

Immediate Family ★★★

Year of Release: 1989

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: See It

Immediate Family contains one of the strangest sights of any movie in 1989. Yes, even stranger than the hair pieces in *Star Trek V*. Brace for a shock: for the first time in his film career, James Woods plays a sensitive, all-around nice guy. I'm not kidding. I had to constantly remind myself I was watching Woods and not Alan Alda. With his warm performance, Woods has broken the mold and virtually reinvented his on-screen persona.

Woods stars opposite Glenn Close; together, they play a loving husband and wife who can't conceive. After years of fertility drugs, they finally decide to give up on Mother Nature and pursue an open adoption, which means they meet the natural mother before the baby is born. Mary Stuart Masterson plays the pregnant teenager who agrees to give up her baby. The movie examines the culture clash between the lower class teenager from Cleveland and the Yuppie couple who live in post-card pretty Seattle.

Immediate Family captures your heart, but only after fighting off several flaws. For one thing, just when the movie seems ready to end, the real con-

flict finally kicks in. Better late than never, I guess. Second, the lovey-dovey relationships are too much to take: it's like being trapped in an elevator with someone who reeks of perfume. The sweet aroma is suffocating. Third, the movie is utterly predictable; the "big surprises" are anything but surprising.

The good news is that director Jonathan Kaplan has elicited memorable performances from his leads. It comes as a shock to see Woods expressing compassion rather than his usual hostility. I never buy Close in her glamorous *Dangerous Liaisons*-type roles, but her character in *Immediate Family* suits her well. I believed every minute of her performance as a woman who desperately yearns to have children. Close will probably earn her ump-teen millionth Oscar nomination, but it's Masterson who really deserves the honor. Masterson is so down-to-earth and so compelling that it's impossible not to feel for her. Her performance rings true at every juncture as the movie depicts the pain and confusion of teen pregnancy.