

SHAMELESS

An Unromantic Comedy About Sex and Marriage



Directed by Jan Hrebejk
Written by Michal Viewegh, Jan Hrebejk
and Jiri Machacek

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BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE FILM

Directed by	Jan Hrebejk
Screenplay by	Michal Viewegh
Written by	Michal Viewegh, Jan Hrebejk, and Jiri Machacek
Produced by	Rudolf Biermann and Tomas Hoffman
Starring	Simona Babcakova Nina Diviskova Karel Gott Ady Hajdu Pavel Landovsky Pavel Liska Roman Luknar Jiri Machacek Emilia Vasaryova Eva Kerekes Martina Krátká
Length	88 min.
Format	2:35:1

ABOUT SHAMELESS

When Oskar turned over in bed early one Saturday morning in June and briefly glanced at his still sleeping wife through eyes puffy from sleep, it suddenly struck him that her face was rather ugly, even though he considered it quite pretty. My God, that nose!

Michal Viewegh, Tales of Marriage and Sex

And Oskar, a popular television weather anchor begins to lose his head... The film, freely inspired by some stories from Michal Viewegh's bestseller, Tales of Marriage and Sex, is an unromantic comedy about sex and marriage, a story about parents and children (whether the child is already five or slowly going on forty), and last but not least, a story about losing and finding love.

ORIGIN OF THE FILM

For Jan Hrebejk not even a final version of the screenplay is somehow not the last. When I understood this, everything was smooth sailing!
Michal Viewegh, author

A film based on the motifs of the stories in Viewegh's successful book Tales of a Marriage and Sex had to be made. The original idea arose directly from Jan Hrebejk, director, who approached the author with a project for the film to be directed by Petr Nikolaev and Igor Chaun. In the end, this project was not realized.

Last year, Hrebejk received an offer from Michal Viewegh and producers Rudolf Biermann and Tomas Hoffman to film Viewegh's draft screenplay as an independent full-length movie. The two producers have a proven track record of successful film titles from Viewegh's books, A Novel for Women and The Holiday Makers. Filming of *Shameless* began in January 2008.

This film reunites Hrebejk with Viewegh, the two worked together when Hrebejk filmed a portrait of the highly successful Czech author many years ago for the documentary series GENUS. The two had planned to work together again. Hrebejk, along with actor Jiri Machacek, collaborated with the author on the final version of *Shameless*' script.

Jiri Machacek had previously co-authored a screenplay for the black comedy, *One Hand Cannot Clap*, with David Ondricek. "With *One Hand*, David and I said at the beginning that we would write a screenplay, but with *Shameless*, Hrebejk invited me to let's say, supply new possible inspiration for material that Michal Viewegh wrote according to his tales. And that's the essential difference," says Jiri Machacek. There is a broader view of the difference between writing a book and the genesis of a script.

"Tales of a Marriage and Sex, which I wrote more than ten years ago, are loosely inspired-I emphasize loosely- on my somewhat messy post-divorce period. Of course, I would like to believe that I've changed only a little since that time, the screenplay primarily comes, more or completely new motifs to the script," explained Michal Viewegh. Machacek adds, "Michal asks his female readers, in the introduction, for a certain kindness because he wrote the tales at a time that he does not otherwise identify as his personal crisis, but it was probably something like that. And I like these critical periods of the author's because interesting things arise from them!"

CHARACTERS AND THEIR ACTORS

I'm glad that my nose is finally going to start earning its keep!
Simona Babčáková, actress

Director Jan Hřebejk, from the start, was clear about the main actor. “When I was wondering who would play the main character, who in this case is **not** Michal Viewegh’s alter ego – he wrote the book about ten years ago and this character just evolved – from the beginning I thought of Jirka Machacek. Not only is he my favorite actor, he fits this role. He’s the right age, he has humor, naturalness and his acting has lightness about it, the same as Michal Viewegh’s writing. What Michal has in literature, Jirka can do in acting, and for that reason, I put the two of them together,” Jan Hřebejk describes the initial casting. For that, Jiri Machacek originally wanted, according to his own words, to turn down the role and in the end, he accepted it thanks to director Hřebejk.

And how, on the other hand, did the author react to the casting of Machacek? “Unequivocally pleased,” says Michal Viewegh. “At the same time, as chance would have it, I saw Jirka at the NaJezerce Theater in Jan Hřebejk’s production of the play *Closer* – and I understood definitively yesterday that he was the right one for us.” For Jiri Machacek, the film *Shameless* meant a third main role in Jan Hřebejk’s films.

What is the nature of their cooperation? “I really like Jan’s approach a lot, how he works with an actor and with actors together, period; how he connects them, how he gets involved in the process of emergence of the very script, how he calls the meetings before filming so that the screenplay writer can hear the opinions of the actors whom he has already filled, so that he can concretely adapt some things to them. I like the room that someone has with him for either direct improvisation or what’s more, so that he can change some things right before filming on a given shooting day,” says Machacek about Hřebejk.

The other actors react in the same way. Pavel Liska, who has already worked with Hřebejk, found the character of Matej, Oskar’s wife’s new boyfriend his most civil role. “Even when I cooperate with the same actors, I try not to have repeat itself. And so Pavel Liskia is not playing a stupid character in the film, now with his unique method, but the kind of guy that – I think – is certainly the dream of many newly divorced wives,” says Jan Hřebejk. “Coincidentally, our cooperation is fortunately always the same – that means that Jan gives the actors a lot of freedom, listens to them, lets the actors get inspired and in that instance, it’s not about some kind of blind fulfillment of tasks, but the cooperation of two people,” Pavel Liska says.

All during his wild ride through the single life, Oskar meets up with a series of women – from young, shallow beauties up to the ripe, enchanting singer Nora. The director depicts this character as the clear essence of Marie Rottrova,

Marta Kubisova or Hana Hegerova. The most popular Slovak female vocalist, Emilia Vasaryova, plays Nora. "While I was filling the female roles, I proceeded with the idea that I did not want to fill some of them with actresses that were too well known. I think it worked out fine that there are acting personalities that until now have not appeared in a Czech film – Simona Babcakova in the role of the wife, Martina Kratka, Eva Kerekesova. And so I wanted to work with Milka Vasaryova in a role that would be different from one that we had worked on before. So that, after *Head Over Heels*, *Beauty in Trouble*, and to a certain extent even after Jiri Vejdelek's film *Vaclav*, we created a character that has Milka's grace that I know in real life, who has her tremendous charisma. I've found interesting that Oskar's character doesn't only have younger and younger girlfriends, but he also has a relationship with a woman who's a generation older. I like this motif a lot; Emilia Vasaryova is the suitable type for it. Even if we had to persuade her a little that it wouldn't look unseemly..."

The actress Simona Babcakova appears in the role of Oskar's wife, Zuzana. One of the reasons for Oskar's marital dissatisfaction is shown to be his wife's somewhat large nose. "I'm glad that my big nose is finally going to start earning its keep," she says. Simona Babcakova already appeared in Jan Hrebejk's film *I Feel Fine*, but Zuzana offers her an incomparably bigger occasion. "I'm very grateful for it, it was fabulous work, Zuzana is a great woman and life was good with her," says Simona about the role with which many women who have gone through a similar situation can identify. "I'm the barmaid and cheeky girl type and I'm glad that Zuzana in *Shameless* is sweet, nice, tolerant and he comes out of it a little like a fool who threw away his happiness, never realized what's important. Oskar wanted to experience the single life; he experienced it and paid the price for it. The biggest snag that we run into in our relationships is simply a breakdown of communication, we can't even be frank with ourselves." In the film Zuzana, however, finds her happiness in the end. "That, for me, is the most beautiful moment of the film," Simona Babcakova says enthusiastically. "That she's rewarded. In life, it usually tends to be that a guy just sails with it and women suffer from this situation."

Simona's co-star was, besides the husband Machacek, Pavel Liska. "Simona is a beautiful, big-nosed, fantastic co-star and friend," says Pavel. "Even though we used to meet and greet each other in various ways, I never got to know her, as I was shy when we first met. Jiri Machacek more or less came into our partnership with his absolute certainty.... And Pavel Liska and I like the same kind of antihumor, and right away I would fall for his pranks. For me it was a pleasant encounter," Simona Babcakova adds.

THE WELL-KNOWN AND FAMOUS...

It was right to place for Karel Gott to play the role of Karel Gott. Likewise, no building other than Hradcany could play Hradcany.

Jiri Machacek, actor

In the film, a series of well-known and popular faces appear in cameo roles. “Oskar works in television and Nora is a popular singer. They both therefore move in a kind of media environment. It was that way so that, for the sake of increased authenticity, Oskar could meet in the television studio the real-life crème de la crème – such as Petra Volakova, Karla Mrackova, then meet in hallways people who really work in television – Ester Janeckova, Premek Podlaha, Halina Pawlowska, “ explains director Jan Hrebejk and recounts the casting of Czech show business’s Karel Gott. “When there was a situation in the screenplay where Nora and a colleague are taking photos for a new album, then we were saying what caliber the other should be. And Karel Gott is the most famous personality of local show business.” Jirka Machacek adds, “It was right to place for Karel Gott to play the role of Karel Gott. Even though he probably would be glad, as I sense it, to play someone other than Karel Gott, it’s hard: likewise, no building other than Hradcany could play Hradcany!” Karel Gott did not hesitate to appear briefly in the film in the somewhat ironic image of the skeptical commentator, “He helped us in the film in this way, just like Hana Hegerova, who also appears here in such a kindly self-ironic position,” adds the director.



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Shameless

Nestyda

(Czech Republic) A Falcon release of an In Film Praha, Infinity Prague production, co-produced by RWE, with the support of Sony Ericsson, Nova, HBO. (International sales: Menemsha Films, Venice, Calif.) Produced by Rudolf Biermann, Tomas Hoffman. Directed by Jan Hrebejk. Screenplay, Michal Viewegh, Hrebejk, Jiri Machacek.

With: Jiri Machacek, Emilia Vasaryova, Pavel Liska, Simona Babcakova, Nina Diviskova, Pavel Landovsky, Krystof Mucha, Eva Kerekesova.
(Czech, Slovak dialogue)

By [ALISSA SIMON](#)

A TV weatherman gets a bad case of the seven-year itch in "Shameless," a smoothly shot and performed marital infidelity comedy from prolific Czech helmer Jan Hrebejk ("Divided We Fall," "Beauty in Trouble"). Inspired by Michal Viewegh's popular book "Short Stories About Marriage and Sex," the home-turf hit sold nearly 500,000 ducats last fall. Slyly entertaining, the pic treats relationship issues in a way that should resonate with fest and cinematheque viewers abroad.

When fickle Oskar (Jiri Machacek) cheats on DJ wife Zuzana (Simona Babcakova) with their voluptuous Hungarian au pair (Eva Kerekesova), it triggers a complete turnaround for the couple. Oskar ultimately loses his job and winds up in a stereotype-challenging affair with aging chanteuse Nora (Emilia Vasaryova). Meanwhile, Oskar's parents (Nina Diviskova, Pavel Landovsky) offer their beloved daughter-in-law some hilarious help in getting it on with new boyfriend Matej (Pavel Liska).

With longtime scribe Petr Jarkovsky tied up writing "Citizenship Card" for the pair's former producer, Ondrej Trojan, to direct, Hrebejk teamed with novelist and screenwriter Michal Viewegh (who penned hits such as "The Wonderful Years That Sucked," "Holiday Makers" and "From Subway With Love") and producers Rudolf Biermann and Tomas Hoffman. While the cleverly detailed screenplay, to which Hrebejk and Machacek contributed, may not be dramatically profound, the contempo-relationships rollercoaster it depicts strikes a universal chord, and the result fits neatly within the director's oeuvre.

As usual, Hrebejk proves a master of ironic tone and a confident visual stylist. Here he gives the accoutrements of modern life -- cell phones, scooters and tabloid newspapers -- their own comic roles.

The talented ensemble cast, most Hrebejk regulars, hit all the right notes to create nuanced, recognizable characters, while the good-looking Prague-set production features topnotch contributions from Hrebejk's usual crew. Editor Vladimir Barak skillfully juggles the various plot threads to bring the pic in at a sleek 88 minutes, the shortest-ever running time for a Hrebejk film.

Meanwhile, Hrebejk and Jarchofsky already have resumed their collaboration and started shooting on "Kawasaki's Roses," skedded for release in spring 2010.

Camera (color, widescreen), Jan Malir; editor, Vladimir Barak, music, Archivni; art director, Milan Bycek; costume designer, Katarina Bielokova; sound (Dolby Digital), Robert Dufek. Reviewed at Karlovy Vary

Film Festival (Czech Films 2008-2009), July 3, 2009. Running time: 88 MIN.

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