

Judd Apatow's 'This is 40' Clutters Truth with Cliché

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 20, 2012 - 1:01pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Judd Apatow's "This is 40" is a true disappointment, a comedy that purports to say something honest and insightful about approaching middle age in the '10s but blurs truth by smothering it in contrivance and cliché. Strong work from Leslie Mann and Albert Brooks rescue the project from complete disaster but the largely-unfunny and almost entirely disingenuous script mark this as the talented Apatow's most notable misfire.

Pete (Paul Rudd) and Debbie (Mann) seem happy enough. Their sex life has waned in recent years as the magic has dissipated due to exhaustion and a bit too much sharing of Pete's ass (whether he's on the toilet playing with his tablet or literally asking his wife to look in his butt for medical problems) but they're good parents, living a good life. "This is 40" is about a troublesome chapter in that good life as problems mount in various departments at the same time. Most married couples have been there. You can handle one problem at a time but when they all pile up simultaneously, it leads to marital stress.



This is 40

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

The first problem seems at first to be built around Debbie's unwillingness to admit she's turning 40. She tells everyone she's 38 and gets caught at the gynecologist having given different years of birth on different forms. The age issue is quickly discarded for more serious issues when Debbie finds out she's pregnant with an unexpected third baby. Her two daughters Sadie & Charlotte (Maude & Iris Apatow, Mann & Apatow's two real-life offspring) are fighting more often and addicted to modern technology as Sadie goes through a bit of online bullying. How can Debbie & Pete handle a third kid? She decides to keep the unplanned pregnancy secret.

Meanwhile, Pete is struggling with his record label, choosing to bet it all on a comeback for aging rocker Graham Parker while his family's finances continue to dwindle. It doesn't help that he's been bankrolling his lay-about father (Albert Brooks), who just had triplets of his own with his new wife. At the same time, Debbie is struggling to reconnect with her distant dad (John Lithgow). Parenthood and the way it impacts all of the decisions we make on both ends (how our parents treated us and how we treat our kids) is a major theme of "This is 40" and seems personal enough to Apatow to be one of the few subplots that work here. Jason Segel and Chris O'Dowd steal scenes as a personal trainer for Debbie and a co-worker of Pete's, respectively, while Megan Fox co-stars as a young, high-spirited worker of Debbie's designed plot-wise to make our heroine feel young again in a predictable bar-hopping scene.

The big problem with "This is 40" is a lack of honesty at its core. There are couples who hide massive, life-changing secrets like pregnancies or the fact that they gave 80k to their father against their wife's wishes but those couples are massively dysfunctional. Debbie and Pete are merely going through mid-life crises that all of us deal with at their age (trust me, I am their age) and the fact that Apatow felt the need to blow up believable behavior into contrived, clichéd behavior is the film's flaw. To be blunt, I didn't buy it. I didn't buy almost any of it. I didn't buy when Debbie yelled at her daughter's bully. I didn't buy when Pete didn't tell his supportive wife about any of their financial woes. I didn't buy most of the scenes of conflict between both of them and their older daughter. I didn't buy a minute of either workplace, including the woefully stretched subplots involving Megan Fox and Graham Parker.



This is 40

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

"This is 40" falters in its big plot arcs but Mann nearly saves it in the small ones. Little moments like Debbie dancing with her daughters have a fun, truthful air that I think make the relative failures of the rest of the film that much more frustrating. I truly love Leslie Mann as an actress. Her timing is incredibly underrated and she has an emotional arc here that she fully invests in. Albert Brooks also completely delivers, especially in a late party scene in which his needy father is contrasted against Lithgow's absent one.

Perhaps my frustration with "This is 40" is amplified by the feeling, once again, that there's a great movie buried in this disappointing one. If Apatow could cut his work down by an hour (there's NO reason for "This is 40" to be longer than "Argo") and focus on the little things instead of foisting unrealistic big ones on his characters, it would be so much easier to find something to which to relate. Apatow's films have all been about growing up – getting laid for the first time ("The 40-Year-Old Virgin"), becoming a parent ("Knocked Up"), and coming to terms with mortality ("Funny People"). With "This is 40," he mistakenly clutters what should have been a heartfelt tale of middle age with too many subplots and contrivances. Humor comes from truth, especially in the way that Apatow approaches it and this movie is his biggest lie.

"This is 40" stars Leslie Mann, Paul Rudd, Maude Apatow, Iris Apatow, Jason Segel, Chris O'Dowd, Lena Dunham, Annie Mumolo, Robert Smigel, Megan Fox, Charlyne Yi, Albert Brooks, John Lithgow, and Graham Parker. It was written and directed by Judd Apatow. It will be released on December 21, 2012.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [20]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [19]

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