



The Odd Couple



AS SEASON 3 OF *PLEASE LIKE ME* APPROACHES, *EMPIRETV* VISITS THE SET TO SPEAK TO ON (AND OFF) SCREEN BFFS JOSH THOMAS AND TOM WARD, DISCOVERING HOW THEIR SHOW IS INCREASINGLY BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION...

WORDS JAMES JENNINGS



MAY, 2015. *EMPIRETV* is deep somewhere in the unseasonably warm Melbourne 'burbs, idling inside the catering tent at an on location shoot for Season 3 of Josh Thomas's lauded dramedy series *Please Like Me*. As cast and crew come streaming in for their fill of grub, the atmosphere is collegial and abundant with bonhomie: everyone seems to be smiling (Thomas for good reason — his producer has just gifted him with two tickets to Mark Ronson for his birthday); even more so when Thomas's terminally chill 8-year-old Cavoodle, John, weaves his way through the crowd like the beloved team mascot he's become. If first impressions are anything to go by, this is one big, happy family — and at the centre of it are a couple of old friends turned colleagues.

"Is Josh my 'The One'? Oh God... if that is true then I don't think I have the emotional strength to admit it, so I'm not gonna answer that 'cos I don't think I'll get through the rest of today if I say it's true," comes co-star/co-writer Tom Ward's deadpan response when asked if Josh Thomas is his "The One", a joke proposition made in the final episode of S2. Ward, who's known Thomas since they met on the first day of high school 15 years ago ("I hated him, but then he made me laugh and then I had to face the fact that I found him slightly more funny than I did annoying, and that meant that he had to be my best friend"), likens their relationship to an old married couple. "There's just no surprises. That's our problem when we hang out now — there's nothing that either of us can say now where the other will go 'I didn't see that coming!'. If we were married, we should definitely be getting divorced, but we're not going to."

"Yeah, I think that's a pretty good summary of me," says Thomas — *Please Like Me's* star, co-writer, producer and soon to be episode director — in reference to Ward's funny-to-annoying ratio assessment. "He's just the same [*as back then*] — I don't think he's ever changed. I dunno, he's just sort of... there," Thomas laughs. "I laugh at his



jokes! He would never laugh at my jokes now, he's just a bit worn down. We've never had a fight, which is pretty impressive considering we now work together." In terms of the apparent cast and crew camaraderie, Thomas says it's not a case that we've just caught them on a good day: "The crew are always telling me how nice it is to work on and how friendly everyone is, so that's what you want, that's good. It only takes one douchebag, one c#&t, and then your whole day's ruined."

"We are just as friendly with each other off set [*as we are on the show*]," says 25-year-old Keegan Joyce, who plays Josh's on/off love interest from S2, the sweet but mentally fragile Arnold. Joyce adds that the line between real life and what we see on the show are becoming

increasingly blurred: "It was Josh's birthday recently, so Tom [*Ward*], Emily [*Barclay, who plays Tom's new girlfriend Ella*] and I were making a card for him. We were cutting things out with scissors, and we needed another pair, so we made Tom call reception and say, 'Hi, we're doing some craft and need an extra pair of skizz-ors' [*a S2 episode sees Josh make Tom order a pizza and mispronounce "jalapeños" by asking for extra "jall-a-penos"*]. We do that a lot — we live the show a bit." Barclay overhears our conversation and enthusiastically shows *EmpireTV* a video of the prank on her phone, while we wonder if Joyce is ever concerned aspects from his private life will be written into the show. "Sometimes you tell a story, then you worry that it's going to wind up in the

BRIEFING

PLEASE LIKE ME S3

AIRS: Premieres on ABC Thursday, October 15 at 9.30pm

CREATED BY: Josh Thomas

STARRING: Josh Thomas, Thomas Ward, Caitlin Stasey, Keegan Joyce, Emma Barclay, Debra Lawrance, David Roberts, Renee Lim, Hannah Gadsby.

DO YOU LIKE THEM? Why yes, yes you do. Last year the show picked up several prestigious industry awards in Oz and was nominated for an International Emmy Award for Best Comedy Series.

DOES JOHN THE CAVOODLE RETURN? Oh yes. In a Godzilla costume, no less.



Clockwise from top left: Josh Thomas smiles for the camera; Josh (Thomas), Arnold (Keegan Joyce) and Claire (Caitlin Stasey) get cosy; 'Johnzilla' gets ready to wreak havoc; Josh and Tom (Tom Ward) check out some chicks.

show," he says. "I was a bit scared at first, but I got over it. Now I'm hoping something will get in the show. It started as a fear, now it's a want!"

"I've started being careful about how much I claim the show is based on real life because of some of the situations in it," Ward laughs. "I used to be 'Yeah it's autobiographical, we just write what happens to us in real life', but then there's a scene where I call up a sex worker because I'm feeling sad, but then when she turns up I hide in the bathroom until she goes away. That hasn't actually happened to me in real life, so I'm gonna stop saying the whole show is based on real life, because then I can't show my girlfriend's parents the show then go out to dinner with them and try and convince them I'm a good guy." He adds, however, that sometimes real incidents wind up in the show "inappropriately quickly": "I was breaking up with a girl and having the worst argument I've ever had. We were screaming, there was tears, and as she was saying something to me I

was making a mental note to put into a show to include how she'd said that I had fat cheeks [laughs]. While crying I was like, 'That's going to be a great scene'."

Thomas is fine with real life feeding into the show "as long as we're not making fun of someone who hasn't given us permission to", but is experiencing the odd situation of the show's fictions informing his personal life. "The seasons always wind up feeding back into our lives — like when we were writing the show Tom and I had never really lived together, but then after the show went to air Tom wound up moving in with me," Thomas explains. "And in the show my Dad has a Thai girlfriend, something that at the time wasn't based in reality, and then that wound up coming true afterwards. There are quite a few things now where I can't remember if we made them up or if it was from my life... it's getting a bit weird. I don't know which version of a story is the real thing anymore — if it happened or if we embellished it for the show."

LIKE MOST THINGS YOU see on television or in a movie, the share house that on-and-off screen pals Thomas and Ward call home on *Please Like Me* looks a lot smaller in real life. What the camera doesn't fully pick up, though, are all the minute details within its walls: a corner where Ward's drawings of animals with human faces are displayed and an enviable collection of second-hand hipster bric-a-brac ("We're going to have to come up with a storyline about how Josh and Tom are always hanging out in op shops," Thomas quips.) Inside the living room, *EmpireTV* witnesses an incredible sight: a cardboard miniature city, resplendent with lights, bridges and astonishing attention to detail (cast and crew have been regularly adding to it; the latest buildings created by series' director Matthew Saville and his kids). As Keegan Joyce darts about looking for a mint due to an imminent scene where he and Thomas kiss, we ask Thomas if this scene — which includes John the Cavoodle dressed in a Godzilla costume — is Season 3's most elaborate scene. "It's definitely the stupidest," he laughs. "That's just an indulgence, isn't it? I mean, if I can't have a Cavoodle dressed as Godzilla walking around a cardboard city, then who can? There's a place for that on my show. Is there no place for it >

"I'm now more careful about claiming the show is based on real life because of some situations in it." TOM WARD

anywhere else in the world, and if so, is that really the kind of world we want to live in? I don't think so."

As the cast assemble — Thomas, Ward, Barclay, Joyce and Caitlin Stasey's Claire (currently outfitted in a dinosaur onesie that has had cameo appearances in both S1 and S2), fear grows that the magnificent cardboard metropolis is not long for this world. Soon enough director Saville calls "Action!", and 'Johnzilla' is let loose: he trots through the cityscape, wonderfully oblivious to the absurdity of it all. The second the scene ends the cast and crew erupt into applause and laughter. "If that's not going to win us a Logie, nothing will," jokes Thomas. "Thank God there's not a journalist here who can see us wasting tax payers' money..."

Everybody present admits they're thrilled with how Season 3 has panned out. "I love it, I think it's our best season yet," enthuses Ward. "I'm so excited for people to see it." Considering Ward's character was in a low place at the end of S2 — spending inordinate amounts of



“As you get older you get better at making choices, and that’s a bit *dull*, isn’t it?”

JOSH THOMAS

time getting stoned in a hot tub while listening to sad music — we wonder if we'll see Tom break out of his fug in S3. "I guess I'm making the same types of mistakes and pretending it's not my fault," says Ward. "But yeah, my character was in a low place, if by 'low place' you mean Tom telling Josh everything was fine and he didn't need a girlfriend and then there's a final shot of him masturbating in front of a computer. That is a pretty low place. You'd think that by S3 he really would've sorted his stuff out and we get to see Tom rise to the top, but that's not the case [*laughs*]."

Keegan Joyce sheds some light on where his character is at when S3 kicks off: "After Arnold had his panic attack on the beach at the end of S2 — and later we see Arnold tell Josh he's not ready to be boyfriends — this season picks up not long after with Arnold calling Josh and them eventually attempting to have a relationship. It gets intense, but Arnold also gets to have more fun — he's not always in tracksuit pants in a hospital this time! I get to

wear nicer outfits, which I'm excited about. It's going to be a great season."

Thomas reiterates that along with the laughs there will be some hairy moments for certain characters. "There's some pretty intense stuff... we try and get into Josh and Dad's relationship a bit more," he reveals. "The first episode is like a proper romantic comedy with Josh and Arnold sorting their shit out — or not sorting their shit out, who knows? I think we do quite a lot of things that we've not done before. Plus we've got Emily Barclay playing Ella, who is just delightful. I think [*this season*] is better, but maybe I'm wrong. I don't really have any idea now that I've had to watch it 17,000 times," he laughs. "I'm just numb to it. That's inspiring, isn't it?"

As for further seasons of the looping real-life-turned-show-turned-real-life series, Ward says it could happen — but, he notes, it could come at a cost. "As long as neither of us become properly happy, the show could go on forever," he deadpans. "Sometimes I'll see Josh and say, 'I had the worst morning!', then I tell

him what happened and he gets very happy because I've just given him a storyline." *EmpireTV* posits that his pain, ultimately, equals entertainment for the masses. "Yeah. I'm like Jesus," he responds drily. "No, I can't say that because Josh claims that he's like Jesus — we can't both claim to be like Jesus. If Josh is Jesus," he laughs, "I'm way more likely to be Judas."

"Tom does these things and tells me about it and I'm just so pleased at the awful choices he's constantly making," jokes Thomas. "I'm quite jealous of Tom though, he has a lot more going on than me. He's had more partners, he's had all these fights. My life is quite stable and boring — my boyfriend's delightful. Tom keeps getting in these disgusting situations, and I've been fine for the past three years. I keep begging my boyfriend to break up with me, but he won't do it." Thomas ponders if the responsibility to make stupid mistakes might soon fall to him rather than his foil/BFF. "He's in a happy relationship right now, I'm really worried about him... now I'll have to be the one to go and make horrible choices! It just gets harder as you get older. I mean, I *used* to! We've just used a lot of them in the show. As you get older you get better at making choices, and that's a bit *dull*, isn't it?"

PLEASE LIKE ME S3 PREMIERES ON ABC THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15 AT 9.30PM.

Tom, Josh, Arnold and Ella (Emily Barclay) reenacting that scene from *Zoolander*. Possibly.