

Movie 'Dad' is a real sentimental tear jerker

Entertainment

FILMETER



ROBERT DIMATTEO

DAD (PG) Gary David Goldberg, creator of the popular sitcom "Family Ties," makes his movie directorial debut with this well-intentioned, but highly sentimental, movie about, well, family ties.

Adapted from William Wharton's novel, the film tries to be a moving yet funny study of two troubled father-son relationships at a time of extreme crisis. Maybe Goldberg has worked the sitcom route too long — his movie has a mechanical quality that is almost offensive. Dealing with heavy-duty subjects like aging, senility, schizophrenia, heart attacks and bitter unresolved familial tensions, the film favors grandstanding, tear-jerking and jokey one-liners when simple, subdued drama would do.

It's too bad, because a lot of talent went into this movie. Playing a fading 78-year-old who is called back to life after his controlling wife (Olympia Dukakis) suffers a heart attack, a heavily made-up Jack Lemmon seizes his role with the dedication of an actor who clearly wants one more Oscar for the mantel. It's a bravura performance — too bravura. The part isn't well-written enough to justify Lemmon's ostentatious efforts. The character is cute and touching beyond words — and beyond belief. He lapses into senility, then he gets feisty, then he lapses again. His health varies far too much from situation to situation.

Playing Lemmon's estranged son, who decides to mend relations with his dad before it's too late, Ted Danson shows some new dark colors as an actor. Since Danson's own son in the film (Ethan Hawke) can't relate to him, there's an apt sense of miscommunication being passed on from generation to generation. On a slightly lighter note, Olympia Dukakis is amusingly cranky as Lemmon's domineering wife. But, as the traumas pile up, the movie becomes an orgy of manipulation. **GRADE: ★★**

It's a subject that brings out lots of primal feelings in the viewer — especially in this baby boom era when many would-be parents find adoption is their only option. It was only a matter of time before the big screen got around to the subject. Here it is, via a

proach to adoption, the couple meets with the pregnant woman before she gives birth, and then even accompanies her to the delivery room. The idea is that the mother will hand over the baby to the couple after delivery — but, of course, it isn't so easy.

For the most part, the movie details this situation in skillful, if somewhat simplistic, terms. You have to accept some caricaturing of the young working-class mother and her leather-jacketed boyfriend (Kevin

Dillon). And you have to accept a movie that is better at setting a potent situation than at fleshing it out dramatically. (The last section of the picture is weak.)

Woods and Close play well together, though neither are at their best as conventional types. Mary Stuart Masterson, however, is wonderful as the beleaguered young mother. Along with Winona Ryder and Bridget Fonda, Masterson is one of the most promising actresses of her generation. Here, she makes soapy and somewhat contrived scenes work better than they ought to. Some of the credit must go to director Kaplan. As he proved directing Jodie Foster in her Oscar-winning performance in "The Accused," Kaplan has a special affinity for gritty, blue-collar women. **GRADE: ★★★**

Film grading: ★★★★★ — excellent, ★★★★ — good, ★★★ — fair, ★ — poor

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JOHN TREMONT (Ted Danson) shows his elderly father Jake (Jack Lemmon) how to do some basic household chores in "Dad."

script by Barbara Benedek (who co-wrote "The Big Chill"), and directed by Jonathan Kaplan ("The Accused").

In roles that run counter to their recent work, James Woods and Glenn Close star as "normal" middle-class marrieds who plan to adopt the child of an unwed mother (Mary Stuart Masterson). In an unusually open ap-

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