



## **Josh Jarman**

*Written and directed by Pip Mushin; Produced by Pip Mushin and Eva Orner  
Cast: Marcus Graham, Daniela Farinacci, Damien Richardson, Kestie Morassi, Kim Gyngell.*

*2005; Josh Jarman Productions; comedy; 96 minutes; M;*

*4½ stars, 9/10*



It's a perilous trip from the printed page to a commercially-produced theatrical production and small-time playwright Josh Jarman's (Marcus Graham) tragic love story "A Man, A Woman" is in danger of never being performed as he does the rounds of theatrical producers in his home city, Melbourne. Bespectacled, hesitant, not-very-cool Josh is elated, therefore, when producer Stan Billows (Kim Gyngell, in flamboyant used-car salesman mode) agrees to put on his play.

His elation is only slightly dampened when there are a few conditions. One is that he dates Sasha (Kestie Morassi), Billows' flighty daughter, and the other is that he allow a few changes to his script. It's all, Stan assures him, because people want entertainment, not realism. And having praised Josh's play as "Intense! Like Shakespeare! And Chekhov!" he concludes, "Nobody's interested. The classics are finished!" It's echoed later with a director who absolutely loves the play and wants to change it completely. There are a few more changes. And a title change or three. And eventually it evolves into a musical with scantily-clad dancing nurses.

Looming in the background of Josh's mind is his inspirational mentor, a crusty old playwright named Harold Stalinger who once famously refused commercially-based alterations to his own script. He approves of Josh's play. "I was once like you but I got screwed," he writes. "Don't get screwed." And though Josh intends to keep his artistic integrity, his flatmate Russ (Damien Richardson) reminds him that he's not Stalinger, "You're a struggling has-been who never even was." His new social life with frothy party girl Sasha entails many long exhausting nights dancing in clubs as he tries to loosen some of his uptight intensity and changes are made to his script before he can object.

A parallel plot with Russ, whose dark secret vice hatches some of the knock-out funniest situational comedy in the film, punctuates the main story. The character arcs of each of the two friends are about coming back to personal integrity after straying into some pretty wild and off-the-mark territory, including, for Josh, being targeted by the sex-addicted predatory wife of Stan Billows, who purrs that it's all part of being a successful playwright.

Representing the lodestone to the hidden true path of Josh's life is his next door neighbour Maxine (Daniela Farinacci) whose quiet depths hide some surprises and contrast brilliantly with the shallow Sasha if only he can discover that fact in time. In between late nights with Sasha and rehearsals he hears Maxine practise the cello for her classical string quartet. Maxine's involvement with Brahms' Hungarian Rhapsody No 5 in G minor is literally orgasmic and a hilarious scene in a record store is one of the high points of many in this film.

An absurdist, witty script, tight timing and some superb physical comedy as well as more subtle humour make **Josh Jarman** possibly the funniest independently produced Australian film in years and is a significant debut achievement for writer/director Pip Mushin. Kim Gyngell's Stan Billows contributes some of the American feel to the film, and is matched by highly enjoyable performances by Damien Richardson, Kestie Morassi and Daniela Farinacci. Marcus Graham brings a likable openness to Josh, and his journey, while wildly funny, has authenticity enough to make **Josh Jarman** sweetly rewarding.