

Movie Review: 'Baby Mama'

by Jane Clifford

Maybe the first point to make about "Baby Mama" is that it's believable.

Kate Holbrook (Tina Fey) is 37 and sure her biological clock's about to run out of batteries. She melts at the darling babies she sees everywhere she goes. A successful executive with a natural foods company, Kate's career has blossomed, while her love life has dried up. A long-term relationship is over, she's been turned down for adoption and fails at in vitro fertilization, where her doctor (John Hodgman) tells her a T-shaped uterus leaves her with a one-in-a-million chance at getting pregnant.

'BABY MAMA' - Tina Fey (left) is thrilled to hear from Sigourney Weaver, the owner of a surrogacy center, that things seem to be going as planned in the comedy 'Baby Mama.' CNS Photo courtesy of K.C. Bailey / Universal photos. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) As if all that weren't enough, her mother (Holland Taylor) is harping at her and her younger sister ("ER's" Maura Tierney), who's had three babies, is offering advice. Kate's ready to listen and, after a hilarious scene where she chooses a sperm donor by watching her face merged with those of several prospective dads, she ends up at a place called Chaffee Bicknell, to discuss surrogacy.

Assuming the company was formed by Chaffee and Bicknell, she discovers it's actually named for the patronizing - and pregnant - woman who runs the place (Sigourney Weaver).

Enter Angie Ostrowiski (Amy Poehler) and her common-law husband (Dax Shepard), who pull up outside Kate's posh Philadelphia apartment after clearly driving from a part of town Kate would never visit. The look on her face says it all, as the bickering couple proceeds to upset the natural order of Kate's very controlled life.

Factor in Steve Martin, with a long gray ponytail, as Kate's wacky New-Age boss, Barry. He's owner of the Round Earth natural foods company, which promotes her and rewards her with a big project, just as she starts "nesting" in the notion of impending motherhood.

The story may be too painfully familiar to any woman who wants to get pregnant and can't. And it's a whole lot funnier than it is in real life, thanks to the sum of "Saturday Night Live" talent, including writer Michael McCullers, Fey (who also is directing for the first time here), Poehler and producer Lorne Michaels (along with co-producer John Goldwyn).

And "Baby Mama" is funny. Martin plays his eccentric to the hilt. There are bittersweet and tender moments between Kate and Angie, but their best scenes are when they click comedically, as Fey and Poehler have so many times together. Weaver is wonderful as the sickeningly sweet referee of more than one spat between the uptown girl and the self-proclaimed loser who wants a better life.

The film is littered with laugh-out-loud moments - especially the sometimes-subtle, sometimes-not jabs at the upscale trappings of well-to-do moms and those well-meaning pregnancy experts - and there are thought-provoking ones as well.

In the end, well, things are lot tidier than a toddler's room, but it's a lot like childbirth, too. You forget the bad parts and feel really good.

"Baby Mama." Running time: 1 hour, 39 minutes. Rated: PG-13. 2 1/2 stars.

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