

'Bridget Jones's Baby' avoids the sequel curse with slapstick comedy

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4

Running Time: 123 min.

It's been a while since we've seen Bridget Jones on the big screen. The original exploits of the character back in 2001 were, surprisingly enough, charming and very, very funny. Not long after, *Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason* (2004) rehashed the material in a painfully ineffective manner. After more than a decade, the character has returned in a new feature. So, is *Bridget Jones's Baby* a worthy return or nothing more than a nostalgic cash grab?

From this reviewer's perspective, the answer lies somewhere in the middle. This is a definite improvement over the previous calamitous and best forgotten entry. Yet in all honesty, it's a far cry from the freshness and frivolity of the original. Are a handful of amusing moments here and there over two full hours enough to justify the experience? I'm still not sure, even as I write this.

The new chapter begins with 43 year old Bridget (Renée Zellweger), still on her own after breaking up with Mark Darcy (Colin Firth) some five years earlier. Unfortunately, our protagonist's professional life at a TV news station isn't going much better. New management has stepped in, telling employees to emphasize shock journalism and the latest media platforms. As if that isn't enough, Bridget's life gets increasingly complicated after becoming romantically entangled with Jack (Patrick Dempsey) and rekindling her relationship with old flame Mark.

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While the plot may seem simple, there a lot of characters present and just about everyone from the first film pops in for a scene or two, albeit briefly. All of the supporting role updates and introductions of new faces result in a rather slow and bumpy opening. It all feels a little rushed and many of the jokes early on don't have the impact they should. The movie is also hampered by several subtle callbacks to the original (often by repeating familiar lines) that aren't necessary and further elongate the proceedings.

But that's not to say that there aren't any laughs. When the central paternity concept is finally set up, it leads to several bits that do work. This includes Bridget attempting to covertly collect DNA samples to determine her offspring's father and an incredibly awkward dinner between the three main characters. These moments are even funnier because of the bit players surrounding the stars, who react with amusing discomfort as revelations are revealed. There are also some funny lines from an obstetrician (Emma Thompson) who is forced to play along with Bridget's elaborate ruse.

In truth, there's a very funny 30 or 40 minutes smack in the middle of the picture when all of its comic cylinders are firing. But on either side of the fun are several dead patches. And the plotline doesn't bring much of anything new to the table; there's only so many ways you can rework the basic inspiration for this story. At least the movie attempts to raise some points about modernizing the definition of family (even if some plot elements wrap themselves up in a rather conservative and predictable manner).

Thanks to its capable cast, *Bridget Jones's Baby* does manage to provide a few big laughs, which is probably more than many were expecting. Yet the screenplay is overstuffed with so many characters and nods to the previous films haphazardly wedged in that it also comes across as unfocused and clumsy. Fans and forgiving viewers will probably find just enough here to satisfy, but others would be better served by revisiting the original.

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