

'The Starling': McCarthy, O'Dowd find truth in small drama

By Adam Graham
The Detroit News

Yes, there's a starling in "The Starling." The lil devil decides to nest at the home of Lilly Maynard (Melissa McCarthy), who already has plenty on her mind without having to worry about an insanely territorial bird. But the starling helps teach her valuable life lessons, even if she has to learn them from underneath a football helmet, which she dons to help protect herself from its swooping attacks.

Viewers, too, may need a football helmet to help shield themselves from the "The Starling's" heavy-handed messaging, which is dropped from the sky by writer Matt Harris and director Theodore Melfi ("St. Vincent" with McCarthy, "Hidden Figures" without her). But McCarthy and co-star Chris O'Dowd find honesty in their

performances, and "The Starling" handles grief in a mature way that is relatable for adult viewers in the mood for a small film about human issues. For that, "The Starling" delivers.

McCarthy and O'Dowd star as a couple who lose their newborn baby to SIDS. The overwhelming grief and his guilt — could he have saved her if he hadn't slept in that morning? — sends Jack (O'Dowd) to a mental health facility. Lily, meanwhile, is forced to stay at home and grieve on her own while taking care of the house, which is where the starling comes into play.

The lil bugger makes his presence known while Lily is gardening and makes her life hell. She's sent to Dr. Larry Fine (Kevin Kline), a former psychologist who's now a veterinarian, which is oddly both of the things she needs. Larry, reluctantly at first, helps her cope with her issues

and find a path toward the light.

"The Starling" isn't exactly subtle — its quirks are exacerbated by a pushy soundtrack — but there is warmth and truth in its performances, particularly by McCarthy and O'Dowd. They're two people trying to push forward despite incredible emotional setbacks. It's something we can all relate to, particularly right now, football helmets or not.



'THE STARLING'

MPAA rating: PG-13 (for thematic material, some strong language and suggestive material)
Running time: 1:42
Where to watch:
Streaming on Netflix

Netflix
Melissa McCarthy stars as Lilly in "The Starling."

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