

## Adam Sandler, Seth Rogen Star in Ambitious But Flawed 'Funny People'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 31, 2009 - 10:55am

- [Adam Sandler](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Eric Bana](#) [4]
- [Funny People](#) [5]
- [Jason Schwartzman](#) [6]
- [Jonah Hill](#) [7]
- [Judd Apatow](#) [8]
- [Leslie Mann](#) [9]
- [Movie Review](#) [10]
- [Seth Rogen](#) [11]



Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Judd Apatow's "Funny People," starring Adam Sandler, Seth Rogen, and Leslie Mann, is like watching a friend try out a new stand-up routine. As with a lot of attempts at trying something untested, it doesn't quite work out, but you have to admire the effort, if not the execution.

The three films that Apatow has written and directed could be viewed as a natural trilogy about common chronological development through the life of a man. "The 40-Year-Old Virgin" is about sexuality, "Knocked Up" is about fatherhood, and "Funny People" is about mortality. If it sounds like deep material for what has been advertised as a raunchy comedy, it is, but that doesn't mean it works.



(L to R) Ira (Seth Rogen) and George (Adam Sandler).

Photo credit: Tracy Bennett/Universal

"Funny People" is an undeniably ambitious piece of work about infidelity, regret, death, fame, friendship, and love, but it simply got away from one of the most talented comedy writer/directors of the last decade. The romantic end of "Virgin" and the lessons about responsibility in "Knocked Up" had an emotional resonance that's missing from the over-long, often-rambling "Funny People," a film with great parts that never quite develops into a cohesive sum.

Like a lot of successful comedians, George Simmons (Adam Sandler) is kind of an a-hole. Life has left him with no friends and less real love. The star of "Merman" and "My Best Friend is a Robot" learns at the beginning of the film that he's dying. Looking at the face of death sends



George back to his roots, bringing him back to the stand-up stage and regretting the one that got away, Laura (Leslie Mann).

After a disastrous on-stage performance one night, George takes a liking to the young man that follows him, Ira Wright (Seth Rogen). Ira has been working his way up the comedy ladder, keeping a day job behind a deli counter and sleeping on the futon of his friends (Jonah Hill, Jason Schwartzman). George hires Ira to write jokes for him and the two become odd friends with the younger comedian going with the dying one to everything from doctor's appointments to corporate concerts with James Taylor.

There is a solid, entertaining movie about an awkward, overly nice young comedian working with an older, bitter one and learning lessons about the price of fame and the art of comedy. That movie is in "Funny People" but it has been cluttered by a too-long running time and enough themes for a season of television. Instead of sticking with his "A-story," Apatow stretches his film to the breaking point with subplots about the conflict between friendship and career and a third act love quadrangle between George, Laura, and Laura's husband (Eric Bana), with Ira stuck in the middle.

It's all too much for one film and the script gets away from Apatow. By trying to tell so much story, he loses the emotional impact of what he should have focused on. It's nice to see a film that avoids manipulative melodrama, but "Funny People" is surprisingly dead when it comes to honest emotion. There are scenes of crying characters that should at least pull at a heartstring, but they register shockingly flat.



Laura (Leslie Mann) flirts with George (Adam Sandler).

*Photo credit: Tracy Bennett/Universal*

Part of the reason for this is the mishandling of the dramatic material, but there are serious issues of chemistry and character that enhance the flaws. I never bought the undying love between Sandler & Mann, nor the relationship between Sandler & Rogen. There's a dramatic urgency missing from the proceedings. You won't care if George gets back together with Laura, if Ira finds success or fame, what happens with his friends, or even if George lives or dies. All of it takes place at arms-length, like you're watching someone on stage, not relatable, three-dimensional characters.

Having said all of that, there are things to like about "Funny People," even if most of it is on paper. I don't want to suggest that Apatow isn't talented enough to handle drama. He is. And we should encourage writer/directors to spread their wings outside of their traditional niche. If your friend's new stand-up routine didn't work, you'd still encourage him to try again.

I also vastly prefer this Sandler to the one that makes silly faces and stupid voices as Zohan, Nicky, The Waterboy, etc. He's missing the dramatic edge of his work in "Punch-Drunk Love," but there are hints of that actor in this performance, one that gets away from Adam because of the lack of definition in the screenplay but not due to any mistakes by the actor.

Rogen and Mann have excellent comic timing. Eric Bana nearly steals the film with a few scenes. Jason Schwartzman gives his funniest performance in a long time. And there are some very funny moments in "Funny People". The humor works if the drama doesn't.

Ultimately, Funny People is a film starring very talented people made by a very talented man. You can't write it off entirely. Judd Apatow is at the top of his game and he could have played it safe and produced just another raunchy comedy. He didn't do that. He got up on stage and tried a new routine. It may not have connected with the audience, but you have to admire the effort.

*'Funny People' stars Adam Sandler, Seth Rogen, Leslie Mann, Jonah Hill, Jason Schwartzman, and Eric Bana. It was written and directed by Judd Apatow. It opens on July 31st, 2009. It is rated R.*



[12]

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [13]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

[brian@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com) [12]**Source URL (retrieved on Aug 24 2024 - 3:52am):**<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/8292/adam-sandler-seth-rogen-star-in-ambitious-but-flawed-funny-people>**Links:**[1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>[2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/adam-sandler>[3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/brian-tallerico>[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/eric-bana>[5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/funny-people>[6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jason-schwartzman>[7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/jonah-hill>[8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/judd-apatow>[9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/leslie-mann>[10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>[11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/seth-rogen>[12] <mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com>[13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#BRIAN>