

Baby, It's You

(Docu — Color)

An ITVS presentation of a Makepeace production. (International sales: Jane Balfour Films, London.) Produced, directed, written by Anne Makepeace. Camera (color, video), Uta Briesewitz; editors, Makepeace, Jennifer Chinlund; music, Simon Kendall. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (competing), Jan. 17, 1998. Running time: 56 min.

By GLENN LOVELL

With every boomer's biological clock ticking as loudly as Big Ben, Anne Makepeace's autobiographical "Baby, It's You" couldn't be more timely. Incredibly personal doc — not to be confused with John Sayles' 1983 film of the same title — chronicles Makepeace's attempts to conceive in her late 40s. Much-in-the-news topic, plus filmmaker's wry, self-analytical take, make this ITVS project a strong choice for fests and PBS, although sub-60-minute length will make hard-top bookings a longshot.

In the midst of a midlife crisis, Makepeace is torn between having an extramarital fling and pushing aside lifelong fears of motherhood and becoming pregnant. As she's happily married to writer Peter Behrens, the former course is not really a serious option. Nor, alas, is the latter: Fertility experts report tubal blockage and lousy odds. Undeterred, Anne and Peter begin a full battery of tests and avail themselves of the latest in biotech, from ultrasound to hubby-administered hormone shots to in vitro procedures.

Indie helmer Makepeace, best known for her screenplay of the 1990 feature "Thousand Pieces of Gold," has tenaciously tackled many middle-aged women's worst fear and turned it into a two-in-one triumph. On one level, pic charts the demoralizing, at times humiliating, gauntlet late-pregnancy candidates must run. On a second, less obvious level, it's "a journey into the past" to reunite with siblings and New England relatives to sort out why she delayed having children.

What she discovers about her family's uptight, puritanical mindset is as insightful as what doctors learn with their lab samples and laproscopes. Connecticut aunts confirm that Makepeace's mother was a

cold fish who didn't know the first thing about nurturing. Makepeace's brothers, Doug and Roger, add their two cents and illustrate with eccentric lifestyles that include goat-farming and dreams of polygamy.

Pic, shot on digital video by Uta Briesewitz and then transferred to 16 mm, is so unusual and refreshing, the sitcom cliches and over-dramatized moments stand out all the more. These include hubby's sperm-on-demand test, and Makepeace's recounting of an illegal college abortion that began with a tunnel rendezvous and blindfold, and led to a sadistic doctor who worked without anesthetic as he whistled "Pop Goes the Weasel." Latter, even if true, can't help but play like loaded melodrama.

We also could have done without final, dockside scene in which Anne blames Peter for his lack of faith. Left-field recriminations feel cooked up for the sake of added drama. Little that goes before suggests anything but complete cooperation and support on both sides.

Pic ends on an upbeat, bitter-sweet note as Anne and Peter make do as surrogate parents, taking their infant niece on an outing. Despite New Age voiceover, final shots have the feel of a funny Woody Allen vignette.