

Film Review: *JUNO*

Juno is a film about a free-spirited young girl named Juno MacGuff (Ellen Page) who gets impregnated by her socially awkward boyfriend Paulie Bleeker (Michael Cera). Faced with this unwanted pregnancy, she decides to put her baby up for adoption, finding a couple she deems fit to take care of her child in Vanessa and Mark Loring (Jennifer Garner and Jason Bateman).

Juno is anything but a conventional teenage romantic comedy. It is actually an interesting reworking of the convention, because the film offers different ways of seeing the film. The film is really about pregnancy and love, but the film offers pointed social criticism at the way society perceives (teenage) pregnancy. Juno MacGuff, the young pregnant girl, is a good means of evoking the polarity between pro-lifers and pro-abortionists, and she makes a case for neither. Juno is an off-beat, tomboyish, witty, and, to some extent, precocious girl; she was foolish enough to get pregnant and wise enough to put her baby up for adoption. The film explores Juno's emotional development as a pregnant teenager, while society figures prominently in the way institutions like abortion clinics, school, hospitals, and an adoption family think about her pregnancy. In that sense, seeing her wobble through the film is meant to show us how funny it really is to be pregnant when you are 16, when it is not. Her self-deprecating humor is sufficient for a number of laughs, though I have to warn viewers that her clever turns of phrases based on clichés or commonplace things can be a tad excruciating ("Thanks a heap, Coyote Ugly, this cactus-gram stings even worse than your abandonment"). However, maybe the fact that this film is so brash is what makes it so alluring and refreshing, yet, in my opinion, contrived.

I say contrived because the film is actually not that unique in terms of its comic content, since a similar film, *Knocked Up*, has the same theme that screams pro-adulthood instead of

abortion, and Juno is offering a different option, adoption. The film ends, however, where Juno's loss begins, and that part of the film is never treated (otherwise it may have taken on more depressing and confronting dimensions). Moreover, Paulie Bleeker and Mark Loring, played by Michael Cera and Jason Bateman, seem directly transposed from the show *Arrested Development* (in which they both star) to *Juno*. Cera, once again, plays the character of a goofy, bashful, lovestruck teenager (as he did in *Superbad*), and Bateman plays the laid-back, cultured man who happens to get along very well with teenagers (he becomes a kind of mentor for Juno).

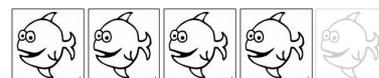
My real qualm with the film lies with the main character, Juno. You will certainly enjoy the film if you can appreciate her witticisms, her feistiness, and the fact that she knows things better than her peers. To other viewers, Juno's never-failing insouciance at her pregnancy and her aplomb amid scornful high-school peers may appear to be too unrealistic (I would have expected a shoot-

ing at some point). Hence, at times you are forced to wonder whether it could at all be possible (the lonely protesting Asian girl at the abortion clinic must have appeared out of oblivion).

I have left to say that this film needs to be taken for what it is. If you are able to bear the film's nonchalance at so serious a subject and suspend your disbelief, you will be delighted in its fresh approach in handling delicate subject matter with levity (considering it takes place in the United States). If you're critical of the way the film presents teenage pregnancy and have strong opinions about the verisimilitude of this film, you may be taken aback by its pretensions. Overall, solid acting, a fresh scenario, and plenty of laughs along the way.



In select theatres December



By Matthijs Smits