



# MAKING A SCENE

There's a bit of a buzz in the air in Ventnor. Post lockdown, there's now a renewed creative optimism. Admittedly, the town has always been a magnet for the art crowd, but in the past weeks the energy seems more vibrant, more alive. With even Bollywood here filming this year, it seems Ventnor is becoming a hotspot for many TV and film productions, and now a new local production team is also making an impression.



9 of Cups Productions made their first short film during last year's restrictions. Their short supernatural thriller, called 'Strange Waters', was filmed on location in Ventnor and on Spitbank Fort in the Solent. The finished short, which is a teaser for the full-length feature film, is now headed for the international festival circuit.

Writer and Producer, Rowena Amos, probably better known for running 'The Cabin' on Ventnor seafront, says: "This project felt blessed from the outset, literally everything fell into place. Andy is a fantastic new director, plus we secured our first choice of actors. All the crew were immensely talented, and everyone got on really well together on set, which is rare! We actually all

met during the first lockdown through Director's Cut Theatre company in London and had been working together over Zoom for just over a year. When we saw each other for the first time it was like, hey you have a body!"

The idea for the film itself was born out of the pandemic situation. Rowena continues: "The story has themes of isolation and suspicion, a reflection of how the collective was feeling, but we also wanted a project that would be fun to make. I think everyone is ready for a bit of fun."

The film is Andy McLeod's directorial debut, although he is by no means new to the industry with fifteen years as an established actor in shows such



of tunnels that were once used by the former Victorian tuberculosis hospital. Some shots for the interior of the fort were also re-created in Ventnor Arts Club.

Many of the cast and crew are based here on the Isle of Wight. Tim Rowe, who plays Vince, and Kevin Early, the Director of Photography, are based out in West Wight. Four of the team graduated from Portsmouth University in the same year, although they only met during the filming. Stills photographs on set were taken by local photographer Gianpaolo Giancovich and renowned local musician Angelina Grimshaw joined the crew as wardrobe and continuity; some may not know

as *The Beast Must Die*, *Eastenders* and Stephen Merchant's, *The Outlaws*. Andy comments: "Lockdown did pose some big challenges for the shoot. We had to use Zoom for the pre-production meetings, limit the amount of people on set and test daily. I think we were all praying that no-one became ill; thankfully we were lucky."

Many of the shots were filmed on the historic Spitbank Fort itself. Rowena adds: "I was looking for a totally original setting for the story, so when we passed the fort on the ferry one day I shouted - that's it! Obviously everyone thought I was a bit crazy as it's in the middle of the sea. The logistics of filming at sea are not easy. On researching the fort, I discovered it has a fascinating history and is actually built on a fresh water well that ironically links to France. To be honest I was pretty astounded when the owner Mike Clare said we could use it, and we owe an equally big thanks to his son Edward who helped practically to make it all happen."

Director Andy enthuses: "The fort is an amazing location, it's living history. I believe we are the only narrative film to shoot on it. There was a fair bit of me and the director of photography going deep into the bowels of it to get the best, creepiest shots possible. It's pretty damp and dark down there but was worth it for the footage! The



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external shots were taken with a drone, and we had to make sure we kept it in range whilst getting all the intricate angles we needed, it really kept us on our toes. At one point we couldn't get the drone back on the boat due to the high wind, that was a bit hairy for a while. It could have been very costly!"

The film also shot locally in Ventnor Botanic Gardens, down in the network

that she holds a fashion degree from Cheltenham School of Art. Her brother, accomplished Island musician JC Grimshaw, composed the score for the film. Rowena comments: "We wanted to create an original sound on real instruments. JC composed the music while watching the finished edit so we could get the exact timings and interpretation. He and Kathy then



recorded the score on piano, mandolin and violin. JC adds: "I tried to keep all the sounds real and organic to enhance the nautical theme of the story. It's a bit of a departure from my usual method of songwriting, but I really enjoyed the challenge of this project."

The film also includes the sea shanty 'Roll the old Chariot' – otherwise known as 'A Drop of Nelson's Blood' – sung by New England baritone singer David Coffin. Rowena discovered a clip on YouTube of David singing entitled 'Portsmouth Festival', only to later realise it was in Portsmouth, Massachusetts! However, when they approached David in the US he was keen to be part of the project.

Filmwight, the Island's official film office, also helped support the project. They organised locations, arranged discounted ferries and even provided transportation during the shoot. Film Officer, Dave Russell says, "the Island has so much to offer, with such a wealth of locations in such a small area." The Island also boasts a lot of TV and film expertise, for example the BBC's *Silent Witness* and ITV's *The Larkins* are both edited here.

A private screening of 'Strange Waters' is due to be held at Ventnor Arts Club this month, with general release later in the year after the festival circuit has completed. Their next film project is already in the pipeline for this year.

