

The Trouble with **JESSICA**

LIAR

MANIPULATOR

HYPOCRITE

FANTASIST



The Trouble with ■
JESSICA

A FILM BY MATT WINN

OFFICIAL WEBSITE

OFFICIAL STILLS

89 mins. / Comedy / United Kingdom / English / 2023

CONTACT

PUBLICITY & MARKETING REQUESTS

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A man and a woman are shown from the chest up, looking towards the camera with serious, slightly worried expressions. The man is on the left, wearing a dark blue button-down shirt. The woman is on the right, wearing a black top under a white lace cardigan. In the background, a dark grey wall features a white light switch with three buttons. The lighting is soft and focused on the subjects.

SYNOPSIS

Married couple Sarah (Shirley Henderson) and Tom (Alan Tudyk) are in terrible financial trouble. On the brink of losing everything, they've managed to find a buyer for their stylish London home. When their best friends Richard (Rufus Sewell) and Beth (Olivia Williams) come over for a final dinner, an uninvited old friend, Jessica (Indira Varma), tags along.

After a seemingly trivial argument at dinner, Jessica disappears. She has the temerity to hang herself in the garden, totally oblivious to the adverse consequences for Sarah and Tom's real estate sale. The only solution: Sarah and Tom must convince Richard and Beth to help take care of this little inconvenience. If they're clever enough about it, what could possibly go wrong? Knives are out and best-kept secrets are revealed in this laugh-out-loud dark comedy featuring a starry ensemble cast of phenomenal UK talent.

LOGLINE

A couple facing serious financial trouble finally finds a buyer for their stylish London home. At their final dinner party, they are thrown into an outrageous and darkly comic situation with the shocking behavior of an uninvited guest.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

When I set out to make this film, what I was really interested in was to take a snapshot of the British middle classes at this particular moment in time. I wanted to put them under a microscope and to pick them and their values apart, to record and observe their absurd behaviour and to create a satirical 'state of the nation' piece.

To do this, I needed a big story to provide a way in. This came in the form of a suicide. The eponymous Jessica kills herself in the company of a group of her oldest friends, an event so shocking that it will change their lives forever. And the main question that it forces my characters to grapple with is a moral one: what is the right thing to do?

Suicide, in my experience, is literally the worst thing that can happen to any of us. Not the person who kills themselves – it's irrelevant to them, they're dead – but to all those left behind. I know this because it happened to me. The act of suicide is like a giant stone dropped into a pond. The ripples reverberate in all directions causing mayhem for years and years to come. It's against nature, says Shakespeare. And he's right. With our film I wanted to examine the repercussions of carrying out this deeply personal and violent act, on someone else. Or in this case, in their garden.

Jessica's brutal act might be partly out of spite. Did she know Sarah and Tom's livelihoods were hanging by a thread? We can't say, but it's clear she has completely destroyed the delicate plans our heroes have put in place to preserve their future. And what follows from this rather stark set-up is a contemporary moral comedy.

Sarah is determined to do the practical thing. Beth on the other hand wants to do the right thing, and the first response to Jessica's death is an ethical debate between these two powerful female characters. What should they do: is it the thing that will cause the least moral jeopardy or the thing that will create the least practical chaos?

Richard's position is morally ambiguous – and, unbeknownst to the other characters and the audience, he is harbouring a secret about Jessica he will be forced to share when the night is through. Tom has bought into Sarah's plan, albeit reluctantly, due to the current dynamics of their marriage.

What follows is a brutally comic battle where our foursome slug it out over a series of fine ethical but violent skirmishes. And what I wanted to make very clear, is that what seems like an easy decision – when you dig down into the reality of what that will mean for their lives – is by no means obvious.

In the giant game of snakes and ladders that is life in the developed world, Sarah can't go back to living hand to mouth. She's too old to become a struggling millennial. She's paid her dues, but only when faced with this stark dilemma does it become possible for her, and rest of us, to realise just how lucky we are. And what's given us this advantage? Perhaps nothing more than being born at the right time or in the right place.

I don't think these characters are good or bad. They are our friends and neighbours. They are us. And this begs the question, 'who are we?' Are we glib, or are we serious? Are our values decent, or are we hypocrites blindly breezing through a mess of a world we ourselves are complicit in creating?

Above all, I want our audience to have some serious fun while they consider these questions – to take them on a dark journey of farcical highs and lows, with moments of pure comedy and others of real pathos. It's only through Jessica's death that Sarah realises what she has, and my hope is that this tragic act will ultimately force the audience to look a little more hopefully on their own lives. —Matt Winn

ABOUT THE MUSIC

I am composer with a jazz background and have been making records for over twenty years. But when it came to the score and soundtrack for this film, I initially had a different type of music in mind. Remembering how well the music in Peter Greenaway's *The Draftsman's Contract* created a satirical atmosphere of intrigue and jeopardy, I decided that baroque music would be the perfect foil to our flawed characters.

In the temp score we tried out Thomas Tallis, Purcell, Vivaldi, Bach, Scarlatti – and many more. But as clever and intricate as this music is, none of it had quite the right energy to work with the comedy of the film.

Then I was reminded of Inarritu's *Birdman*, with a score consisting purely of jazz drums, which worked brilliantly for that film. I needed a twist, so I initially created a score of drum and bass, the two instruments interacting in a playful way, working closely with the dialogue and creating a call-and-response to my characters' often feeble logical breakthroughs.

This wasn't quite enough. A bit of piano, in the style of Thelonious Monk, quirky and atonal, provided just the right aggressive upside down-ness. This led to thoughts of the amazing trumpeter, Lester Bowie, who was like an actor who'd trained at Jacques Le Coq – a drunken court jester who could undermine the most perfect of plans. I got in the trumpeter Byron Wallen and he created a series of burps, quips and snarls for the score.

But there was another element missing; something of the formal satirical edge of the baroque – and then it hit me. The music I was looking for couldn't be done by a traditional baroque composer. That music is too subtle, too sedate, too 'classical' in its formal taste. What I needed was something brash and a little bit tasteless, which is why I knew I'd found the perfect piece for the start of the film, by a modern sting composer, Gabriel Saban.

The reason this works is that it's ersatz baroque. The strings are plastic, the reverbs not from a church but harsh and digital. This music works perfectly to top and tail the comical and crazy jazz compositions in the main part of the film because the two complement each other.

Finally, I wanted to create an emotional counterpoint for 'Jessica's Theme'. I wrote some strings pieces that were influenced by French impressionist composers Ravel and Debussy, and these provide a poignant harmony to bridge the journey from comic to tragic. All in all, it's a mix that sits perfectly as the score and soundtrack to my characters' lives *in extremis* through the course of the film. —Matt Winn



CAST

Sarah	Shirley Henderson
Richard	Rufus Sewell
Beth	Olivia Williams
Jessica	Indira Varma
Tom	Alan Tudyk
Miranda	Anne Reid
Klaus	Sylvester Groth

CREW

Directed by	Matt Winn
Written by	James Handel Matt Winn
Produced by	Sarah Sulick
Co-producer	Jeremy Campbell
Executive Producers	John Cairns Tom Stewart Ulf Ek Georgia Di Mattos Ek Amy Gardner Matt Winn Ahsan Mallick Rosemary Ellis Mark Stothert
Director of Photography	Tristan Oliver BSC
Film Editing	David Freeman
Production Designer	Matthew Button
Music by	Matt Winn & Matt Cooper
Casting by	Colin Jones
Costume Designer	Barbara Elum-Baldres
Hair & Make-up Designer	Jojo Williams

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

SHIRLEY HENDERSON - “SARAH”

Shirley Henderson is a Scottish actress who was recently nominated for a BAFTA Scotland Award for her performance in *THE TROUBLE WITH JESSICA*. In 2023 she was presented with the ‘Outstanding Contribution to Film & Television’ Award from BAFTA Scotland. Previous accolades include two Scottish BAFTAs for Best Actress (“Southcliffe” and *Frozen*) and an Olivier Award for Best Actress in *Girl from the North Country*, the Conor McPherson musical featuring the songs of Bob Dylan. Recently she played ‘Claudia’ in “The House Across the Street” (2022) for Paramount+ and was Scottish BAFTA-nominated for her role as ‘Lucille Hardy’ in *Stan and Ollie* (2018) opposite Steve Coogan. She had an unforgettable role as ‘Frances Drummond’ in “Happy Valley” and is well-known for playing ‘Moaning Myrtle’ in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002) and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005) as well as ‘Jude’ in all four Bridget Jones films. In addition, she recently featured in “The Mandalorian” (2023) and *The Rise of Skywalker* (2019) in the Star Wars Universe.

RUFUS SEWELL - “RICHARD”

Rufus Sewell is a renowned British actor currently starring as 'Hal Wyler' in Debra Cahn's Golden Globe nominated series “The Diplomat” for Netflix, opposite Keri Russell. He recently appeared as 'Roger Salas' in “Kaleidoscope”, also for Netflix, and played 'John Smith' in “The Man in The High Castle” for Amazon from 2015-2019. Notable film roles include 'Charles' in M Night Shyamalan's *Old* (2021), 'Paul' in Florian Zeller's *The Father* (2020), 'Sid Luft' in Rupert Goold's *Judy* (2019), and 'Count Adhemar' in Brian Helgeland's *A Knight's Tale* (2001).

OLIVIA WILLIAMS - “BETH”

Olivia Williams is an acclaimed British actress who has appeared in a range of high-end British and American films and television. She recently starred as ‘Camilla Parker Bowles’ in Netflix’s “The Crown” opposite Dominic West and as ‘Lavinia Bidlow’ in “The Nevers” (2021-2022) for HBO Max. Other key roles include ‘Ruth Lang’ in Roman Polanski’s *The Ghost Writer* (2011), ‘Anne Crowe’ in M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and ‘Rosemary Cross’ in Wes Anderson’s debut film *Rushmore* (1998). She won a BIFA for Best Actress for her starring role in *The Heart of Me* (2002).

INDIRA VARMA - “JESSICA”

Indira Varma is a celebrated British stage and screen actress. Her recent credits include playing ‘Ingrid Farrow’ in Netflix’s limited series “Obsession” (2023), ‘Safiya Masry’ in “For Life” (2020-2021), ‘Anne Moore’ in “Patrick Melrose” (2018), and ‘Ellaria Sand’ in “Game of Thrones” (2014-2017). In the Star Wars spin-off series “Obi Wan Kenobi” (2022) she played ‘Tala Durith’. Her film debut and first major role was ‘Maya’ in *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love* (1996). Last year she did a world tour as ‘Lady Macbeth’ opposite Ralph Fiennes.

ALAN TUDYK - “TOM”

Alan Tudyk is a versatile American actor whose career spans a variety of animated and live action roles. Most recently he played ‘Mr. Darling’ in Disney’s *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023). Other key roles include ‘Harry Vanderspeigle’ in three series of “Resident Alien” (2021-2024), ‘Eric Morden & Mr. Nobody’ in “Doom Patrol” (2019), and a range of characters in “American Dad” (2011-2023). His numerous beloved voice-only performances include Disney films such as *Moana 2* (2024), *Wish* (2023), *Encanto* (2021), *Frozen II* (2019), *Moana* (2016), *Zootopia* (2016), *Frozen* (2013), as well as the eponymous *I, Robot* (2004), opposite Will Smith.

ANNE REID - “MIRANDA”

Anne Reid MBE is a venerated British stage, film and television actress. She recently starred as ‘Ann Moore-Martin’ in “The Sixth Commandment” directed by Saul Dibb for BBC One. She is perhaps best known for her role as ‘Celia Lawson’ in “Last Tango in Halifax” (2012-2020). She played ‘Valerie Barlow’ in the soap opera “Coronation Street” from 1960 to 2023 and ‘Jean’ in the sitcom “Dinnerladies” (1998-2000), for which she was nominated for a BAFTA for Best Actress. She was also BAFTA-nominated for her candid starring performance in Roger Michell’s *The Mother* opposite Daniel Craig.

SYLVESTER GROTH - “KLAUS”

Sylvester Groth is a German theater, television, and film actor. He has recently appeared in several Netflix series including “Dark” (2019), “ Fargo” (2017), and “Sense8” (2015). He famously played ‘Goebbels’ in Tarantino’s revisionist history film *Inglourious Basterds* (2009). Other roles include ‘Uncle Rudi’ in “The Man from U.N.C.L.E.” (2014-2017) and ‘Walter Schweppenstette’ in “Deutschland 83/86/89”.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

MATT WINN - DIRECTOR, CO-WRITER AND COMPOSER

An accomplished polymath, Matt Winn is a director, writer, producer, saxophonist and composer. He has written and directed three feature films and five award-winning shorts. His pioneering 90s jazz and electronica dance band D*Note released six albums, many five-star reviewed, now hailed as classics. His music was originally released on cult independent label Dorado Records and later on hip Virgin Records imprint VC Recordings. Matt started off directing commercials in the 90s, working on over a hundred campaigns for the leading production companies of the day (Stink, Tomboy, and Freedom Films).

Selected Filmography

- His drama debut “Coming Down” (1997), a 30-minute film about five friends whose relationships collapse and reconstruct in the aftermath of a party, became an instant cult hit.
- “Out of The Game” (2002), a short film shot in Ibiza and acquired by Channel 4, told the story of the souring of a male friendship.
- January 2nd (2006), Matt’s first ‘no-budget’ feature, was a bittersweet romantic comedy set during a New Year's Eve gathering. The film was selected for Oldenburg, Kiev, Jackson Hole, and Houston Film Festivals. It was sold by Screen Projex internationally and distributed by Guerilla Films in the UK.
- “The Brunchers” (2013), a short film about a couple in search of the trendiest brunch table in London, starred Tom Burke, Natalie Dormer and Rufus Sewell. It had its world premiere at Hamptons International Film Festival, and was in the Official Selection for Palm Springs, Cinequest, Nantucket, Rhode Island, and St Louis Film Festivals, and won the ‘Special Jury Award’ at Aspen Shorts. It was selected by Tribeca Enterprises to showcase the Tribeca Film Festival on US TV and airlines and acquired by Conde Nast and Magnet Films for international distribution.
- The Hoarder (2015), a feature film horror-thriller set in the US, starred Mischa Barton & Robert Knepper. The film premiered at Frightfest Glasgow and was sold by RavensBanner to US, Middle East and German distributors.
- “We Are Happy” (2016), a short film about a couple who contemplate divorce when their friends tell them it’s what they’re happily doing, starred Tara Fitzgerald and Anna Madeley. The film was nominated for Best Film at Austin, Bermuda and Sydney Film Festivals.
- "Bad Mother" (2017), a short form comedy series starring Laura Patch and Kevin Bishop about benign neglect and other assorted contemporary parenting crimes, screened on All4.

Music

Matt continues to lead music group D*Note, whose 'Fuchsia Dog' album was re-released in 2022 by Dutch electronic label, Altra Moda, and features remixes of their Euro-hit, “Shed My Skin” by Christoph and other international house DJs. Matt is also a film composer and scored the music for THE TROUBLE WITH JESSICA, with regular collaborator, jazz pianist Matt Cooper.

SARAH SULICK - PRODUCER

Through her company Bright Pictures (www.brightpictures.co.uk), Sarah has developed, produced, financed and secured distribution for feature films *THE TROUBLE WITH JESSICA* (2023), *The Time of Their Lives* (2017), *Honeytrap* (2015) and *The Waiting Room* (2008). Recently Sarah served as Co-producer on director Anu Menon's Hindi-language feature film *Neeyat* for Amazon Prime India and Abundantia Entertainment, which shot in the UK, and was released in cinemas worldwide in July 2023.

Previously Sarah held executive positions at BK Films (*Off the Rails; The Fanatic*), Scorpio Films (*Dear Frankie*), and Renaissance Films (*The Republic of Love*). A dual national (UK/US), she is a voting member of BAFTA, a selection committee member for BIFA, and an active member of European network ACE Producers. She is a graduate of UCLA (BA) and University of London (MA).

TRISTAN OLIVER BSC - DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPY

Tristan Oliver BSC has been a cinematographer for over 25 years and has worked across multiple disciplines. His long history of collaboration with director Nick Park includes Academy Award-winners *Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, "Wrong Trousers", and "A Close Shave". He has also worked closely with Wes Anderson as DoP on his stop-motion animation films including the Academy Award-nominated *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* and *Isle of Dogs* and was cinematographer for the model and animation units of Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch* (2022) and *Asteroid City*, released June 2023.

In addition, Tristan was live action cinematographer for the Academy Award-nominated *Loving Vincent* (2017), the first fully painted animated movie where live footage was overpainted in the style of Van Gogh.

Tristan is a full member of the BSC and of the cinematography chapters of AMPAS & BAFTA.



ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Music Box Films is the prestigious North American distributor of acclaimed international, independent, and documentary feature films. Recent releases include *Mountains*, the debut feature from Monica Sorelle, who took home the Independent Spirit Awards “Someone to Watch” Award, and *In the Summers*, Alessandra Lacorazza’s heartfelt and subtly powerful coming-of-age directorial debut that won the two top prizes in the U.S. Dramatic Competition at Sundance. Upcoming releases include the Cannes Directors’ Fortnight baseball comedy *Eephus* by Carson Lund, and *Ghost Trail*, Jonathan Millet’s tense and haunting revenge thriller that premiered at Cannes Film Festival.

Since its formation in 2007, Music Box Films has distributed award-winning films and art-house favorites that include Academy Award winner *Ida*, *Meru* (from Oscar-winning filmmakers Jimmy Chin and E. Chai Vaserhelyi), Christian Petzold’s *Transit*, the popular Swedish comedy *A Man Called Ove*, and the original *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates the Music Box Theatre, Chicago’s premier venue for independent and foreign films.

For more information, visit www.musicboxfilms.com.

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