



The following is an excerpt from *No Limits* free weekly e-magazine.
To download entire issues or view other excerpt selections just go to:

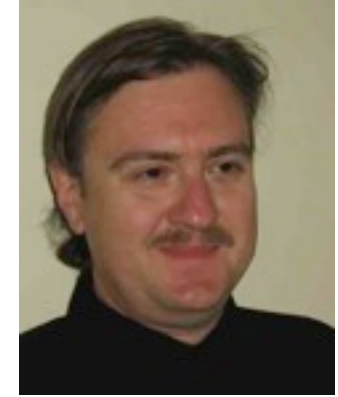
<http://www.nolimitsforme.com/No-Limits.html>

WIDER



screening

www.widerscreenings.com



by Robert Cettl

Mortality and Desire Amidst Hollywood's Funniest People

Director Judd Apatow began in stand-up comedy, making a name for himself as a producer and writer before segueing into directing with surprise back-to-back hits *The 40-Year Old Virgin* and *Knocked Up*, the latter spring-boarding overweight pot-smoking stand-up comedian Seth Rogen to fame as one of the funniest figures in current 20-something America. Rogen steadily developed his popularity (and box office bankability) with a run of hit comedies, most notably as the aspiring pornographer in director Kevin Smith's *Zack & Miri Make a Porno*, re-working the epochal Rob Reiner / Nora Ephron movie *When Harry Met Sally* in the process. Rogen and Apatow have re-teamed for the new comedy *Funny People*, this time squaring Rogen against American comedy powerhouse Adam Sandler and guest-starring a diverse array of stand-up comedians from Andy Dick to Paul Reiser.

In *Funny People*, Sandler stars as a successful movie comedian – the star of gimmick-laden comedy of the type popularized by such *Saturday Night Live* performers Rob Schneider as yes, Sandler himself – who is diagnosed with a rare blood disorder and put on a series of experimental medications, with an only 8% chance of success. Distraught, he re-examines his life and returns to the comedy club he began at, performing a bleak routine which leaves his audience flat. Following him at the club is Rogen, who ridicules the departing Sandler's set with enough wit to impress Sandler into hiring Rogen as his gag-writer and

assistant. Rogen seizes on the opportunity to earn some money and advance his career but soon finds himself befriendng Sandler when the latter informs him of his medical condition. When Sandler desperately wishes to connect with a former lover (the only woman he ever loved and considered marrying – played by Apatow's wife Leslie Mann) even to the detriment of her existing marriage, Rogen must re-assess his responsibilities to a man now his friend and boss.

Sandler here plays a character of some depth and, as he has shown in only rare instances (most notably for Paul Thomas Anderson in *Punch Drunk Love*), reveals himself a performer of broader range than he is usually given credit for. Indeed, the majority of Sandler's fans still relate to the decidedly infantile persona of his early films, before *The Wedding Singer* made him into a potential romantic-comedy leading man, those parodied in the film-within-a-film material within *Funny People*. The irony in *Funny People* is that Sandler plays a Sandler-like actor who got rich make Sandler-like movies. But *Funny People* is far from a vanity piece and Sandler's use here reflects, more accurately, a canny piece of casting direction. Director-writer Apatow uses Sandler here to portray a rather un-likeable character, the actor being here good enough to make this figure both sympathetic and, at times, repugnant – more human than Sandler's goofy histrionics often allow for.

**motion picture
commentary that
says something
worthwhile**



WIDER SCREENINGS

**An
interactive
e-Portfolio**

"For discerning adults who
like to read about rewarding
movies on DVD."

[CLICK HERE](#)

Watch movies, TV
programs and music
video online.
Instant access
[CLICK HERE](#)

Indeed, in its first half, *Funny People* makes for a clever humanization of the lives and lifestyles of those involved in the world of stand-up comedy, though such is here full of competitiveness alongside its explorations of the inter-personal relationships between stand-up comedy performers. Comedy is, after all, serious business and it is often said that funny people have lived some of the most harrowing and sobering of realities – the enigma of the tortured comedian having been explored by Sally Field and Tom Hanks in *Punchline* and surfacing here in some of Sandler's asides about his childhood experiences which leave vague and ambiguous details which lend a different dimension to the character. Male friendship, attitudes to women and sex (Rogen joking constantly about masturbation in his routines while Sandler can bed two different women in one night – only to admit to Rogen in the morning with resigned irony that the girls always end up looking disappointed and leave) and the re-assessment of life and mortality that comes with midlife conspire to make *Funny People* an invigorating, cleverly scripted and well-directed comedy.

At least for most of its length.

At almost 2 1/2 hours, *Funny People* is a stretch and, inevitably, both the laughs and the thematic complexity begin to peter out. And the point at which the stretch becomes all too evident is in the subplot involving Sandler's romantic relationship with Mann, now married (to an Australian – played by genuine Aussie Eric Bana who insisted on making his character Australian as it was easier for him to improvise in his natural Australian accent, usually well covered in such recent American films as the latest *Star Trek* movie) and with two daughters.

As Mann begins to wonder if she should go with Sandler at the expense of her marriage, emotional complexity verges dangerously close to maudlin soapie. In a way, this plot point, developed so as to dominate the film's third act, is necessary to explore Sandler's changing (or not?) self-assessment in light of his illness but in tone and texture almost belongs in a separate movie. It's padding which irrevocably obfuscates the film's carefully laid dramatic focus, but it has a point: sadly its resolved in rather tired, trite and clichéd situations which emerge dreadfully contrived in comparison to the natural flow of the movie's first 90 minutes. Bana's character, though an amusing turn from the actor, is essentially an unnecessary diversion which bogs the film down.

Still, *Funny People* proves that Apatow is one of the most talented people working in American film comedy, not just as producer (he was behind the scenes on Harold Ramis' recent hit *Year One* with Jack Black and Michael Cera) but now as director. While it works, *Funny People* is thoughtful, complex and humanistic; while it doesn't work, it is trite, overlong and hesitant about confronting the reality of Sandler's character. Indeed, with such dark material as filters into *Funny People* on occasion and inherent in Sandler's character, Apatow endeavours to keep the material as light as possible. Sadly, that makes much of the emotional connection in the latter half seem not merely contrived but bathetic, not a good thing for a comedy. In choosing bathos over true complexity, *Funny People* ultimately plays it reassuringly safe. It is there too though that the casting of Sandler works – he can play cute, adorable and sympathetic as well as ugly, bitter and repugnant and Apatow plays a delicate

balancing act with the actor's potential for sudden and unexpected misanthropic rage (the potential essayed brilliantly in *Punch Drunk Love* and toyed with in the remake of *The Longest Yard*).

Funny People is also the first film to showcase the leaner Rogen, the once rotund comic who could joke in *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* about not appearing nude in a porn film so as to conceal his man-tits has lost some 20 pounds for *Funny People*. This knowing re-packaging of Rogen, still emblematic of the slacker generation but now looking trimmer, makes for a running joke in the film, with Sandler referring to Rogen's obese roommate as "like you only size XXL" (which is essentially the character's symbolic function in the film). Rogen does well though is not as effective as he was for Kevin Smith in *Zack and Miri*, where his overweight everyman made him an inherently sympathetic aspiring loser. Underused in this company is Jason Schwartzman, an actor more suited to the genuine emotional and intellectual complexity of comedy director Wes (*Rushmore*) Anderson but here aiding in making *Funny People* perhaps Hollywood's finest film to date aimed at mature twenty-somethings, headlining their icons alongside their predecessors. Indeed, in comparison to such recent drivel as *He's Just Not that Into You*, *Funny People* is a welcome reminder that there are people of talent, thought and complexity still working in American film who can be brought together in a project which does them at least some justice. ###



Announcing the release of Robert Cettl's *Film Tags* in digital (ebook) pdf format.



Value
\$8.95 us

FILM TAGS

Promoting the Movies in the Age of DVD

by **ROBERT CETTL**

One aspect of the movie-making process that gets lost in all the hype is the creation of the hype itself

Film taglines are everywhere. They appear on posters, on promotion and are often marketed so that they become a part of the movie itself. "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" is an example of a tagline that has both become so identified with a popular movie and yet so catchily distinctive as to take on a life beyond the movie. Not many taglines have been so successful, but a few have emerged with similar force. Both well-known and lesser-known movies have been chosen for inclusion here: a journey through the world of film from the perspective of the tagline.

Until now, there has been no guide to taglines, no collection dedicated to celebrating this peripheral art of the movies.

Get the ebook edition **NOW!**

EXCLUSIVE TO
INKSTONE DIGITAL
www.inkstonedigital.com



NOW AVAILABLE WORLDWIDE

The Dreamlife Trilogy by Robert Cettl

motion picture commentary that says something worthwhile

Printed editions

[Click for information](#)



Hamlet

**THIS ABOVE ALL:
TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE**

Products to empower you www.hamlet.ws



**NOW
AVAILABLE
as an ebook**

PDF format for
immediate
download

\$8.95 us

PETER SHEPHERD
Daring to be Yourself

[CLICK HERE](#)

Find out who you really are!