



# Quirky, original, entertaining



## FILM

Irina Palm (MA15+) ★★★½  
Marianne Faithfull, Miki Manojlovic  
Directed by Sam Garbarski  
Review: Pip Christmass

Points must certainly go to Irina Palm for originality. For obvious reasons, this quirky little number took a long while to get funded; it's not often you see a film about a middle-aged frump working in a sex shop to pay for her beloved grandson's medical expenses.

And to cast Marianne Faithfull as that middle-aged frump is bordering on the inspired. Faithfull has been a lot of things over the years — folk singer, 1960s rock-chick muse, heroin addict, Brecht and Weill interpreter — but frump, it is safe to say, she has never been.

So that's the first bit of disbelief you'll have to suspend while watching *Irina Palm*. The second bit is the sex shop owner, Miki (played by Serbian actor Miki Manojlovic), whose surface sleaze belies a heart of gold.

And thirdly, while *Sexy World* — the garish strip club and X-rated video library where Faithfull's dumpy widow Maggie accidentally falls into her unexpected work —

may be seedy, nothing really bad ever happens there. No drugs, no violence; just men standing in a queue, eagerly waiting to be anonymously masturbated through a hole in the wall by Maggie's stubby but remarkably soft hands.

If at this point you think, by some accident, I have started to describe a B-grade porn film, don't worry. We never see exactly what Maggie is doing through that hole in the wall — the finer details are left to our imagination.

And rather than seeming salacious or disturbing, what Maggie does — and does surprisingly well, as it turns out — is presented in such an hilariously perfunctory way that it seems about as normal as eating a biscuit with a cup of tea.

Maggie's grandson Olly (Corey Burke) is dying from an unspecified illness. His only chance for survival is an operation in Melbourne, which doctors will perform gratis, but his parents, Tom (Kevin Bishop) and Sarah (Siobhan Hewlett), cannot afford the airfares or accommodation. Unable to secure a bank loan and having already sold her house to help her son pay Olly's medical expenses, Maggie is distractedly wandering the streets of London's Soho when she sees an advertisement for a "hostess" in a shop window.

*Sexy World's* "hostess" requirements, of course, have nothing to do with serving cups of tea and doing the dishes, much to the naive and unworldly Maggie's

shock. She doesn't quite fit the lap-dancing bill but after a few quick lessons on technique from Luisa (Dorka Gryllus), Maggie is relieving men with the expertise of — excuse the pun — an old pro, and the mysterious Irina Palm is born.

Sam Garbarski's odd gem of a film is obviously not going to appeal to everyone. But it is by turns funny, moving and delightfully different. As Maggie, Faithfull has to suppress her diva qualities, transforming into a kind of blank slate. She's a woman with virtually no inner life who rediscovers a stronger sense of herself through the most unexpected chain of events.

Ultimately, *Irina Palm* is about the sometimes extreme lengths we will go to for our families, and why we occasionally do things we might never have imagined ourselves capable of doing. As Maggie finds out, not everyone appreciates the actions she has taken, despite them being potentially life-saving.

With its subtle undercurrent of humour, a tight script and unusual subject, *Irina Palm* is definitely worth a look, if only to see Maggie tell her group of snooty friends how badly she is suffering from a nasty case of "penis elbow".

**Irina Palm is at the Somerville Auditorium each night at 8.30pm until Sunday. It then moves to the Joondalup Pines for one week.**



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Unusual role: Marianne Faithfull as Irina Palm