Juno

Talent: Ellen Page, Jennifer Garner, Jason Bateman, Michael Cera, Alison Janney, J. K. Simmons, Olivia Thirlby.

Date of review: Thursday 13th December, 2007

Director: Jason Reitman
Duration: 91 minutes
Classification: M
We rate it: 4 and a half stars.

Jason Reitman, son of ultra-mainstream (and very successful) Hollywood director Ivan Reitman (he of Ghostbusters, Stripes and Kindergarten Cop fame) may just be able to move out from under his father’s significant shadow with this wonderful film. Jason Reitman’s breakthrough film as a director was 2005’s Thank You for Smoking, a cleverly written and very well performed black comedy that was so well pulled-off that one felt in the presence of promising new talent. It seems that feeling was correct, because with Juno, a very different film to its predecessor, Reitman has made an utterly assured and charming comedy/drama, and has drawn tremendously convincing and engaging performances from the entire cast.

The talented young actress Ellen Page (who was so memorable in the confronting thriller Hard Candy) plays the titular character, an intelligent, articulate, out-of-left-field high-school student who, as our story opens, finds herself pregnant to her close friend and would-be boyfriend, Bleeker. Being smart, strong and self-possessed, Juno confronts her situation level-headedly, and decides, on reflection, that she will go through with the pregnancy and offer her child for adoption to a couple who are unable to conceive. With the support of her family - stepmother Bren (the wonderful Alison Janney) and father Mac (the ever-humourous J. K. Simmons) - Juno remains at high-school and works through the demands of her pregnancy while spending time with the childless couple she has chosen to adopt her child, a wealthy yuppy pair (Jennifer Garner and Jason Bateman). As Juno’s pregnancy nears its end and the realities of the situation become more and more apparent, she must confront both her own feelings about giving up her child, her family’s feelings about the matter, and the position of the child’s biological father, the nerdy Bleeker.

What made this film so wonderful for me were two main things: the central performance of Page, as deliriously talented an actress as I can remember having seen in the last few years, and the strength of the film’s screenplay (by the unusually named Diablo Cody). Cody, who has herself had a fascinatingly unconventional past, here proves that the most wonderfully everyday characters and “standard” human
situations can make for engaging, perceptive and truly touching drama. With Page et al giving the characters such believable life, Cody’s story doesn’t for a moment seem contrived or glibly moralistic. Juno is a film that deftly evokes the wonder of simple human interaction, and it uses this simplicity and wonder to tell a truly affecting story. Will Juno give up her child? Will the yuppie couple get its act together and realise that there’s more to life than a new kitchen and a perfectly-arranged living room? Will Bleeker overcome his shyness and tell Juno how he really feels about her? These questions will all be answered, but they’re answered with such warmth and humanity that I insist you go and see the film in order to learn what the answers are. Juno is this year’s most delightful independent comedy-drama.

Nick Prescott