

NEW SLANT ON SANTA STORY

A festive Shane Jacobson is transported back in time in his latest project, writes
CARIS BIZZACA



WHEN it came to movies about Santa Claus, Shane Jacobson thought he had seen it all.

So he was surprised to find a “fresh look” on the story in *Santa’s Apprentice*, in which he voices Mr Claus himself.

“We would probably think we know all there is to know about the Christmas story,” he says.

“It’s been retold in so many ways so we kind of go, ‘I get it, he lives at the North Pole, he’s got elves and he comes out at Christmas and delivers presents to the whole world.’”

However, in the animated film *Santa’s Apprentice*, Mr Claus is nearing retirement and needs to find a replacement who must be three things — an orphan, who’s pure of heart and named Nicholas.

The only child in the entire world who fits the bill is a seven-year-old boy in Sydney.

“The idea that Santa needs to find a new apprentice to replace him, I’ve just not ever contemplated that,” Jacobson said.

“I love the fact that this is a whole new angle that has just not been considered.”

Jacobson says Australian animators did hand-drawn illustrations for the film, which unlike many recent children’s movies, is in 2D.

He says watching *Santa’s Apprentice* reminded him of the Christmas cartoons he used to see growing up.

“It makes me feel childlike watching it, because I get transported back to a time when I was younger,” he says.

“For the kids today who are probably used to seeing the ones that are more the 3D animation stuff, the thing that I think makes any good project and any good film are three things — a good story, a good story and a good story and this one has it.”

Judging by its success overseas, children obviously think so too.

An Australian-French production, *Santa’s Apprentice* was released in France last year, where it sold more than

100,000 tickets in the first week.

The film made more than 3.2 million euros at the box office and has been sold to other countries including Austria, Canada, Greece, India, Russia and the US. Aside from Jacobson, *Santa’s Apprentice* also features the voices of Delta Goodrem, Magda Szubanski and Hugh Sheridan.

Jacobson says the great part about voicing an animated character is being able to let loose.

He says to try to find the right voice for Santa Claus, the key was to stop overthinking it.

“When someone tries very hard with anything I think it ends up going worse,” he says.

“It’s actually not about trying to perfect anything — it’s about trying to let everything go...”

“He needs to be completely over the top and the great part about animation is you can do it.”

***Santa’s Apprentice* is out now.**

SANTA WILL SLEIGH 'EM

Shane Jacobson was drawn to the idea of a boy from Australia being Santa's apprentice, writes **Fiona Purdon**

ACTOR Shane Jacobson only had to see the vibrant drawings of his character Santa Claus in the animated film *Santa's Apprentice* to know he "could go to town with a booming voice".

"He was such a great-looking Santa with strong colours and a lovely big beard and I knew this would give me more room to move because I saw how big he was," Jacobson says. "It was a bit like fireworks – the brighter and louder, the better."

Jacobson, who won fame as a portalo worker in the 2006 hit movie *Kenny*, drew on his imagination to bring Santa Claus to life during solo studio recordings.

"Some people could find it a weird process because you are in the booth and there's no action around you," Jacobson says.

"I've got a very visual mind – the way I think is almost cartoon-like. I could really imagine myself flying in the sleigh in order to really yell."

Jacobson was joined in the studio by 13-year-old Jack Versace, who voices seven-year-old Nicolas, who is chosen as Santa's apprentice, and the two could "bounce off each other".

The film, which features the voices of Magda Szubanski, Delta Goodrem and Hugh Sheridan, starts with

concerns that the current Santa Claus is too old and forgetful and it is time to choose a young boy to train. But Santa Claus is reluctant to give up his job.

Jacobson was instantly captivated by the story when he read the script – he hopes to take his three young children, including five-week-old son Will Danger, to the film.

"It has the three things all great movies have – a great story, a great story, a great story," he says. "It was such a fresh look at Christmas stories."

"Why couldn't a boy from Australia be selected to be Santa's apprentice? He had the three things – his name is Nicolas, he is pure of heart and he is an orphan."

Jacobson might have voiced the world's most famous ample-bellied man but he has shrunk 20kg this year as a high-profile participant in the Jenny Craig program.

It was as the large-framed larrikin Kenny Smyth in the mockumentary *Kenny*, directed by his brother Clayton, that Jacobson found fame. His acting was so convincing in the AFI award-winning role that many people thought he really was a plumber.

Jacobson has since proved his versatility and credentials after winning a Helpmann Award for the

musical *Guys and Dolls*.

He has just returned from New York after successfully auditioning for a role in the big-budget Hollywood thriller *The Bourne Legacy*. And he will be seen in next year's Channel 9 telemovie *Beaconsfield* as trapped miner Brant Webb, and play a police officer in ABC-TV's *Jack Irish*, alongside Guy Pearce. He will also be part of the *Top Gear* live show in Brisbane in March with Jeremy Clarkson and James May.

"So many actors work every bit as hard but aren't lucky to have a breakthrough role and film like I had with *Kenny*," he says. "I've worked really hard from a young age. I've sung in bands, danced on stage, been in amateur theatre for 13 years, been a warm-up guy for six years, been in barbershop groups, in stand-up comedy, theatre and corporate work."

"I've spent my whole life treading the boards. (Only) my success was new."

"It is like a kid going home and hitting cricket balls every day. Then one day they get to play for Australia and they are out in the middle of the MCG and a crowd has turned out to watch. But they are still working hard and hitting cricket balls every day."



COOL: *Santa's Apprentice* features the voices of Australian actors Shane Jacobson, Magda Szubanski, Delta Goodrem and Georgie Parker.