

"THE GIRL FROM MONACO is assured and well-oiled entertainment that assumes an audience that appreciates complex motivations and adult situations"  
Roger Ebert, CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

"In her film debut, Louise Bourgoin proves a force of nature unto herself and leaves every man onscreen - and many in the audience - helpless in her wake."  
Scott Foundas, VILLAGE VOICE

**The Girl From MONACO**  
a film by Anne Fontaine

EXCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT STARTS FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

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Adam Egoyan's most affecting film since *The Sweet Hereafter*.

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## movies BY JASON BLAIR



Adam Sandler, Eric Bana and Seth Rogen in *Funny People*

## Second Acts

A gentler, funnier Judd Apatow

**FUNNY PEOPLE:** Written and directed by Judd Apatow. Cinematography, Janusz Kaminski. Music, Michael Andrews and Jason Schwartzman. Starring Adam Sandler, Seth Rogen, Leslie Mann, Eric Bana, Johah Hill and Jason Schwartzman. Universal Pictures, 2009. R. 146 minutes. ★★★★★

"Comedy is for funny people," snarls George (Adam Sandler) toward the end of *Funny People*. Apparently it's for miserable types, too, since George uses the line to insult his assistant Ira (Seth Rogen), himself a budding comedian and George's primary joke writer. As a standup comic turned movie star, George enjoys *Seinfeld*-like recognizability in *Funny People*, but the character is at least partially based upon Adam Sandler himself. Like Sandler, George traded in his edgy material early, opting instead for big payouts for increasingly ridiculous material. Since *Funny People* is rich in its backstory, we get occasional glimpses into George's back catalog — *Merman*, *Dog's Best Friend*, *Sayonara Charlie* — which bear a passing resemblance to actual Sandler films like *Little Nicky* and *Mr. Deeds*. It's hard to imagine, then, that writer/director Judd Apatow and Sandler weren't in on the joke. That Sandler trusted Apatow with such close-to-home material is one thing; that both contribute the best work of their careers is something to celebrate.

*Funny People* opens to a series of home videos, shot by Apatow in 1991, of Sandler making prank calls in his best old lady voice. (Apatow and Sandler, young and skinny, were roommates at the time.) Within moments, Sandler's George is diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia. Thus *Funny People*, in a few seconds, shuttles us light years away from *Knocked Up* and the *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, establishing a tone and style not seen since perhaps *Terms of Endearment*. The comedy that gives you chills. Unwilling to reveal the news of his disease, George hires Ira to be his assistant, joke writer and emotional punching bag. Every time Ira wants to think they're becoming friends, George coldly

reminds him they aren't. Instead they co-exist peacefully and often hilariously while taking to the comedy circuit for a final lap of standup performances. Then, just as George reveals his condition, he goes into remission. Wouldn't you know, life turns out to be much harder than death. George's reaction, "What the fuck do we do now?," is typically saucy and jaded. The answer is to go after the girl who got away, a beaming ex-girlfriend named Laura (Leslie Mann).

Poignant without ever being manipulative, densely referential with numerous classic lines, *Funny People* is a once-in-a-decade comedy, a unique product of several talents coming into contact with the right material at the right time. Apatow, who wrote the script, clearly lived with these characters for some time — he wrote the screenplay for Sandler and Rogen, reportedly — which gives the film an easygoing, natural feel. The improvised parts *feel* improvised. Like life, all the big moments in *Funny People* happen offscreen; the film is about how we sort out the little moments in between. The first person George speaks to after learning he's no longer sick is his maid. She reacts by telling him she found his lost pants. Life goes on, and George is nowhere near ready for it. It's one thing, as George says, to get a glimpse of "something people only see once." It's another to know what to do with it.

*Funny People* has more cameos than *Short Cuts*, but they reinforce the tight-knit standup community in L.A. Sarah Silverman shines; Ray Romano and Eminem have, of all things, a shout down. This is a big film in its ideas and themes, so the length is a problem; there are too many montages, too close together, of George trying to pull himself through. The film stalls badly once George and Ira visit Laura, now married, in her home — they spend 45 film minutes there, the equivalent of six weeks in the real world. Still, *Funny People* remains a sweetly exuberant film, a reminder of what comedies are still capable of in the age of radically lowered expectations.

EW

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