proud as Legge clearly is of *LOLA*, his next movie will be a more conventionally told affair. “It’s set in the ’60s and again it’s sci-fi and about two women,” he teases. “We’re just bashing the treatment around the place at the moment, which is excruciating.” So is he planning any return to the found footage genre? “I’m never ever doing it again,” he laughs. “It’s a great experiment and it’s fun to do once, but no way, it’s too limiting.” **so**

LOLA is in cinemas from 7 April, with a digital release on 8 May and a Blu-ray on 3 July.

▶ SCI-FACT! Emma Appleton played Nancy Spungen in *Pistol* and Stefanie Martini was the lead in *Prime Suspect 1973*.