

In the Spotlight

By [Anna Malpas](#)

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In Ren-TV's new show, "Who's the Star?", celebrities are caught off guard as they are interviewed by apparently the world's least competent journalist. He works for an obscure Russian-language channel in Australia and constantly refers to scribbled notes. And he seems more interested in talking about his cheating wife Scarlett and his brother-in-law, diamond merchant Schwartz, who may have a job for the stars.

Brilliantly, it is in fact a spoof interview show, a bit like Britain's "Da Ali G Show," where Sacha Baron Cohen posed as a youth television presenter so he could ask very clever stupid questions.

The interviewer called Igor Poryvayev is played alternately by two actors. He says he left the Soviet Union in 1989 and is Melbourne's vice kickboxing champion. He talks a lot about his sister, Yoko, who is married to a Belgian diamond merchant called Schwartz, a close friend of Nicole Kidman.

Mousy and vulnerable-looking, he carries a bulging briefcase and asks unexpected questions of soap and pop stars, such as "What do you think of Nietzsche?" The show does not really

play for laughs or try to show up the celebrities. It is more about their reactions — impatient, motherly or critical — as they are confident that the interview will end up on the cutting room floor.

Instead it is aired on Ren-TV on Friday nights.

Bizarrely, the men who play Poryvayev have very different day jobs. Grigory Kulagin hosts “Marriage Fiction” (Brachnoye Chtivo) on DTV, where spouses try to catch their other halves out in infidelity. The episode I saw was obviously played by actors and an excuse to show semi-naked women. Vyacheslav Vereshchaka is an editor at Humor FM, a radio station known for hoary jokes.

In any case, neither has a very recognizable face and none of the celebrities smelt a rat.

Mouthy actor Nikita Dzhigurda, known for his love of obscenities and talking about sex, takes it more or less in his stride as Poryvayev rips out pages of his notebook and rubs out penciled questions, complaining they are no good, before asking: “Have you ever seen a human scalp?”

“Maybe you need to ask different questions, not ones written down but the ones from the soul,” Dzhigurda suggests kindly.

Actor Dmitry Nagiyev, who is reputed to be a sex symbol, sneers as the interviewer fumbles. “I’m waiting here while you are poking around,” he says. “You lived abroad a long time. Why did you come back. Are you a loser?”

Hearing of the wealthy Schwartz, he offers to sing for him. “I can only mime but I move beautifully. If you invite me I can sing for you and old man Schwartz, for old man Schwartz’s money, 40 minutes nonstop.”

With blonde sex kitten and sometime Liberal Democratic Party deputy, Masha Malinovskaya, Poryvayev really opens up. “You look a lot like my sister. I feel very comfortable with you, like with my sister,” he says, even offering her a job modeling diamonds for Schwartz.

He asks her about voicing a hippopotamus in the animated film “Madagascar” before saying he preferred the penguins because penguins are monogamous. “At least the male ones are, I don’t know about the female ones,” he says bitterly, launching into the story of his wife Scarlett, who left him for a surfer after going to a psychoanalyst.

“I started feeling the psychoanalyst was worth more to her than I was. Then it turned out that the surfer was worth more to her,” he says.

Malinovskaya tells him to get over it. “She was probably with the surfer first anyway,” she tells him. “You’re a man, not a penguin.”

“But it turns out, I am a penguin,” he says inconsolably.

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