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CANADA VOTES 2008

New film carries formula for laughs

Filmmakers tap fertile topic for 'The Baby Formula'

Posted By LARA BRADLEY, THE SUDBURY STAR

Posted 3 hours ago

The makers of "The Baby Formula" had been hoping for some outrage in Montreal.

No such luck.

However, the film was called the "best film of the festival" by one journalist, the "best breakout film" by another and has made the short-list for Sundance. Maybe Sudbury will provide the outrage.

"The Baby Formula" screens at 4:30 p. m. today at the Cinefest Sudbury International Film Festival.

It's about Athena and Lilith, two women in love who want to have a baby that is a biological combination of them both. With the help of a trusted lab technician, who uses each's stem cells to create sperm, both become pregnant. However, the real trouble starts when their families get involved. The film is shot mockumentary-style, with a film crew following the women through their pregnancies.

John Griffin, of the Montreal Gazette, described it as "funny, rueful, angry, absurd, hysterical, deadly serious and entertaining as hell. Sort of like life."

Director Alison Reid got the idea for the film after shooting "Succubus," about a lesbian couple trying to get pregnant. While at Sundance, the stars of that film Megan Fahlenbock ("Resident Evil: Apocalypse") and Angela Vint ("Lars and the Real Girl") e-mailed her to say both had become pregnant.

"This is an amazing opportunity to make a sequel and follow them through their pregnancies as if they were the first two women giving birth to each other's babies," Reid said.

She contacted the writer from her previous film, Richard Beattie, who got to work on a script.

"We actually started shooting before we had the script," she said. "We had the first 30 pages when we started, but didn't know exactly where it was going."

It's rare that a film actually uses pregnant actors. Most of the time, such as in the case of "Juno," pregnancy bumps are prosthetic.

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Paul Zimic and Alison Reid will be at the 4:30 p.m. screening of Reid's film "The Baby Formula" today. The film is about Athena and Lilith, two women in love who want to have a baby that is a biological combination of them both. With the help of a trusted lab technician, who uses each stem cells to create sperm, both become pregnant.

Lara Bradley/The Sudbury Star

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While shooting two pregnant women brought a sense of realism to the film, it also presented some challenges for Reid – and unexpected outcomes.

Pride Week in Toronto takes place in June. Since Angela wasn't due until the end July, they decided to shoot some scenes at the festival celebrating gay pride. Reid decided to have her go into labour at the parade and hitch a ride on the back of a motorcycle to the hospital.

"We were just rehearsing. We put her on the back of the bike to make sure, because she had a big pregnant belly and there's a seat about that big," explained Reid. "She said, 'No, I'm fine. This is good.' "

"She got off the bike and said, 'My water just broke.' "

So Vint did end up going to hospital that day and couldn't continue shooting.

The science behind the premise of the film is not that far out. In fact, we might be closer to "The Baby Formula" than you'd think.

"There's actually a fertility treatment being developed right now in real life. It's being developed for men with low sperm counts," said Reid pointing to her Grindstone Media principal Paul Zimic, who is marketing the film.

"My sperm count's just fine," said Zimic.

"They've figured out how to make stem cells differentiate into sperm. The offshoot is women's stem cells can also be differentiated into sperm," said Reid. "This is happening in mice. They've had two female mice who have had offspring."

Despite the big buzz the film is making, it was shot on what Reid calls a "very low budget" -- about \$275,000.

"I'm a stunt co-ordinator, stunt performer. I've done that for 25 years. I was able to get lots of people to work on the film for next to nothing," she said. "I knew the selling and packaging is equally important and was able to get Paul recommended to me when we were just about finished shooting."

Zimic was able to get the Super Channel interested in the film, as well as secure \$140,000 financing from Telefilm, before it headed into post-production.

"Alison had financed the film up to that point on her own ... \$70,000-80,000. It was a combination of cash, debt and even rented her house out to the producers of 'Hairspray,'" he said. "It's amazing what pushes a movie alone. Pure determination."

While it's possible that people will be outraged at the idea that women can create their own babies without the help of men by using stem cells, "it's hard to get mad at the results when it's a baby," Zimic said.

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