

Extras turn out to help film crew wake the dead in the Irish style



Tyrone was the scene for a new film yesterday as **Marie Louise McCrory** reports

THE POPULATION of Co Tyrone could be forgiven for letting its recent run of success go to their heads. First an All-Ireland triumph and now movie stardom for more than 100 of its budding stars.

While the rest of Northern Ireland spent their usual Sunday afternoon in front of the television, the people of Omagh were 'on location', where it was a case of lights, camera, action, on the set of a new movie.

More than 100 lucky starlets got the chance to be movie extras in *Crashing the Wake* - a short, dark comedy about death, a traditional Irish wake and the relationship's which evolve in such sensitive situations.

The film, which is a final year graduation project by a group of students from the Surrey Institute of Art and Design, was co-written by Chris Baugh, from Omagh, and Arnstein Dybvik, from Norway.

The movie's international crew is a mixture of established professionals and students, who are up-and-coming filmmakers themselves.

The 12-minute independent film, which is due to be completed early next year, was shot solely at the Omagh home of Chris Baugh's father, with one funeral procession scene shot in the Co Tyrone countryside.

The crew transformed Mr Baugh's home into the scene of a traditional

Irish wake, complete with a coffin, which was temporarily moved into the front room.

A team of local undertakers even offered their services, with one employee even scoring a part as the corpse.

Crashing the Wake centres around the wake of father-of-two Frank McCabe, from Gortin, who has died of natural causes.

The 65-year-old left his successful plumbing business to his less-than-capable son George (32), played by Armagh man Philip Campbell.

George dislikes confrontation and has spent much of his life letting people walk all over him.

He also has a hard time communicating with his eight-year-old son Matty, whom he loves dearly.

At the wake, George begins to realise that he needs to become more of a man

if he is to ever fill his father's shoes.

The sombre wake is thrown into disarray with the arrival of Frank's former employee Jerry, who is infamous for his boozy, grubby nature.

Having learned that he has been left out of his former employer's will, Jerry sets about insulting George and getting back at those he feels have wronged him.

The 45-year-old causes havoc at the wake, with bizarre and hilarious consequences.

The film explores the relationships which change and develop through the course of the wake.

Co-writer/director Chris Baugh (21), from Omagh, said it was crucial the film was shot in Ireland.

"There would have been huge problems such as accents and landscape and stuff, in order for it not to look fake. It had to be shot in Ireland," he said.



‘ It has been great to be part of. My sons were saying ‘are you crazy?’... it’s better than the ironing, that’s for sure! ’

Film extra Kathy O'Donnell

"We had to get the house and the people looking authentic. We brought in antiques and repapered the walls to make it look like an Irish country house." Chris and fellow-student Arnstein



■ **WRITERS:** Above, Omagh man Chris Baugh and, left, Arnstein Dybvik, from Norway, who co-wrote and directed the film

Dybvik (23) went through eight drafts of the script before it was finalised.

"The idea came from the concept of the traditional Irish wake and how relationships develop in such situations, and how it can take a situation like a wake to brings relationships to a head," said Chris.

"It has been a really good project, there have been no major hiccups. The team are a very dedicated group of people and everyone has given it their best.

Co-writer/director Arnstein, who knew nothing of traditional Irish wake rituals before the film, said it has been "incredible" to see the project come together.

"It's a great feeling pre-visioning something and then seeing it come true. The idea of the wake has evolved and subtlety is a keyword in terms of plots and characters."

Award-winning filmmaker Chee Keong Cheung, whose company Intense Productions is producing the movie, paid tribute to the "mature" team behind the project.

"The script was sent to me and I was very taken with the commitment and vision and I was intrigued," he said.

"I have never seen it as a student film. There is a level of maturity and it is not dissimilar to fully professional set-ups.

"I will help push and promote the film at film festivals and get it to the audiences. It has a worldwide appeal, it is a very human story, people watching will be able to relate".

For housewife and film extra Kathy O'Donnell, *Crashing The Wake* was a chance for "a bit of fun".

"I have never done anything like this before," said the Omagh mother-of-two.

"It has been great to be part of. My sons were saying 'are you crazy?' when I told them about it but this was a one-off and it's better than the ironing, that's for sure!"