Rewinding Fate

Run Lola Run sprints to success
By Michael Giltz

34-year-old German director Tom Tykwer smiles amiably as we sat down to talk about his runaway German smash, *Run Lola Run* — an infectiously fun tale of a girl who has 20 minutes to find 100,000 marks (about $480,000) or watch her boyfriend die at the hands of his mobster employer. Tykwer has every reason to smile: the movie grossed an amazing $14 million in Germany and is poised to repeat that success all over the world.

It's a happy success for such a bold movie. *Lola* shows the girl (Franka Potente) desperately trying to find 100,000 marks as she races through Berlin and then — just when we seem to have reached the climax — her passionate desire to save her boyfriend literally sends the movie back to the beginning and it starts all over again. This happens again and again, and subtle differences in her quest — sometimes she bumps into a nun, sometimes she decides to ask her father for help — send the story veering off into unexpected directions.

In Tykwer's hands, *Run Lola Run* turns its $2 million budget into a witty and moving exploration of fate and love. But selling it was another matter. "They would read the script and then stop and say, 'What do you mean it starts all over again?'" laughs Tykwer. "They said, 'It sounds like an art, an experimental film.' I said, 'Yes, it's an experimental film for mass audiences.'"

Born in Wuppertal, Germany, this is Tykwer's third film (not counting *Clash of the Giants*, a rampage he filmed at 11 years old in which a robot fought Godzilla in the garden of his parents' house). He moved to Berlin as soon as possible and one-upped Quentin Tarantino in the process — instead of schlepping for a video store, Tykwer programmed the revival house Moviemento when he was 23. "It was amazing, wonderful," says Tykwer, who started as a ticket taker and quickly moved his way up as people left. "It was always crowded. I did the whole programming myself, which was paradise

because I could show all my favorite films and all the films I missed. You could do a triple feature of Polanski films starting at 12:30 at night and it was sold out! They sat there till six in the morning and it was so beautiful."

Tykwer is a genuine lover of movies. For a recent collection of essays on Hitchcock, he wrote about the relatively obscure film *The Wrong Man*. "It's so tender and so personal, much more than all the films he did in the Fifties," he enthuses. Ask him if he's read *Hitchcock/Truffaut* and he says quite sincerely, "It's the Bible, isn't it? This is the book everyone reads every year. Don't you?"

Comparisons to Hitchcock don't hold up, though. Tykwer was cruel to his leading lady — the script includes endless scenes of her running at full tilt, but he didn't enjoy it. In fact, the two have since started dating. "I didn't know whether Franka would be able to survive this marathon idea, because she is not a sporting person at all," he laughs. "She hates running and she is a smoker. In the pauses, she always had a cigarette and that made me really worried."

Tykwer talks enthusiastically about Lars Von Trier, Wim Wenders and is delighted when I bring up Terence Davies' *The Long Day Closes* (1992) when talking about Tykwer's earlier film *Winter Sleepers*. "His *Distant Voices, Still Lives* is one of my all-time top ten favorites." But the box office triumph of *Lola* is neither unexpected. "I had a feeling there could be something popular in it," he says, nor unwelcome for such a cineaste. For Tykwer can pinpoint his aesthetic to the passionate debates of his youth over two of the most popular directors of all time.

"I can remember there were two factions when *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* opened up in Germany," says Tykwer. "I saw *Star Wars* once in '78 and I saw *Close Encounters* I think...28 times only in the first release. And that was the film I cared about. And today when I see them again, I haven't changed. I was then 12 or 13. It still represents what I like about cinema, even commercial cinema. I still see in *Close Encounters* how personal it is and that's what I look for in film."