Reynolds starts over in new comedy

Reynolds portrays one Phil Potter, who is thrown out by his wife, Jessica (Candice Bergen), and, in gloom and despair, does what is logical and moves to Boston. Eventually he's paired off with Jill Clayburgh (portraying, once more, an unmarried woman), and the expected happens — but in unexpected ways.

As is common with divorces, they can't seem to get dating right. They're scared and a little bewildered, which leads to odd dialogue and some amusing scenes. "I want to have sex with you," he says earnestly. "Can't you personalize it a little?" she says.

That line is more obvious than much of the film, so jumping to conclusions may get you nowhere. First, Potter wants his wife back, then he doesn't. He and Marilyn agree on a platonic relationship, and soon change their minds. Marilyn leaves him, then moves in with him. Jessica wants him back, Marilyn throws him out. Left, Right, Up, Down. Starting Over is certainly good at misdirection.

Too good, at times. For example, Jessica's character and her singing form a kind of credibility gap. For every high point in her life — marital independence, etc. — she writes and sings a top-40 song. These songs (composed by Marvin Hamlisch and Carole Bayer Sager) aren't too bad, but her singing is. Bergen presents a serious character here, and the music would make decent background score — but as soon as she opens her mouth, all farce breaks loose.

Since she only sings twice, her credibility more or less survives.

It's pretty funny. The humor hovers near a medium level, and peaks every so often. One scene finds Clayburgh the "volunteer" in a carnival dunking booth, and currently at odds with Phil, who spends about $10 throwing balls at the target. In another, Phil attempts to make his barren Boston apartment livable by buying $700 worth of furnishings and leaving the store with a parade of shopping carts. Phil is obviously at ease spending money, even if he isn't at post-marital love affairs.

— Shava Wilson