

Parents, Trapped

The stars of NBC's new comedy **Up All Night** have tiny tots at home—and act with tiny tots at work. Are they out of their minds?



FLIPPED OUT:
Christina Applegate
and Will Arnett in
Up All Night

Most actresses would kill to be on a top-rated sitcom. Not Ella and Jaden Hiller, the three-year-old identical twins who until recently played the part of Lily on ABC's *Modern Family*. So agitated and unhappy did the Hiller girls become when a camera was aimed in their direction, they were replaced in September by four-year-old Aubrey Anderson-Emmons.

What a difference a year makes, as Eric Stonestreet, who stars as the young gay father Cameron Tucker on the show, tweeted the other day about Anderson-Emmons: "She's 9mo older than 'old Lily' and happy 2 b there. We love the

Hiller twins, but they were NOT happy 2 b on set."

This is hardly an isolated example. Show runners often blame the lack of baby-related story lines on how difficult it is to shoot with infants and toddlers, whose working hours are limited and whose moods can be fickle. *Cougar Town* creator Bill Lawrence, while speaking on a panel recently, addressed why he didn't include more infant-focused plot points with a question of his own: Are children under five fun to be around? "Get five really bright lights and take the shades off them, and point them at [a] baby, and then try to make them say or do what you want." He added, "And then ask me again why

the baby isn't in the show more often."

Typically in Hollywood, babies are considered a pain. Which is why the cast and crew of NBC's new comedy *Up All Night* are doubly brave. Not only are they making a TV show about how having a baby changes your life (which necessitates working with infant twins), but all of the principals—Will Arnett, Christina Applegate, and Maya Rudolph, not to mention the series creator, Emily Spivey—have small children at home, as do several of the writers. "We're all living it, going from being career people and partying all the time to having kids. It's fresh material," says Spivey, 40, a former *Saturday Night Live* writer who draws much of the inspiration for the show, she admits, from her and her editor husband's own frenetic struggle as older working parents. Real life, she adds, "is the gift that keeps on giving." Except, that is, when it leaves you completely and utterly exhausted, which is what *Up All Night* is about.

"It's a darker story," adds Applegate, 39, who gave birth to daughter Sadie nine months ago. Applegate, who doubles as a producer on the show, plays Reagan, a talk-show producer and new mom. She and her character's stay-at-home husband, Chris (played by Arnett), are "at the pinnacle of their lives, about to turn 40, when everything changes," Applegate



SIX PACK: Shows like *The Brady Bunch* weren't exactly honest looks at family life

says. "You can be madly in love with your child and still have moments where you go, 'Ugh!' We're saying things people are afraid to say."

What type of things? Things like this: When you work and have a family, and you care about your family, your work inevitably suffers. Or this: Working and parenting, when taken together, leave little time for (or interest in) sex. Which is a corollary to this: A new parent will more likely use the energy they once might have summoned for sex to instead have an argument with their partner about which one of them got less sleep. This scene

was brought to life in the first episode, when Arnett and Applegate are shown bleary eyed in bed at dawn, bickering. "You were asleep when I got up at one 'cause I saw you, 'cause I was awake!" Reagan alleges, to which Chris replies, "No, I'm sure you were groggy from being in such a deep sleep that you did not see that my eyes were wide open." The scene ends with Chris suggesting some hanky-panky and Reagan rolling her eyes in disgust.

Arnett, 41, says the weirdest thing about the scene struck him afterward, when he found himself arguing with his real-life wife, *Parks and Recreation*'s Amy Poehler. For the record, the couple has two kids under the age of four, so they are constantly sleep deprived. "It was kind of trippy," Arnett recalls of the real-life spat, "because I'd shot a scene having this discussion, and now I'm *actually* having this discussion."



Since Lucille Ball got pregnant and introduced the world to Little Ricky on *I Love Lucy* in 1953, it's been the rare TV show that honestly confronted early parenting. The late '80s series *Full House* centered on a young widower who enlists the help of his best friend and brother-in-law in raising his three daugh-

AD
1/2 HORZ.
3 COLUMNS
4 5/8 x 6 3/4

ters (the youngest of whom was played by the twins Mary-Kate and Ashley Olson, who were less than two when the series debuted). But over the years, most shows that have depicted parenting—from *The Cosby Show* to *The Brady Bunch*, from *Married...with Children* to *Who's the Boss?*—portrayed kids for whom diapers were a distant memory.

Up All Night is trying to do something different: chronicle the joys and terrors that accompany the moment when one's life is forever altered by the arrival of offspring—especially for older parents. The fact that so many on the show are older parents makes that a bit easier. As Applegate says of her character, "Reagan's going through the same thing I'm going through."

Being sleep- and sex-starved may be funny, but the laughs would soon wear thin without a comic foil: Ava, the ambitious but vulnerable talk-show host played by Rudolph. Ava is Reagan's best friend and boss. And, notably, while Rudolph herself has three kids (ages six, two, and three months), Ava is both childless and clueless about children. In a defining scene early in the pilot, Rudolph shows up unannounced at Applegate and Arnett's house with a gift basket "for" the baby—complete with venison stock, hot pepper cheese, and champagne. Seeing the new parents' dis-

mayed faces, Rudolph reacts with glee: "Are you telling me there's nothing in there for a baby? Oh well, I guess we'll be left having an awesome time by ourselves!" In another scene Applegate tries to teach Rudolph how to appropriately cradle an infant. Not since Julia Louis-Dreyfus danced spasmodically on *Seinfeld* has physical awkwardness been so hilarious. Rudolph first sticks her hands up straight in the air, then grabs the baby by the crotch. Needless to say, wailing ensues.

Rudolph's character is the show's fulcrum, Arnett says—the one without whom it might devolve into goo-goo and ga-ga overload. "Not everyone's goal is to start a family," Arnett points out, laughing like a man who once thought he was one of those people. "Maya's character allows us to explore that person who goes, 'Oh, man, whatever, who cares.' She's essential to the audience, so we're not just hitting them over the head with 'You'd better like this baby—or else.'"

Even though she plays someone without kids, Rudolph says one of the reasons she wanted to be in *Up All Night* is because of the family-friendly attitude of its creators. Lorne Michaels, who is an executive producer, had kids later in life and understands what he calls "wanting to do it right and be present." Spivey, whose own kids are cared for mostly

by her husband, tries to limit the late nights and long days, and everyone's children are always welcome on set.

"It's comforting to hear someone say, 'I know this time is hard for you, and I really want you here,'" says Rudolph, 39, who was in her third trimester when Spivey shot the pilot and who returned to work six weeks after giving birth. "It's not like the *SNL* days. Nobody's looking at you going, 'That lady and her kids excuse again!' when you don't want to get drinks." Instead she says *Up All Night* is populated by "old farts" who love to discuss when to introduce solid foods to a baby's diet and how to change a diaper when Dad and the baby are both standing up.

This ease is only possible, of course, if it starts at the top. As veteran show runner Jonathan Groff explains, in the TV business it's always best to work for someone who likes their own family. "They tend to work more efficiently and not want to waste time," says Groff, whose credits include *Scrubs*, *How I Met Your Mother*, and, currently, *Happy Endings*. "The ones with dissolving marriages and unhappy home lives like to keep people around working longer to avoid going home."

While making a weekly show is always hectic, Spivey says, "I want to see my kids, and all the lady writers have kids, and I want to give

AD
1/2 HORZ.
3 COLUMNS
4 5/8 x 6 3/4

AD
2/3 – 2 COLUMNS

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9 1/2

them as much time as I can. Having kids makes you focus. We all have the same agenda, so we don't goof off."

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There is another upside of having parents play parents: They're great with babies—in this case, the twins who portray newborn Amy. "Christina is a *really* good baby wrangler," says Spivey. "She always gets them to look in the right direction." Applegate prefers to call herself the baby sheriff. "The second I see the baby's uncomfortable, we stop shooting," she says. "Those little munchies—we're protective of their time, emotions, germs, everything. They're our surrogate kids."

Michaels agrees. "When you see Will holding the baby," he says of Arnett, "you know that on some level, his having just done it with two of them at home makes it feel authentic."

Perhaps only real parents are comfortable admitting that as magical as it is to bring life into the world, sometimes you want to tear your hair out. "Can you balance it all? No," says Applegate. "Reagan has that tension there, and she mostly fouls it up. You can't do it all," she adds, even as she admits that's exactly what she's trying to do.

Applegate knows that such honesty opens the show up to criticism. Already, she says, some are "saying this is a show about parents denying that they have a kid." But while you can imagine where those people get their ammunition—the episode, for example, in which Applegate and Arnett call the cops on a rowdy neighborhood party, then go to the party so they don't appear to be the snitches—the actress says such negative analysis is simplistic and wrong. "This is a show about adjusting," she says, "not about denying their child love."

Everyone on the show, meanwhile, describes experiencing a blurring between fact and fiction. That is a departure for Arnett, who's made his name with over-the-top characters such as Gob in Fox's dysfunctional family comedy *Arrested Development* and sweaty corporate schemer Devon Banks on *30 Rock*. Using the spats he has with his wife to mine for humor? He still sounds almost surprised that it's working.

The other day a few of the writers noticed Arnett's underwear. He won't describe them except to say, "I have this random underwear I wear to keep things sexy." The writers immediately decided the character should use his undergarments the same way—which made Arnett reflect on his own behavior. "Once you have a kid, there's a real question of how you keep your sexual being alive," he says thoughtfully. Then he adds, "the writers are definitely poking fun at me." ■