

Blu-Ray Review: Clint Eastwood’s ‘Changeling’ Features Great Performance By Angelina Jolie

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 12, 2009 - 1:49pm

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CHICAGO – I usually don’t agree with suggestions that certain movies need to be seen twice to be appreciated. If a movie doesn’t work on first viewing, then it simply doesn’t work. Having said that, watching [Clint Eastwood](#) [6]’s “[Changeling](#) [5]” a second time on Blu-Ray made me appreciate the final product significantly more than my disappointed reaction to it in theaters.

What struck me about the first time I saw “Changeling,” starring Oscar-nominee [Angelina Jolie](#) [3], [John Malkovich](#) [12], [Jeffrey Donovan](#) [11], [Colm Feore](#) [7], [Amy Ryan](#) [2], and [Jason Butler Harner](#) [10], was the disjointed storytelling in the film and the way the black and white themes don’t play into Eastwood’s strengths as a director.



Angelina Jolie stars in Clint Eastwood’s Changeling
Photo credit: Anthony Michael Rivetti

Eastwood has always been at his best when his films deal with gray areas of behavior and morality. “Unforgiven,” “Mystic River,” “Million Dollar Baby” - all of these films feature characters caught in complex moral situations. Sometimes good and bad can reside in the same troubled soul and very few filmmakers have captured that in drama like Eastwood.



J. Michael Straczynski's screenplay for "Changeling" is missing that complexity and subtlety that has marked Eastwood's best work. In "Changeling," characters are pure good, pure evil, pure heroism, or pure corruption.

And the film fluctuates wildly in styles, trying to be a drama, women's rights story, period piece, and thriller all in one. There's a fine line between making trying to make an unpredictable one and making one that feels disjointed and I think "Changeling" sometimes crosses that line.

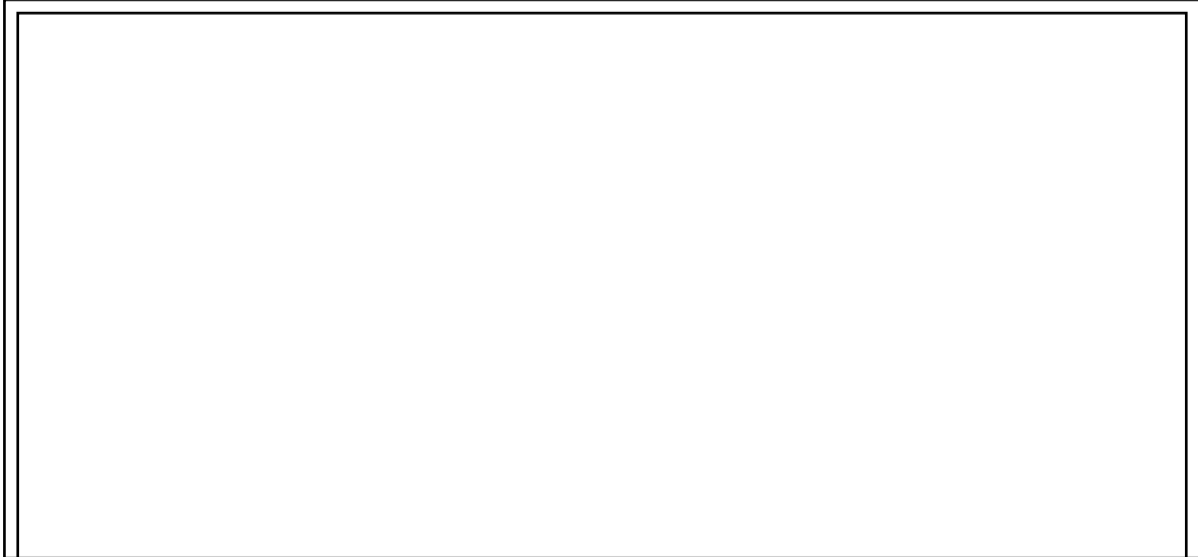
Watching it a second time and being able to put those issues aside, I was able to appreciate Eastwood's film more than I did in theaters. What felt disjointed on the big screen with only one viewing, feels more ambitious on Blu-Ray and it's easier to get over the lack of gray area when you know not to look for it.

"Changeling" is a brutally dark, upsetting true story of a single mother in 1920s Los Angeles. Christine Collins (Angelina Jolie) was living an ordinary life until she came home from work to find her son missing. The LAPD at the time was already knee-deep in bad PR due to increasing corruption and couldn't handle more bad press. They returned another orphaned child to Ms. Collins and tried to convince her that he was her son.

Collins knew immediately that the boy was not hers - differences in height and circumcision are pretty obvious signs - but Captain J.J. Jones (Jeffrey Donovan) and the rest of the police force ignored her until they eventually threw her in a psychiatric hospital to keep her quiet. Only the powerful radio figure Reverend Gustav Briegleb (John Malkovich) kept her story alive long enough for the shocking truth to come out.

Angelina Jolie gave one of the best performances of 2008 in "Changeling," taking a part that would have been tragically melodramatic in the wrong hands and making subtle, interesting decisions instead of descending into great hysteria. Jolie is fantastic and she makes the film worth at least a rental on Blu-Ray.

Having said that, I still think "Changeling" is a bit of a missing opportunity. Trying to tell so many stories in the film's 141 minute running time makes everyone a bit two-dimensional. The police force *must have* realized at some point that they were doing something wrong, but they are painted as two-dimensional villains, draining the film of believability. There's a complex, character-driven mini-series in this amazing true story that has been reduced to just the essentials and anchored by one central, riveting performance.





Angelina Jolie stars in Clint Eastwood's Changeling
Photo credit: Anthony Michael Rivetti

The design of "Changeling" looks great in HD and the precise and detailed costumes and art direction should impress in 1080P, but I do wish the world felt more lived-in than backlot. Everything about "Changeling" looks *too* good and not quite realistic. The pretty picture of the Blu-Ray release mesmerizes until it dawns on you that admiring the design keeps it and the film as a whole at arms length.

Technically, "Changeling" is good but not one of Universal's best. The blacks and blues often blend a bit too much in the film's many darker scenes and, in general, the picture doesn't pop like you think it would. The audio is similarly right around average with an English DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 track.

U-Control is still my favorite studio Blu-Ray function on the market and "Changeling" makes smart use of it, providing interactive cast and crew interviews and behind-the-scenes footage using the Picture in Picture feature. U-Control also allows the viewer to see pictures of "Los Angeles: Then and Now" as the story unfolds to compare the city as it was in the '20s to the sprawling metropolis today. Archival images and documents are also presented through U-Control allowing the viewer access to the real-life individuals and story portrayed in the film.

Two HD features - "Partners in Crime: Clint Eastwood and Angelina Jolie" and "The Common Thread: Angelina Jolie Becomes Christine Collins" - round out the Blu-Ray release of "Changeling".

Ultimately, "Changeling" is a good film that I wanted to be great in theaters but it's easier to forgive the film's flaws with a studio as great as Universal producing its Blu-Ray release.

'Changeling' is released by Universal Home Entertainment and stars Angelina Jolie, John Malkovich, Amy Ryan, Jeffrey Donovan, Colm Feore, and Jason Butler Harner. It was written by J. Michael Straczynski and directed by Clint Eastwood. It will be released on February 17th, 2009.



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