

## Blu-Ray Review: 'The Spy Next Door' Functions as an Ultra-Lame Babysitter

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on May 20, 2010 - 10:33am

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CHICAGO – “The Spy Next Door” pairs a man who can’t speak English with three kids who can’t act. They’re forced to recite dialogue credited to three writers who are incapable of writing a single line of wit or originality. Worst of all, the film is directed by a man whose last halfway decent family flick was 1992’s “Beethoven.” Rarely has a mainstream release looked so much like Amateur Hour.

Over the last decade or so, director Brian Levant has specialized in making some of the most crass, annoying and audience-insulting films ever to be aimed at an audience under the age of 13 (they include “Jingle All the Way,” “Snow Dogs,” and the appropriately titled “Are We There Yet?”). The main reason I fell for “Beethoven” upon its initial release was because: a.) I was the age of its intended target audience, and b.) the film starred the woefully underrated Charles Grodin, whose deadpan timing and genuine warmth were allowed to shine through the mind-numbing slapstick.



Blu-Ray Rating: **1.5/5.0**

“Spy” is headlined by an equally gifted leading man with a specialty for turning dreck into...well, at least watchable dreck. Though Jackie Chan may be a spectacular physical comedian and a seasoned crowd-pleaser, he can only do so much with this creatively bankrupt material. He plays international spy Bob Ho, who’s on loan to the CIA, and disguises himself like an Asian Clark Kent while in public, where he falls for single mom Gillian (Amber Valletta). She’s raising three beastly brats who all speak as if they’re sitcom characters in a failed pilot. They all hate Bob because he looks like a geek, which prompts their love-struck mom to declare, “I deserve happiness too.” Her son, Ian (Will Shadley), pouts, “I hate it when old people have feelings.” Of course, Bob is ultimately forced to reveal his true identity, thus winning over the kids.



Jackie Chan and Alina Foley star in Brian Levant’s The Spy Next Door.

Photo credit: Lionsgate Home Entertainment

Is this picture the harmless equivalent of a cinematic babysitter? Sure. When I was a little kid, I loved every movie, even the bad ones. I'd sit on the edge of my chair and be amazed at the larger-than-life world unfolding before me. But the films that remained with me were the ones that ignited my imagination and refused to patronize its young audience. The filmmakers behind "Spy" assume that their viewers are dumber than a bag of bolts. Everything about the film is lazy, mediocre and instantly forgettable. The villains (led by Katherine Boecher and world's fittest man Magnús Scheving) are cartoonish caricatures, while the kids are insufferable clichés. Madeline Carroll may have displayed promise in previous films, but her role as brooding eldest daughter Farren does her no favors. And as tiny tyke Nora, Alina Foley (daughter of Dave) proves to be one of the least convincing child actors in movie history. No matter what emotion she's attempting to project, there's always a smirk threatening to spread on her face.

As for Chan, his sunny smile looks positively weary this time around. At this stage of his career, he seems doomed to play mentors in kiddie pictures (such as the upcoming "Karate Kid" remake), but hopefully none will be as bad as this. The film's sole highlights are the effortless bits of business Chan does in the corners of the frame, such as when he hangs his coat on a hook before sliding out of it.



The Spy Next Door was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on May 18th, 2010.

Photo credit: Lionsgate Home Entertainment

"The Spy Next Door" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.78:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Spanish subtitles and includes a DVD copy of the film. The scant extras include a ten-minute featurette largely consisting of the cast and crew gushing about Chan; Levant calls him, "our last great silent comedian." Anyone expecting new footage of Chan's flubbed lines or botched stunts will be sorely disappointed by the three-minute bloopers reel, which is the exact same one that's tacked on to the film's end credits.

Yet the 11-minute featurette, "Adventures in Acting with the Kids From The Spy Next Door," offers more laughs than anything else on this disc. It's alternately charming and maddening to see these three alleged talents (actually, make that four) naively speaking about a business they have little hope of succeeding within. Model-turned-lousy actress Boecher struggles to hold it together while interviewing her youngest co-star, six-year-old Foley, who spouts enough memorable one-liners to convince viewers that she probably should've just written the script. When Boecher asks her the reason why she wanted to become an actress, Foley responds, "My mom told me I wanted to be an actress." One of her memories during production was George Lopez's habit of feeding her Skittles as if she was a "circus seal." When Shadley talks about doors opening in his life, Foley helpfully informs Boecher, "He doesn't mean real doors." Foley even displays behavior worthy of a diva, such as when she claims that she's never had an acting coach and "never will." When Boecher asks Foley if she wants to be an actress when she grows up, she curtly replies, "I already am an actress and I think you know that." The girl can't act, but boy can she talk.

*'The Spy Next Door' is released by Lionsgate Home Entertainment and stars Jackie Chan, Madeline Carroll, Will Shadley, Alina Foley, Amber Valleta, Magnús Scheving, Katherine Boecher, Billy Ray Cyrus and George Lopez. It was written by Jonathan Bernstein & James Greer and Gregory Poirier and directed by Brian Levant. It was released on May 18th, 2010. It is rated PG.*



By [MATT FAGERHOLM](#) [14]

Staff Writer

HollywoodChicago.com

[matt@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:matt@hollywoodchicago.com) [13]

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