

## DVD Review: Fine Cast Adds Substance to Contrived 'City Island'

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on September 1, 2010 - 7:39am

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CHICAGO – There are many reasons why “City Island” shouldn’t work. It’s entirely contrived, from one end of the script to the other. Every gargantuan misunderstanding in the film has been spawned by festering lies, the kind that sitcoms have thrived on since the beginning of television. Yet what works in a 23-minute TV sketch often becomes tedious and exasperating when stretched to feature length.

This quirky indie comedy from writer/director Raymond De Felitta (“The Thing About My Folks”) aims to be the “Love Actually” of sitcom contrivance, balancing various misconceptions and outrageous twists until they erupt in a shrill expulsion of cathartic revelations. Like so many quirky indies, the film centers on a dysfunctional family, The Rizzos, where each member is secretly living a double life, mirroring the dichotomy of their town’s name, City Island, a small fishing community defined by De Felitta as the Hamptons of the Bronx.



DVD Rating: **3.0/5.0**

Traditionalist father Vince (Andy Garcia) is both a correctional officer and an aspiring actor, a fact he hides from his wife, Joyce (Julianna Margulies), naively lying about attending poker games whenever he’s attending acting classes. Daughter Vivian (Dominik Garcia-Lorido, daughter of Andy) is a serious college student who also happens to be a stripper. Son Vince Jr. (Ezra Miller) is a mouthy teen who harbors a fetish for feeding BBWs (a.k.a. Big Beautiful Women). Wife Joyce...smokes. All of these character quirks seem to have been tacked on by a filmmaker intent on making his work fit the mold of quirky indie cinema. None of the characters are developed enough to make their quirks truly convincing. Yet the heart of the film lies in Vince’s relationship with his long-lost adult son Tony (Steven Strait), who he discovers in prison. Tony only knows Vince as his correctional officer, which makes him doubly surprised when he finds himself invited to stay at Vince’s home, where he predictably emerges as the most level-headed member of the cartoonish clan. Their house is overflowing with clues and red herrings waiting to be discovered and taken out of context. Just in case the audience hadn’t caught on to the film’s cautionary message about deception, the soundtrack includes not one but two songs entitled, “One Lie Leads to Another.”

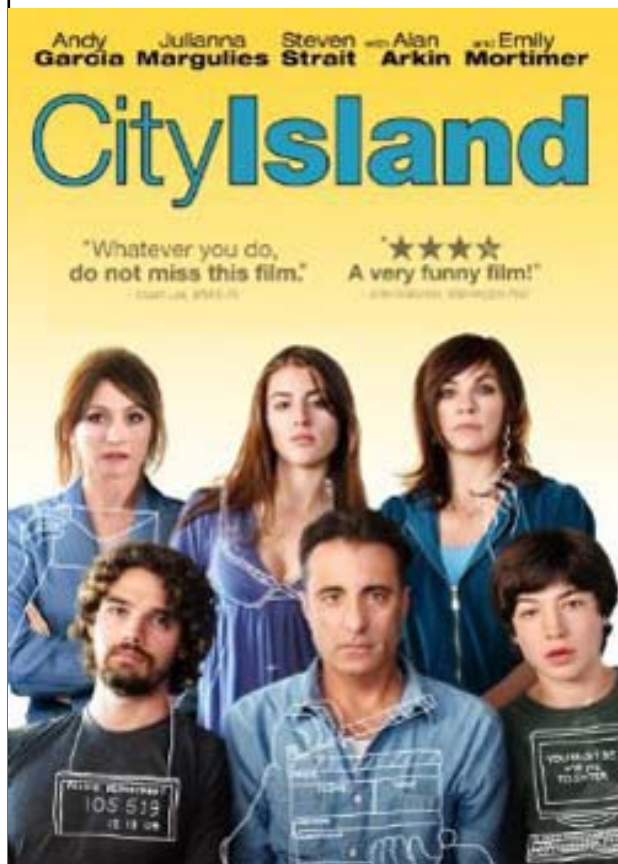


Andy Garcia (center) is the head of an exceedingly dysfunctional family in Raymond De Felitta’s City Island.

*Photo credit: Anchor Bay Entertainment*

So why does this picture still manage to amuse and delight in spite of its fundamental flaws? It all boils down to the strength of the cast. After

previously working together in “The Man from Elysian Fields,” Garcia and Margulies sport a natural chemistry, despite the fact that their scenes together center on fiery domestic disputes. Though his character is often maddeningly naive, Garcia is very touching in scenes where his character makes the first steps toward resolving issues that have long gone unacknowledged, while subverting his once rigid sense of identity. On the eve of her success with “The Good Wife,” Margulies is a joy to watch, even in her moments of unbridled frustration. The film earns its biggest laugh from a line brilliantly improvised by Margulies during the dizzying climactic sequence. Another extraneous but memorable character is Vince’s angelic scene-partner, Molly, played with utterly radiant gamine charm by Emily Mortimer, who may be one of the only actresses on the planet capable of channeling Audrey Hepburn. Even Alan Arkin pops up for a funny cameo as Vince’s Brando-bashing acting coach. Just as Arkin’s “Little Miss Sunshine” greatly benefitted from the contributions of its impeccable cast, “City Island” wears down audience resistance whenever the actors are allowed to shine.



City Island was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on  
Aug. 24th, 2010.

Photo credit: Anchor Bay Entertainment

“City Island” is presented in its 1.78:1 aspect ratio, and includes 15 minutes of deleted scenes, some of which manage to enhance the film, none more so than Garcia’s climactic monologue, jarringly deleted from the final cut. Though the monologue does needlessly restate the film’s themes (a flaw that runs throughout the picture), Garcia delivers his best work in years, opening his character’s emotional floodgates in riveting fashion. All the main actors (minus Miller) are on hand for a 16-minute discussion about the film, while De Felitta orders them to devour a starch-filled Italian dinner. There’s an interesting moment when Margulies and De Felitta clearly differ in their interpretation of how Joyce would’ve reacted, had Vince been honest with her. Margulies makes a convincing argument that Joyce wouldn’t have been as abrasive a character if Vince was simply brave enough to tell the truth.

The audio commentary from Garcia and De Felitta also has several moments of insight, such as when the actor points out his subtle homage to Jacques Tati, or when the director reveals his method for creating a “slightly chaotic” atmosphere during a dinner table scene, through the subdued use of handheld cameras, and a complete disregard for eyelines. De Felitta recounts a story about how Walter Matthau got his first acting role simply by joining a line that would hopefully lead to his post-WWII employment (the line ended up leading to a theatre audition). The story may very well be an urban myth, but it sure is a good one, and undoubtedly inspired Vince’s subplot. For his 2000 feature, “Two Family House,” De Felitta cast several people who never dreamed they would ever end up working as actors (many of them found stardom on “The Sopranos”). Perhaps the most enlightening tidbit is the director’s motivation for garnering a PG-13 rating for the film. It wasn’t to attract younger crowds, but rather older viewers turned off by violence and vulgarity. “City Island” is hardly squeaky clean, but its hip, sunny wholesomeness is ultimately endearing.

*‘City Island’ is released by Anchor Bay Entertainment and stars Andy Garcia, Julianna Margulies, Steven Strait, Dominik Garcia-Lorido, Ezra Miller, Emily Mortimer and Alan Arkin. It was written and directed by Raymond De Felitta. It was released on Aug. 24th, 2010. It is rated PG-13.*



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