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City actor Peter Grant is finding fame in a quirky, short horror film based on Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland stories

A SHORT film shot in Oxford and starring actor Peter Grant has been picked up by two North American film festivals.

Actor Peter Grant, who lives on a boat near Port Meadow and appears in an Oxford-shot short film picked up by two American film festivals, says appearing in it has "re-ignited" his passion for acting.

The film, titled *Alice in Nightmareland*, was shot in Oxford last summer, and has been selected for an honourable mention by the Fear Faire Film Festival which takes place in the USA this weekend, and has been nominated by Canada's AltFF Alternative Film Festival in Ontario.

The seven-minute production, which he calls a "microhorror", was filmed around Oxford, with locations including Oxford Castle, the Alice Shop and St Frideswide's Church.

Its plot sees a modern-day film crew shooting a documentary on the annual Alice's Day, before it all goes horribly wrong.

Mr Grant says of shooting: "When we got on set on the Castle Mound, we all really enjoyed filming off the cuff and improvising our lines.

"Our shoot had a sense of anarchy matching Alice's adventures, and all the actors were in their element."

"I played a character who loves the book but has had a magic mushroom trip and fears going down a rabbit hole.

"I brought a book on Lewis Carroll from the Alice Shop, and wore a shirt with tiny rabbits on it, to connect with the White Rabbit.

"My character is nervous, he's trying to warn the documentary crew and other characters that something is going to go wrong."

Peter, who went to theatre school in London, added: "We also shot outside the Alice Shop with some 'cosplayers' who were the Cheshire Cat and the Mad Hatter.

"Afterwards the cast and crew went for a wrap dinner at a local restaurant, and got to know each other, which was great.

"Alice in Nightmareland has re-ignited my passion for acting, and it's nice to hear it's already started to get recognition with this Californian festival award."

Writer and producer Nina Romain, who was born in Oxford, shot the film. She said: "When I visited the Alice Restaurant in Tokyo a few years ago, I knew I had to bring my Alice obsession back to where I was born.

"Everyone here is so welcoming and friendly and it's a great place to shoot."

The Fear Faire Film Festival runs this weekend in Spring Valley Lake, California.



Peter Grant with Alice. Above, Alice's Day

Our film shoot had a sense of anarchy which matched Alice's adventure



Global talent: The Varna International Ballet perform *The Nutcracker*. Pictures by Elliott Franks

'You will feel our passion and joy'

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"I'm performing the lead roles of Marie in *The Nutcracker*, Swanhilda in *Coppélia*, and Giselle in *Giselle*."

The tour moves on to towns including Reading and High Wycombe, where she will also take on the star dual roles of Odette and Odile in *Swan Lake*.

"I really love *Swan Lake* because you get to be elegant and soft in the first act, and then you play the dark swan in the second act, which is a big change of personality. It's really fun to do.

"We have four principal casts going on tour, so we alternate shows between us."

Perennially popular with ballet aficionados, Claire says they are also perfect for first time audiences.

"All of these ballets are really accessible," she says.

"There's nothing better than seeing children in the audience with smiles on their faces.

"When I was a little kid, my mum always took me to *Swan Lake*, and I'd say 'Oh, mum, when I grow up I want to be a swan'. Now I am! I'm so thankful to be on stage, hopefully with other little kids looking up at me and having that dream."

What can audiences expect from a Varna ballet?

"They're going to really like our company because we're just full of



energy," she says.

"We're so thrilled to travel, bringing our ballets to new audiences, and we have a great connection on stage between all the dancers. I think they'll feel our passion and our joy."

She goes on: "When you get the dancing, the live music, the sets, the costumes, everything coming together, it's magical."

Italian soloist Vittorio Scolè agrees.

"You don't need to understand all the ballet technique or the history," he says. "We're bringing stories with princes and princesses that little kids will love, as well as beautiful dancing, costumes, music: everything you need to have a magical time."

Vittorio is dancing solo roles as Albrecht in *Giselle*, Frantz in *Coppélia*, and the Princes in *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*.

"We're completely international – it's really cool," he says. "I started last August with the company and I really like the atmosphere. It's like a family from all different places."

The ballet orchestra is equally impressive, boasting more than 30 musicians.

"It makes such a difference having the orchestra with us," Vittorio says.

"I feel it in my heart: the music and dancing are together, they are one. You might be scared before you go on stage, but when the orchestra plays you get this feeling that's impossible to explain: it's like a dream. We are carried away, and I hope people watching are too."

He adds: "It's our job to carry people with us when we're up on stage – to tell them the story through our dancing. It's like sharing a fairy tale. I remember when I was younger how exciting it was going to the theatre. I think parents and children, everyone who comes will have an amazing time."

● Varna International Ballet is at the New Theatre Oxford, performing *Coppélia* on January 30, *Giselle* on January 31, and *The Nutcracker* on February 1. Go to atgtickets.com

For other dates, including *Swan Lake* performances, see ents24.com/uk