

Blu-ray Review: Judd Apatow's Underrated 'This is 40' Boasts A-Grade Extras

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on March 27, 2013 - 10:41am

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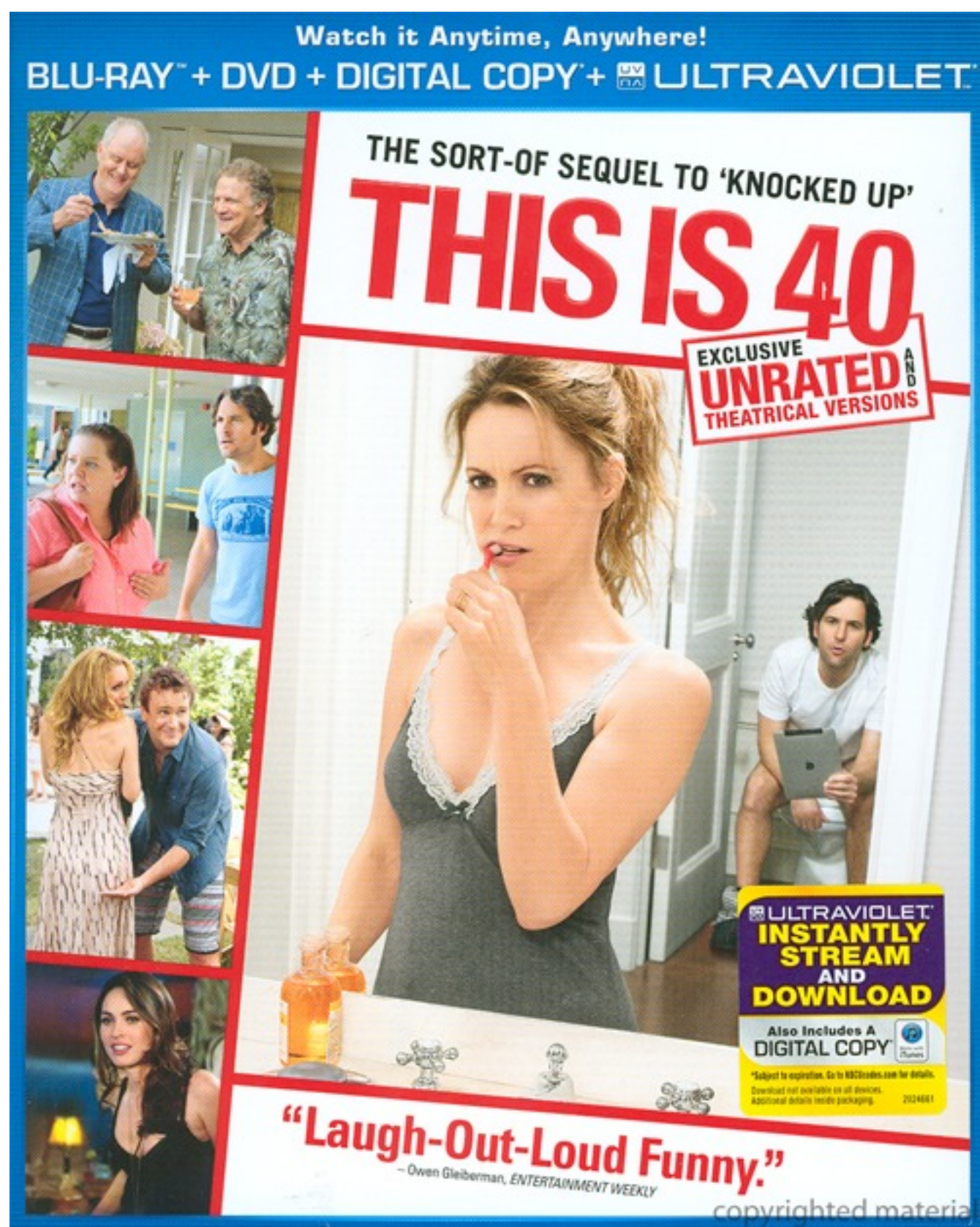
CHICAGO – Why should Judd Apatow and Lena Dunham have to apologize for making films about white upper-class people, considering they are indeed members of the white upper-class? Does their whiteness make their voices any less worthy of being heard? Is it the painstakingly intimate nature of their comedy that rubs some viewers the wrong way? Would these viewers prefer impersonal formulaic retreads populated by token representatives of every race on earth? I can't imagine anything more dull.

"This is 40" may not be Apatow's finest hour on film (that remains his game-changing debut effort, "The 40-Year-Old Virgin"), but it is still a splendidly insightful comedy chockfull of deliriously amusing vignettes. It also shows the director attempting to mine deeper emotional territory in the scenes between middle-aged couple Pete and Debbie (played by Paul Rudd and Leslie Mann, reprising their roles from "Knocked Up"). Apatow has gotten flack for casting his own wife and daughters, Maude and Iris, as Rudd's family, but the sheer excellence of their performances should put all criticisms to rest. Iris is a pint-sized scene stealer, Maude is a budding talent and Mann is more captivating than ever. This is one family richly deserving of their screen time (sorry Kardashians).



Blu-ray Rating: **4.5/5.0**

As a comedy about the toils of parenthood and the bittersweet rewards of aging, "This is 40" isn't an instant classic on the order of Ron Howard's 1989 gem, "Parenthood." It still has the meandering, improvisational rhythm of signature Apatowian sketches that bypass obvious punchlines in search of more inspired laughs. A few of the scenes here could've been trimmed, particularly Jason Segel's poolside flirtations with Megan Fox, but for the most part, every subplot plays a crucial role in enhancing the main narrative exploring Pete and Debbie's relationship. Mann is so good at portraying her character's obsessive need to control the future, despite the fact that so much of it is out of her hands. Her mounting exasperation ends up fueling her wrongheaded (yet show-stopping) confrontation with the school bully who taunted Maude online ("You look like Tom Petty!" she exclaims). The picture is actually at its strongest when it doesn't play the central couple's frustrations for laughs. Mann and Rudd are very affecting in scenes where betrayal and frustration threaten to obliterate their once unbreakable bond. Albert Brooks is also superb as Pete's manipulative father who continues to mooch off his son while rattling off shameless ultimatums like "Your mother wanted you aborted." This compulsive moneylending wouldn't be as much of a problem if Pete's record label weren't in such a dismal state (his co-workers, drolly played by Chris O'Dowd and Lena Dunham, offer little help). Like a Tetris puzzle where the pieces refuse to connect, Pete and Debbie's life is overwhelmingly complicated in ways that are often wholly relatable. Few comedy auteurs have ever presented audiences with such a nakedly honest summation of their own hang-ups, regrets and affirming beliefs about marriage and parenthood. It may be imperfect, but its rewards are plentiful.



This is 40 was released on Blu-ray and DVD on March 22nd, 2013.

Photo credit: Universal Studios Home Entertainment

"This is 40" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.40:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, French and Spanish audio tracks, and is available in a Blu-ray/DVD/digital copy/UltraViolet combo pack that thankfully includes both the film's theatrical and unrated cut (the latter adds a mere three minutes to the running time). Unlike most Apatowian commentaries featuring giggling crew members, the director wisely opts to go solo on this track, providing viewers with a revealing and poignant explanation of how each scene was inspired by his own life. He also discusses how he wanted to give the film a more realistic visual palette by hiring "Descendants" cinematographer Phedon Papamichael, and during an in-depth Fresh Air interview, he praises Mann's fearlessness in suggesting that she appear topless during a wrenchingly painful scene with Rudd (asked if she was worried about her children would think, she replied, "Who cares? They can handle it.").

In a two-part making-of documentary, it's especially fascinating to watch how Apatow went about directing his kids just as he would other members of his ensemble. It's moving to watch Maude startle everyone onset (including herself) with her sublimely performed tantrum scene before dissolving into a tearful puddle of self-doubt ("I didn't know what to do with my body," she cries). When Iris can't bring herself to appear excited during Mann's birthday scene, Maude quips, "This is the Funny or Die sketch," referring to Adam McKay's "Landlord" routine, which consisted of him barking lines at his two-year-old daughter, which she hilariously recited. That's not all that far removed from Apatow's technique, which requires actors to incorporate lines that the director dreams up while the camera is rolling. Melissa McCarthy earns major props for her impenetrable deadpan expression as she utilizes Apatow's improvised line, "I have high nipples," during her uproariously funny confrontation with Rudd. Yet there are plenty of other occasions when the cast brings their own ideas to the table, such as the flatulence delivered by Rudd during a bedroom scene with Mann, which Apatow ended up interpreting as a sign of the couple's fading romantic life.

As usual, there are an enormous wealth of supplemental features, including the "Line-O-Rama" featurettes displaying the multitudinous alternate ad-libs that could've made the final cut (Brooks even gets his own O-Rama reel). Die-hard fans of Pete's (and Apatow's) beloved rocker Graham Parker will rejoice at the seven complete musical performances on this disc, as well as a documentary of Parker's reunion with his Rumour bandmates. There's also nearly an hour of deleted/extended scenes that includes what I believe to be the very funniest bit on this entire disc. It takes place during a torturously awful evening of music performances viewed by Rudd, O'Dowd and Dunham, who are desperately on the lookout for a profitable group to sign. Suddenly, they find themselves faced with a wince-inducing boy band crooning the gloriously hideous tune, "Basically," which is such a spot-on satire that I wouldn't be surprised if Christopher Guest had written it. Also earning big laughs on the extras is co-star Robert Smigel, who performs Triumph the Insult Comic Dog for a series of onset interviews. Even

Apatow can't help cracking a knowing grin when Triumph describes him as "the director whose previous film was called, 'This is 40 Minutes Too Long.'"

'This is 40' is released by Universal Studios Home Entertainment and stars Paul Rudd, Leslie Mann, Maude Apatow, Iris Apatow, Megan Fox, Albert Brooks, John Lithgow, Robert Smigel, Chris O'Dowd, Jason Segel, Annie Mumolo, Charlyne Yi, Melissa McCarthy, Lena Dunham and Graham Parker. It was written and directed by Judd Apatow. It was released on March 22nd, 2013. The theatrical cut is rated R.



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