



REEL TALK
Ben O'Shea

Chasing the Present

Award-winning doco offers an insight into anxiety, mental health and the benefits of self-awareness

★★★

STARRING James Sebastiano, Russell Brand, Alex Grey, Zelda Hall, Prem Baba

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Chasing the Present.

Anxiety and its impact on mental health are a malaise that seems specifically tied to our modern existence. The stresses of work and life, the negative pull exerted by social media on our collective psyche, and increased awareness around the issue have contributed to a situation where anxiety has never been more common in society.

Many seek help through medication but Mark Waters' thoughtful documentary, *Chasing the Present*, uses a solitary case study to suggest meditation may be a viable option, too.

This case study is actually the director's mate,

James Sebastiano, a successful wellness entrepreneur who has battled anxiety attacks for much of his adult life.

The doco follows Sebastiano on a globe-trotting journey to uncover the root cause of his anxiety — a fascinating sit-down with his old-school dad is particularly instructive — and what may be done to find a modicum of peace from this paralysing affliction.

Turns out the key, for Sebastiano at least, is a deeper sense of self-awareness, and an appreciation of the way humans have evolved to place themselves at the centre of the universe.

Drawing on teachings from gurus in India, shamans in the Peruvian Amazon and Western authors and experts, Sebastiano (and thus the audience) is given an insight into how ego creates conflict in our minds and what can be done about it.

Waters deliberately sets out to make the viewing experience meditative, too, combining a gentle score with gorgeous visuals that entice more than they excite.

The talking heads are equally relaxing — uber-calm gurus tend to be — but the doco benefits from frenetic wisdom assaults delivered by a typically high-energy Russell Brand.

Brand is a self-styled expert on this topic and, regardless of whether you believe that, his input here is both valid and rooted in



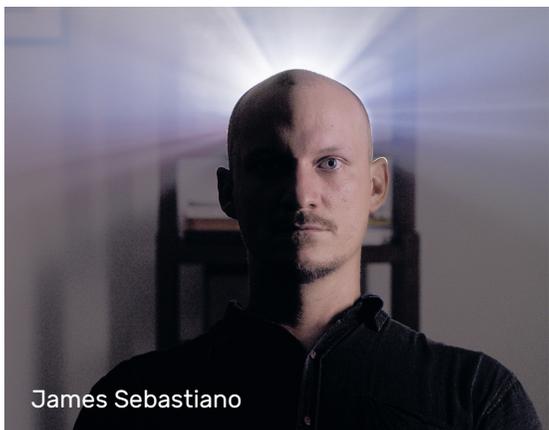
Russell Brand

modernity, which is crucial to the doco's appeal to sceptics.

Far from preaching to the choir, Waters appears conscious of pitching his film to unbelievers, so if you're worried this doco is only suitable for hemp-wearing hippies, don't be.

What you'll soon realise is *Chasing the Present* taps into many themes that are instantly familiar to all of us, not just to those battling anxiety or with a penchant for burning incense and sitting cross-legged on yoga mats.

Think of it like Morgan Spurlock's hit doco *Super Size Me*, only the thing being super-sized here is the viewer's self-awareness.



James Sebastiano

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