

Adam Sandler, Andy Samberg Pulls Our Chains in ‘That’s My Boy’

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Adam Sandler is just freaking with us now. His goal is obviously to create the raunchiest, sociopathic and off-putting comedies of all time, and “That’s My Boy” belongs in his Hall of Fame. The A-list cast helps out, including Andy Sandberg, James Caan, Susan Sarandon and Leighton Meester.

The first and most obvious problem is that there are long stretches in the film that have no laughs, but at least it has some laughs, unlike Sandler’s recent “Jack and Jill.” Screenwriter Dave Caspe, who also pens the decent TV sitcom “Happy Endings,” projects some unseemly obsessions through the Sandler character, especially in the sexual realm. It’s an oddball film for sure, paced unevenly by director Sean Anders (screenwriter of the much better raunch comedy, “She’s Out of My League”), and somewhat awkward in its execution. But I predict this film might eventually wear out the DVRs of 15 year-old boys throughout this great nation, as Sandler is their movie patron saint.

Adam Sandler is Donny, who we first meet in 1984 as a 13 year old (Justin Weaver). He’s a middle school playa, and has a hot-for-teacher moment with a Miss McGarricle (the appropriately fetching Eva Amurri Martino, the real-life daughter of Susan Sarandon, who then portrays present-day Miss McGarricle). She sentences Donny to detention, not to punish him, but to reward him with her charms. The affair gets hot and heavy, which results in the teacher’s pregnancy and arrest. This causes some backlash fame for Donny, including a made-for-TV movie.



Andy Samberg (Todd/Han) Shares a Guffaw with Adam Sandler (Donny) ‘That’s My Boy’
Photo credit: Tracy Bennett for Columbia Pictures

Fast forward to the present day, Donny is now a has-been who owes the government 50 grand. His son Han Solo (Andy Samberg), renamed Todd, is getting married and the old man finds out where the ceremony is. In a typical slob-out-of-water moment, Donny raids the festivities to assert his presence in his son’s life. This distresses Todd’s fiancée Jamie (Leighton Meester), her Marine Corp brother Chad (Milo Ventimiglia) and the family priest Father McNally (James Caan), who takes it out with his fists on Todd. Donny is shown to be physically equipped to make a baby, but he’s not morally equipped to be a father.

Sandler does a Boston accent, which should have been retired when “Cheers” went off the air, along with the expression “wicked.” His character is designed to be a lovable goofball, but again – like his drag act as Jill in his previous film – the anti-social behavior would have rational authorities going after him end-of-“Blues-Brothers” style. What remains fascinating in all his films is the blithe acceptance of the supporting characters. No matter what Donny does, there are always rich guys, entourages or hot babes hanging on his every action and word. It’s good to be the king.

Andy Samberg portrays his son, and until he breaks out in the end acts as a straight man. His journey to be more like his Dad is aided by severe and unlikely set-up behavior by the supposedly “good” characters, which doesn’t make the path to Donny all that natural. This is punctuated by Donny pausing in his drinking and self-pleasure to announce that he “loves” his son, even though every action created before that moment would say otherwise. But who needs story sense when Adam Sandler acts like a human bowling ball, Vanilla Ice is in the mix and Samberg flips a bike over a car with two nude fat people. The circus is in town.

There are some funny moments, and it mostly has to do with background scenes such as Jimmy Caan beating the heck out of Andy Samberg. Milo Ventimiglia got some odd notes (no doubt) for his Marine character, but he has a few nice moments, especially with Samberg in the beginning. The fact that Samberg’s character was first named Han Solo elicited a chuckle. And although they are not necessarily funny, Eva Amurri Martino and Susan Sarandon get the nod for finest mother/daughter team-up in recent cinema.



Andy Samberg Spars with James Caan in ‘That’s My Boy’
Photo credit: Tracy Bennett for Columbia Pictures

Another thing about Sandler films, there are so many surreal, head-scratching moments, neither funny or outright bad, but just like wow. Easily an editor could cut these scenes together and display them at a contemporary art museum, where they could uncurl Salvador Dali’s thin mustache. There is no use to critical response regarding an Adam Sandler films, just a acknowledgment that he’s “done it again,” and will continue to do so.

I surrender, Adam Sandler, to your superior skills in determining the condition of American humor, because not everyone is going to like the subtle wit of George S. Kaufman or Woody Allen. The loudest laugh from this movie is from Sandler himself, on the way to make a deposit in the bank.

“That’s My Boy” opens everywhere June 15th. Featuring Adam Sandler, Andy Samberg, Leighton Meester, James Caan, Vanilla Ice, Milo Ventimiglia, Susan Sarandon, Eva Amurri Martino and Tony Orlando. Screenplay by Dave Caspe. Directed by Sean Anders. Rated “R”



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