

Canal Plus' Epic Drama 'Versailles' Gets Greenlit For Second Season (EXCLUSIVE)



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Ahead of its November premiere on Canal Plus, “Versailles,” the upscale epic drama penned by David Wolstencroft (“The Escape Artist”) and Simon Mirren (“Criminal Minds”), has been greenlit by the French pay TV giant for a second season.

The 10-episode show is produced by France’s Newen-owned Capa Drama, Zodiak Fiction and Canada’s Incendo and developed and co-produced by Canal Plus’ original creation division. It toplines two rising British stars,

Georges Blagden (“Vikings”) in the role of Louis XIV and Alexander Vlahos in the role of Monsieur, the Sun King’s enigmatic brother.

The 30 million Euros “Versailles” is already garnering strong word-of-mouth and is being promoted as one of Canal Plus’ most ambitious series as well as France’s biggest-budgeted show. The International Emmy Awards hosted an exclusive screening of the series pilot for its members during a board meeting in Versailles. The screening was followed by a panel with Capa Drama boss Claude Chelli, Zodiak France’s CEO Gaspard de Chavagnac and Fabrice de la Patelliere, who runs Canal Plus’ fiction division, season one helmer Jalil Lespert, Blagden and Vlahos.

The International Emmy event was followed by a private tour of Versailles Palace, where the series lensed, and a cocktail reception attended by France President Francois Hollande (pictured above), France Culture and Communications Minister Fleur Pellerin, Canal Plus topper Maxime Saada, Newen CEO Fabrice Larue, and the panelists, among other high-profile guests.

Sold by Zodiak Rights, “Versailles”’s season one has been acquired by Super Channel in Canada and Movistar in Spain, along with a dozen of channels worldwide. The English-language show, which is partly directed by Lespert (“Yves Saint Laurent”) was also picked up by BBC2 which will roll it out in early 2016.

The decision of shoot “Versailles” in English has been hotly debated in France but de Chavagnac said the show had to be made in English in order for the producers (<http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/producers/>) to raise the 30 million Euros budget and lense on location in France — at the Versailles Palace as well as neighboring castles. Although Zodiak Rights has had experience selling French-language series such as “The Returned” and “Braquo” across the globe, Chavagnac noted the amount of sales are two to three times higher for “Versailles” than “The Returned.” In fact, “Versailles” sales currently account for approximately 25% of French TV programs’ export over the last two years, per de Chavagnac.

De la Patteliere said “‘Versailles’ was the next step in the international coproduction strategy (Canal Plus) is now pursuing with its partners.” “This new season, that we aim to develop with renewed originality, will be a full-blown immersion into the absolute power of Louis XIV,” said the Canal Plus exec.

Lensing on location with French crews was a major boost for the show, argued Blagden, who noted that 600 people working on “Versailles” were artists rather than typical [crew \(http://variety411.com/us/new-york/crew/\)](http://variety411.com/us/new-york/crew/) members. The actor said he was also baffled with the decors, who were meticulously recreated for the series, and lavish costumes.

“Versailles”’s top-notch crew include costume designer Madeline Fontaine (“Yves Saint Laurent”), set designer Katia Wyszkop (“Farewell, My Queen”) and cinematographer Pierre-Yves Bastard (“Maison Close”).

Lespert was involved in the creative process of the series, in particular the casting. Blagden, who is best known for his parts in the series “Vikings” and feature film “Les Miserables,” was picked out of 200 thespians.

Vlahos, who delivers a highly colorful performance as Monsieur, was cast first. Vlahos said he enjoyed great creative leeway in playing the eccentric Monsieur since the historical figure is not so prominent. Indeed, Monsieur grew up in the shadow of his brother and was dressed as a girl through his childhood. Blagden, meanwhile, joked that everyone he encountered during the shooting had a strong opinion about Louis XIV so he felt pulled in different directions, although he ultimately followed his own intuition and understanding to play the part. Blagden’s Louis XIV is charismatic and vulnerable, yet dangerously manipulative.

The second season, whose filming is scheduled to kick off in early 2016, is currently being penned under the guidance of the two showrunners, Wolstencroft and Mirren with new scribes on board: Andrew Bampffield (“D-Day 6.6.1944”), Audrey Fouché (“The Returned”), Jamie Brittain (“Skins”) and Tim Loane (“Teachers”). Blagden and Vlahos are back in their respective roles.

“King Louis XIV ruled France for 72 years, so there are still many stories to be told, in the same style and with the same contemporary approach that we established in season 1,” said Capa Drama topper Claude Chelli, who also revealed the second season will showcase “women, love potions and poisons.”

Season one follows the first years in power of the Louis XIV at age 28, when he made the strategic decision to move his court to Versailles in order to gain more power. Season two finds the King four years later. Now an emancipated sovereign with a wily understanding of the workings of power.

In terms of visual style and music, Chelli and De la Patelliere said they opted for a modern look and feel. The idea was to create an edgy, contemporary series that marks a departure from traditional historical drama made for public broadcasters.

“The audacity of the series has paid off. In telling the story of Louis XIV who, with Versailles, was the first to create an international brand, the series is a compelling property that has succeeded in winning over the most demanding broadcasters,” said De Chavagnac.

The Zodiak France topper said he and the production team had not yet decided where season two will be set up and are examining various options since the French tax rebate for local series shot in English is proving insufficient. While the tax rebates for international and national productions have just been upped from 20% to 30%, the incentive for French shows lags behind. Gaul’s senators will review it before the end of the month.

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