

# Einstein musical's winning formula

DANNY GOCS

AT 22, Jess Newman loves a challenge. The Bialik College graduate and final-year student at the Victorian College of the Arts has written the music, lyrics and script for a new musical, *Einstein: Master of the Universe* which has its Australian premiere at Theatreworks in St Kilda next week.

"It's really exciting to have your work on stage being performed by professional actors and a great production team," Newman tells *The AJN*.

"I first got the idea in year 11 at Bialik College when I came across his famous equation  $E=MC^2$  and his theory of relativity, and I started reading more about his life and ideas – I thought it just had to be a musical.

"It started with a few songs and became more structured with a story – a musical is a beast that has to be tamed so that each song and each scene links and builds up into a story."

*Einstein: Master of the Universe* is set around the famous physicist's determination and obsession with his work and also examines the fame, fortune and the loves of his life.

The cast of 12 young performers is led by Scott Mackenzie as Einstein, and is backed by an eight-member band.

Newman says much of the musical is based on fact, with all the characters drawn from real people in Einstein's life.

"There is always a bit of mythology when you are telling a story on stage, but it is principally based on fact. It's a story of the man behind the icon."

Newman says that in the musical there is a strong focus on Einstein's first wife, a Serbian Jew named Mileva Maric, who was a brilliant physicist.

Newman is not acting in this production, but he has done quite a lot of acting in recent years includ-



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ing roles in *The Normal Heart*, *The Merchant of Venice* (for which he received the Union House scholarship for his role as Shylock) and *The Tempest*.

He has also composed the score for several short films, including *Harold & Emily* (2013), *Echoes* (2012) and the documentary *Thalidomide* (2012)

"I consider myself primarily an actor – writing for musicals is an extension of acting," he says.

Newman graduated from Bialik in 2011. During his VCE year he wrote the music and co-wrote the lyrics for the school's anthem, which is performed at all college events.

"It was an honour to be able to write the anthem," he says.

Newman hopes that *Einstein: Master of the Universe* will have a successful season at Theatreworks and go on to tour.

"Director Daniel Czech and I have big ambitions for this musical," he says. "We are not paring anything back for this production.

"The ultimate goal is to have it being performed on a main stage, whether in Australia or New York or London."

*Einstein: Master of the Universe* is at Theatreworks, 14 Acland St, St Kilda from June 30 to July 10. Bookings: [www.theatreworks.org.au](http://www.theatreworks.org.au).