

## Last tango in Moscow

**German documentary production house Beetz Brothers is ramping up its involvement in digital media with the production of a vast interactive site to accompany its upcoming six-part television series looking at the fall of the Soviet Union, Farewell Comrades!, due to go live in mid-2011 ahead of the series' broadcast.**

"We have a known budget of about €300,000 just for the web format," says Beetz Brothers producer Georg Tschurtschenthaler, listing MEDIA's fledgling interactive fund, regional Berlin fund Medien Board and Arte as the main backers of the site.

"It will tell the story of the collapse of the Soviet Union through original postcards from that time, creating a network of stories. The postcards will act as an entry point to interviews, archive clips, access to times-lines and links to social networks such as Facebook. It will also feature some game elements. A web project on this scale has never been done for a historical theme before. It will launch in the summer of 2011. We just finished the first prototype."

As part of its commitment to interactive new media, the company recently hired games expert Lena Thiele and social media producer Sonia Schmidt. "These two people are thinking about how to bring our documentary content to the internet.

We see this as the future. We still believe in the traditional content of documentary features and television series, but we're trying to develop new formats to tell these stories in a more playful, entertaining way," says Tschurtschenthaler.

Farewell Comrades!, which was pitched at the Forum last year, is being made to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the official end of the Soviet Union in December 1991, marked by Mikhail Gorbachev's announcement to world leaders by phone and Soviet citizens by television address that he was resigning his "position as president of the USSR".

Beetz Brothers, which has offices in Berlin, Hamburg and Cologne, is one of Germany's biggest documentary producers and focuses on public television and international co-productions. It is involved in three IDFA titles this year: [Autumn Gold](#), [Blood in the Mobile](#) and [My Heart of Darkness](#).

"We're very much into feature-length productions as well. We've done eleven international productions this year. Autumn Gold was developed by us, while the other two we boarded later as co-producers – although we were quite heavily involved in My Heart of Darkness," explains Tschurtschenthaler.

Aside from the mammoth Farewell Comrades! project, the company is also developing feature documentary Cheek to Cheek, an exploration of Finland's love affair with tango by German director Viviane Blumenschein. In the film, an Argentine tango player will meet Finnish tango singers and composers Reijo Taipale, Eino Gron and film director Aki Kaurismäki, who once declared the tango was invented by Finns.

Melanie Goodfellow