

## DVD Review: Delightful Score Bolsters ‘Brooklyn Brothers Beat the Best’

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on January 23, 2013 - 12:22pm

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CHICAGO – Amiable charm compensates for scattershot laughs in Ryan O’Nan’s directorial debut, “Brooklyn Brothers Beat the Best.” There’s an undercurrent of tangible warmth that reverberates beneath O’Nan’s awkward assemblage of quirky gags and self-consciously clever dialogue. Though I spent much of the film on the fence, it eventually won me over.

There are few things more thrilling to watch in a film than two strangers connecting through their shared passion for music. That’s what happened in John Carney’s 2006 masterpiece, “Once,” as Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová brilliantly portrayed the spontaneity of an unrehearsed musical performance—allowing the Oscar-winning tune, “Falling Slowly,” to organically unfold before the audience like a blooming flower.



DVD Rating: **3.5/5.0**

A similar sort of magic occurs about a half-hour into “Brooklyn Brothers,” as mismatched duo Alex (O’Nan) and Jim (Michael Weston) start to perform a tune while driving to their next gig. Their instruments are a vibrant assortment of children’s toys that somehow manage to elicit sounds that are simultaneously amusing, endearing and naggingly melancholy. Though the music isn’t entirely original—a lot of it reminded me of DeVotchKa’s marvelous score for “Little Miss Sunshine”—it is infectiously exuberant and will inspire many a viewer to search for it on iTunes. Aside from its rousing musical numbers, however, the rest of the picture is hit-or-miss. Alex is the sort of sadsack who can’t understand why it’s not appropriate to sing songs about suicidal nihilists to a group of mentally handicapped children while dressed as a moose (his initial appearance in costume admittedly inspires a big laugh). Jim is supposed to be an eccentric free-spirit, but he struck me as more of a self-involved creep. Much of his supposedly poignant dialogue rang false in the first act, though Weston does succeed in humanizing the character as he later encounters an unforeseen series of roadblocks. Arielle Kebbel is winningly charismatic as a mysterious woman who offers to become Alex and Jim’s manager. She’s fun to watch, but her character’s volatile behavior seems to be motivated less by a troubled psyche than by the contrivances of a screenplay formula.



Brooklyn Brothers Beat the Best was released on DVD on January 8th, 2013.

Photo credit: Oscilloscope Laboratories

What ultimately caused me to cave in to this picture wasn't even its terrific music, but its soulful nuggets of truth regarding the ways in which an artwork reflects the life experiences of the artist who creates it. There's a lovely scene where Alex teaches his nephew, Jack (Jake Miller), how to write a song, taking as inspiration the boy's love of monsters. As the scene progresses, Jack gradually realizes that the monster in the song is actually Alex, and that the monster's defiant prey is in fact the girl that Alex had failed to scare away. "Brooklyn Brothers" may not be a home run, but it does have a strong batting average.

"Brooklyn Brothers Beat the Best" is presented in its 2.35:1 aspect ratio, and includes a handful of diverting extras. O'Nan is quite charming on the disc's making-of featurette, as he recalls his original pitch for the film ("Once" meets "Planes, Trains and Automobiles") while gushing about the generosity of his "Dry Land" co-stars Melissa Leo and Wilmer Valderrama in taking such small roles in his first feature. It was microbudget indies such as the Duplass Brothers' great "Puffy Chair" that inspired O'Nan to try his hand at directing. The Jersey band Crayon Rosary largely served as the inspiration for the Brooklyn Brothers' music, which was all performed live in the film. There's nearly a half-hour of endearing footage from Brooklyn's Northside Festival where O'Nan and Weston re-teamed to perform three songs from the film and later take part in a Q&A with Indiewire's Nigel Smith. Freed from their characters' neuroses and hang-ups, this duo proves to be even more lovable. Together, they could very well beat the best.

*'Brooklyn Brothers Beat the Best' is released by Oscilloscope Laboratories and stars Ryan O'Nan, Michael Weston, Arielle Kebbel, Jake Miller, Andrew McCarthy and Jason Ritter. It was written and directed by Ryan O'Nan. It was released on January 8th, 2013. It is not rated.*

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