

Baby Driver (2017)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 55 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 6; Language 6; Sex/Nudity 2.

Our star rating (1-5): 5

Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. (KJV)

or 'Give generously, for your gifts will return to you later.' (TLB)

Ecclesiastes 11: 1

When I first saw the title, I thought that Edgar Wright's film would be an animated one like *Boss Baby*. Not so, of course, the film turning out to be an unusual, fast-paced heist film with a romantic plot high-lighted by some of the most stunning car chases ever caught on camera. The "Baby" of the title is a code name for a troubled young getaway driver named Miles, played consummately by Ansel Elgort. Expect to see him as the lead in a lot more movies in the future.

Before the titles appear, Wright delivers up a getaway that would be the climax of a lesser film. Three crooks wearing Halloween masks and brandishing big guns dash out of a bank and jump into the red Subaru driven by Baby. Zig zagging through traffic, narrowly dodging cars at intersections, jumping up onto throughway ramps, often going the wrong way, he is chased by what looks like a third of Atlanta's police cars. High above from the vantage point of a police helicopter his red car is a standout on the expressway—until he pulls between two identical Subarus. They enter a tunnel, and now

hidden from view, Baby switches lanes, so that when they emerge the cops are not sure which car to pursue. On and on the sequence goes until at last, free from pursuit, the gang ditches the car and report to their boss. All the time Baby is listening to music through the earbuds of his iPod.

On his way to his apartment he rhythmically strolls along to the beat of his music, so that we almost expect him to start dancing and singing like Gene Kelly. Entering his apartment, he greets his deaf-mute foster father Joseph (CJ Jones) with sign language. He hides his share of the loot beneath a floorboard. Throughout the film Joseph shows his awareness that Baby's money is not legitimate. Worried about him, he warns him that he (Baby) does not belong in that world. (Although their relationship leads to a beautiful moment later in the film, it could have been enhanced by an explanation of how a black man became the lad's surrogate father. In the brief flashbacks to the boyhood tragedy that traumatized Baby both parents are white.)

Even while attending a planning session where Doc (Kevin Spacey) explains their next heist, Baby never removes the earbuds. The heisters this time include the brutal Buddy (Jon Hamm), his gun-loving girlfriend, Darling (Eiza Gonzalez), and the ever-suspicious Bats (Jamie Foxx). When the latter takes a dislike to "the kid" because he has kept his earbuds on during Doc's briefing, the other two crooks vouch for Baby's driving skills. Not mollified, Bats demands that Baby take off the plugs and tell him what Doc had said, whereupon Baby responds as if his brain were equipped with a tape recorder. The crook's skepticism is overcome, but not his hostility to the driver.

We learn that the tragic crash that robbed Baby of his parents left him with tinnitus – the "hum in the drum" as Doc calls it. The music overcomes the ever-present noise that plagues his ears every waking moment. Also, Baby is not a willing accomplice in the robberies. Because of something he has done,

the lad is in debt to Doc, and when the crime boss discovered his driving talent, had been forced to drive for a specific number of bank jobs. The upcoming one is to be his last, much to the worried Joseph's relief.

Baby wants to quit for two reasons, one of conscience, and one of romance. During the second heist, which involves not only a spectacular car chase but also a foot pursuit through streets and a mall, Baby is dismayed that an armored truck guard is killed when the three robbers rush from the bank. Romance enters the picture one night when a cute waitress at an all-night café bonds with him over the iPod music he shares with her during one of his visits. Debora (Lily James) is beautiful, not just because of her lithe body revealed by her short-skirted uniform, but also because she exudes honest concern and has a quick mind—and as we will soon see, loyalty. The scenes between them win us over to Baby's side, if we had not already been there.

Of course, when the film's second heist is successful, Doc refuses to call everything square with the driver. He tells the boy that he has become like a good-luck talisman, all the robberies for which he has been the driver having been successful. This heist will be the biggest of all, in that the target is a U.S. Post Office with a huge store of money orders that Doc plans to cash through an expert he knows. With such a talented team, can anything go wrong?

Well, for one thing, Baby has been secretly taping his comrades and using their looped voices for insertion into the special mixed music tapes he collects. What will they think if they discover them? And even worse, Bats' nickname comes from his psychopathic behavior, which turns Doc's night-time deal to buy heavy duty weapons from a gang into a bloodbath. Events seem to be heading to a film noir-like conclusion, but...

Directing from his own smartly written script, Wright treats us to a film that is heart-felt as it is exciting. Those up on

music and their bands of the past 40 years (which, alas, does not include this reviewer) will revel in the over 40 songs Baby listens to—songs by Lionel Ritchie, Isaac Hayes, the Vandellas, Martha Reeves, Young MC, Queen, and more. The writer/director has said that his is “a car film driven by music.” It certainly is, but it is much more than that—also a morality tale about inner goodness, love, and loyalty.

I see it as a visual parable based on the first verse of the 11th chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Several times Baby’s goodness shines forth—not just with his beloved foster father and with Debora, but with strangers as well, one example being that when he is fleeing the police and orders an old woman out of her car, he notices her purse on the seat, tossing it to her before driving away with screeching tires. That kind act, and others, will return to reward him later on, turning what I had feared would be a tragically ending film into one ending as happily as most other romantic films.

I think the conclusion would have satisfied even the promoters of the old Puritanical [Hays Code](#)—though I doubt they would have sat through the violence and foul language segments leading up to it. In essence, an epilogue, it is shot in black and white and prefaced briefly several times earlier in the film. If parents were notified of your intentions, *Baby Driver*, would make a great film for a youth group to see and discuss. (But be careful—years ago when I recommended such a film, a youth leader wrote in that he had been fired because he used the film in his program. However, when asked if he had alerted the parents to his plans, he had to admit that he had not.)

This review with a set of questions will be in the Aug. 2017 issue of VP.