

'Stagestruck': new twist on old story

Review by Eric Peterson

A couple of spunky young kids make it big in *Starstruck*, Gillian Armstrong's affectionate parody of popular punk and the Hollywood boy-and-girl-put-on-a-show genre with which Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney had so much fun. *Starstruck*, an Australian film, shows tonight at 7 and 9 p.m. in the Sheldon Film Theatre as part of UPC's Foreign Film Series.

The lively (though not overly exciting) soundtrack, colorful New Wave collages, handwritten song lyrics and cut-out profiles of Elvis (hundreds of 'em) tell us right at the start not to take things too seriously; we overhear a schoolboy/schoolgirl conversation, see their shifting feet — and the 14-year-old boy, Angus (Ross O'Donovan) turns out to have blue hair, while Jacqueline (Jo Kennedy) looks like Pebbles from the Flintstones — orange hair and a witty large bone stuck in it.

All that happens has a deliberate unreality. Dancing is never dancing, but an exaggerated choreographed group activity; we can hear a dozen other movies in every turn of the dialogue; and we know Angus and Jacqueline will each find their sweethearts in the end. They can't be each others' sweethearts, because they are cousins and (we amused and omniscient film viewers learn) possibly siblings.

The film has prepared us fairly quickly not to expect any serious look at the punk movement; we quickly learn that though the boy has blue hair (which his mother makes him wash back to black) and the girl is determined to shock, they are basically nice, ordinary kids on the make. The fun of *Starstruck* is in seeing how the old pattern works out with a punk setting — though certainly not a New Wave film sensibility — and in recognizing the parodic elements in it.

When they go by a store window, Jacqueline is filled with a dream — of having all that stuff — and Angus tells her that if you want something, you're sure to get it eventually. The familiar reach for a star idealism is replaced by naive materialism in this version of the old Hollywood success story. They steal a great red kangaroo suit and go to a club where Jacqueline wants to be discovered. The club crowd use the same motions, have the same reactions and in indication of their conformity form a human chain which becomes one big caterpillar-like being.

She sings a song called "Temper, Temper." Of course everybody gets into it and of course she is a big success. Although her performance is a little mediocre, in this picture guts count for everything, and we can both enter into, and laugh at, the idea that if you're wholesome and have high hopes, no one could deny you your dreams.

Our picture of Jacqueline as a clean-cut kid may alter a little when we see her and the lead guitarist of the band she played with at the Lizard Lounge in bed together — we see them through gauze curtains

— but our perceptions of their relation are similarly distanced so that we realize this is young and first love, and they are probably going to get married or at least live together forever and ever.

Everything Jacqueline and Angus do is as posture, an attempt to be daring — but their sense of fun is so big that none of the other characters can repress a smile. Though they conquered the Lizard Lounge, all of Sydney and Australia remain unmoved.

That's why Angus has to come up with something so big that everybody has to notice. This turns out to be Jacqueline's tightrope walk between two tall buildings while she wears a suit with large and exposed fake breasts. Everything happens that they could desire — the police and firefighters and reporters arrive a crowd gathers, she has a dramatic near fall and all the television coverage has made them celebrities and hot property. No one is offended by any of this, not even the kids' family — who are pleased at all the deserved attention Jacqueline is getting.

This gives Jacqueline and Angus a shot at the Big Chance, which is a rock concert at the Sydney Opera House hosted by local teenybopper personality Terry Lambert. It features a \$25,000 grand prize for the best new band. Lambert agrees to put her in the program, but shuts out her friends and insists on using the studio band.

This is the first big moral choice in the film. Will Jacqueline do the right thing? Will she stick by her pals despite a temporary obstacle? Not this rising star! "You need all the people in your life (meaning Terry)," she says. "It's called healthy." The rejected band and brother-cousin leave singing a cute number about her greed — "I want to live in a house with my own little box!" — and smirk when they see Jacqueline give an insipid and awkward performance, with Solid Gold sex dancers, on Terry Lambert's *Wow!* program.

Jacqueline is still intrigued with Terry and goes to his apartment full of wholesome desire only to discover Terry and a good friend in the pool, gay, with a whole lot of male swimmers and a few plastic sharks. What follows is a pretty nice camp imitation of the old Esther Williams water ballet routines, which is no more interesting now than it was when Esther Williams did it. Her hopes for Terry dashed, Jacqueline returns to her intended and to her friend Angus. Her moral crisis resolved for her, Jacqueline is free to bring things to a smashing conclusion — the clever young things sneak into the opera house through a stratagem, displace one of the bands on the program, and — you know the rest.

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