

## Funny People (2009)

Contributed by Daniel Cann  
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Written and directed by Judd Apatow 'Funny People' stars Adam Sandler as rich and famous comedian and film star George Simmons who has just learnt the unpalatable news that he is suffering with a terminal inoperable disease. This of course leads him to re-examine and re-evaluate his life. He realizes that for all of his wealth and material possessions his is an empty, lonely existence so he tries to make amends with old friends and family as well as making some new friendships before his time is up, enter Apatow regulars: Leslie Mann (Mrs Apatow) as old flame Laura and Seth Rogen as green rookie wannabe stand-up comic and writer, Ira Wright. Simmons takes Wright under his wing, hiring him as a personal assistant and comedy writer. With his future prospects bleak Simmons also tries to reconnect with Laura and right the wrongs of his past.

Those expecting usual Apatow fare such as 'The 40 Year Old Virgin' and 'Knocked Up' will be disappointed. This is no easygoing comedy with lovable eccentric characters. Apatow has departed from his usual formula and in my opinion this is a better film for it. Its good to see a writer and director of his stature taking risks and this is the perfect vehicle for that.

Ever since he appeared in acclaimed 9/11 drama 'Reign Over Me' Sandler has proved that he can do demanding dramatic roles and he is again on top form. Playing Simmons must have been a dream role for Sandler, as he gets to stretch his acting muscles playing a morally ambiguous and even an unlikeable character. Simmons, although undoubtedly the King of comedy, is quite the misanthrope with a high level of world-weariness. He has played the celebrity game and is used to getting what he wants: money, big houses, girls, lackeys, cars, you name it. But along the way he finds he has lost his soul. Clichéd and predictable maybe but these themes are all handled with aplomb.

Acting kudos must also go to Rogen who as Wright is the perfect foil to the cynical Simmons. Wright is eager to climb the fame ladder and is hungry for success. His housemates played by Jonah Hill and Jason Schwartzman have a good chemistry with him and all convince as struggling wannabes with their noses pressed up against the glass of the celebrity mansion looking in. Aubrey Plaza is also notable playing a feisty and funny neighbour and fellow stand-up, Daisy, whom Wright has a soft spot for. The sub-plots make the characters more believable and three-dimensional. For once Apatow's characters are not just a collection of loveable fluffy misfits, here they are real people.

My only criticisms of the film are that the first half can be a little wearing and heavy (obviously a film dealing with imminent death is not going to be a bed of roses!) but luckily the tempo changes for the second half which is packed with comic situations and well drawn observations. It does suffer a little from pacing problems and I'm sure it would not have hurt if some minutes were trimmed from the films two hour and twenty minute plus runtime. All that said I enjoyed this bold new direction from Team Apatow and although it will inevitably divide people it is better than churning out essentially the same material year in and year out. Worth checking out.