



Canadian actress travels to Wonderland

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Caterina Scorsone plays the title role in "Alice," a two-part, four-hour-long adaptation of "Alice in Wonderland." It airs Dec. 6 and 7 on Showcase.

The makers of Alice went through 500 actresses before settling on Canadian Caterina Scorsone for the title role.

"And I think it kind of works out," the humble Scorsone said. "They really didn't know which direction they wanted to go with it. We kind of found this Alice together.

"You know, she's brunette! It's a good thing they weren't looking for someone who was necessarily blond!"

Alice is a two-part, four-hour mini-series that airs on consecutive nights — Sunday, Dec. 6 and Monday, Dec. 7 — on Showcase. Those are the same nights Alice, which also stars Kathy Bates, Tim Curry and Colm Meaney, debuts on its network of origin, Syfy, in the United States.

Alice is based not on that horrible '70s and '80s sitcom of the same name, but rather on Alice in Wonderland. Well, kinda sorta. It's from the same people who made Tin Man — which starred Zoey Deschanel and was kinda sorta based on The Wizard of Oz — back in 2007.

"Alice is an adult in this version but there's still so much of a child inside her," explained the 28-year-old Scorsone, who as a child herself appeared on the classic Canadian kids' show Mr. Dressup in the early 1990s.

"That's the idea, that there's so much childlike, undeveloped stuff in all of us. And romance is a big part of this story."

Scorsone is a Toronto native who has been living in Los Angeles for the past three years. You may have seen her in some recent episodic TV work — Castle, The Border, The Guard — but her profile is sure to expand with Alice, not to mention her upcoming feature film Edge of Darkness, which stars Mel Gibson.

"The whole marketing machine in the States is so much bigger than anything I've been part of before," said Scorsone, referring to her promotional duties for Alice. "I've heard actors from England say the same thing.

"When you're acting, you're often very protected by the story and the character. But there's this whole celebrity machine you encounter in the States where they want it to be about you."

Then again, once you've been through the star-making culture of Mr. Dressup, it's all downhill from there, is it not?

"Yeah, it's all old hat," Scorsone said with a laugh.

Actually, if anyone sounds ready for stardom, it's the well-spoken Scorsone, who harbours no regrets about getting into the entertainment business at such a young age.

"I've got really great parents and they're not involved in the film industry, they're academics," Scorsone said. "My dad runs a social-work agency for homeless gentlemen in downtown Toronto called the Good Neighbours Club.

"I took time off from acting and I travelled. I took time off and I went to college (at the University of Toronto). I made sure acting was what I did with my life, instead of being what I gave my life to entirely."

As grounded as Scorsone is, she always has been a fantasy fan, which gives her the perfect DNA for Alice.

"I did see Tin Man and I thought it was really exciting," Scorsone said. "My favourite movies growing up were The NeverEnding Story, Labyrinth, The Dark Crystal, totally geeking out.

"Fantasy is the genre that, when you have a fever, you stay home and you watch a fantasy movie."

Just to be clear, though, a fever is not required to watch Alice.

Bothered by Alice

Caterina Scorsone recalls being quite shocked and bothered by her first experiences with Alice in Wonderland.

"I remember encountering Alice in Wonderland when I was a child, both in the Disney version and when my mother read it to us as kids, and I was really disturbed by it," the 28-year-old Scorsone said. The Toronto native plays the lead character in the new TV mini-series Alice, which is a modern re-imagining of the original tale.

"The way (author) Lewis Carroll played with logic and the way A plus B didn't necessarily equal C was something that was really jarring for me as a child," Scorsone continued. "I remember this really kind of violent reaction to it.

"This script is totally turned on its head. But coming to it a second time as an adult, the illogical became part of the draw. The whimsy was suddenly something not quite as threatening."

By the way, the TV mini-series Alice — which was filmed in Vancouver and will air next Sunday and Monday on Showcase in Canada, as well as on Syfy in the United States — has nothing to do with the upcoming Tim Burton-Johnny Depp feature-film version of Alice in Wonderland.

"When you look at the world and see what's going on politically and economically, we are in this topsy-turvy time where things don't look how they're supposed to look," Scorsone said. "So I think it's really timely, and it makes sense that Alice in Wonderland would be popping up in the minds of multiple people at the same time."