

FAQ's

THE SPY WHO KNEW ME is the second feature film from A.B.L.E. (Artists Breaking Limits & Expectations), a Chicago-based nonprofit organization offering performing arts opportunities for individuals with Down syndrome and other developmental differences. And ensemble cast of 20 actors with Down syndrome collaborated with a professional film crew and teaching artists to create this unique spy movie.

What is THE SPY WHO KNEW ME about?

A riff on the classic spy-adventure genre epitomized by James Bond, THE SPY WHO KNEW ME follows super spy Tabitha Link and the ladies of the all-female agency U.N.I.T.E. After receiving an anonymous tip, Tabitha winds up at the scene of a jewelry heist where she sees a familiar face from her past. She and her fellow spies must race to find the connections between a series of thefts, a top-secret military experiment, and several missing operatives before they lose themselves completely to the evil organization E.C.H.O.

What was the inspiration for THE SPY WHO KNEW ME?

In 2015, the ensemble devised their own original play called *What You Will*. As part of that show, we all wrote our own monologues using the same prompts ("I am..., I want..., I can..., I love..., I say..., I know..."). A.B.L.E. co-founder and teaching artist Lawrence Kern crafted the screenplay for THE SPY WHO KNEW ME with these monologues in mind, and tailored roles to each individual's strengths and personality. Many of the monologues are incorporated verbatim into the final scene of the film. The story celebrates differences and stresses the importance of holding on to what makes us unique. "People are more than one thing," Tabitha reminds us. "A world where everyone's the same isn't worth living in."

Where was the movie filmed?

THE SPY WHO KNEW ME was filmed entirely on location in Chicago with the assistance at 11 major locations:

- 1) The Menomonee Club Drucker Center
- 2) Fey & Co Jewelers
- 3) Formally Modern Tuxedo
- 4) The Century Shopping Center
- 5) The Union League Club of Chicago
- 6) Burnt City Bowling
- 7) Chicago Shakespeare Theater
- 8) The Nature Boardwalk at Lincoln Park Zoo
- 9) The Field Museum
- 10) Space Stage Studios
- 11) Firehouse Studios

What were the shoots like?

A typical shoot lasted about 3 hours. Crew and teaching artists would arrive first to set up equipment, costumes, and go over plans for the day (30mins). As the actors arrived, they would get into wardrobe and do a group warm-up (30mins). After a quick rehearsal to review content and blocking (10min), it was time to start filming! Shoots began with wide shots to give all the actors a chance to work together and play off of each other. The crew would then work with each actor individually for close-ups and reaction shots.

Did actors memorize their lines?

Some of the cast worked independently to learn their lines, but it was not mandatory. The filmmaking process was set up so that everyone would feel confident and proud without the pressure and stress of memorizing lines or the stiffness of reading from cue cards. As we do with A.B.L.E.'s stage productions, each actor paired with a teaching artist who stayed off-camera (sometimes hiding under set pieces or behind props) to drop-in lines. In the editing room, the teaching artists' voices were removed, so only the actors can be heard in the final cut.

Who was the crew movie?

The core crew consisted of local Chicago artists:

- 1) Lawrence Kern – writer & director
- 2) Katie Yohe – Producer & Lead Teaching Artist
- 3) Andrew McNally – Camera
- 4) Brock Alter – Camera
- 5) Alex Sokol or Alex Palma – Sound recording
- 6) Margaret Sheils – Production coordinator & script supervisor

These individuals were on set every day throughout filming. Several A.B.L.E. facilitators also rotated in and out of locations to help with costumes, dropping in, and taking still photos.

Brock, Andrew, and Alex Sokol continued to work throughout editing and post-production.

Who wrote the music?

THE SPY WHO KNEW ME features an original score by Chicago-based musician Alex Sokol, and Grammy-nominated composer and producer Carlos Villalobos, Jr., known for his work on the Fox series EMPIRE.

How long did production take?

Making THE SPY WHO KNEW ME took about 18 months from start to finish. Fundraising launched in March 2016, with pre-production starting not long after. Actors filmed for 2 weeks straight in early August of 2016. The editing team had picture lock in April 2017, and then spent a long time working on special effects, color correction, and sound editing. THE SPY WHO KNEW ME premiered the movie to our friends and families on September 16, 2017 in a special screening at The Landmark Century Center Cinema.

How was the film funded?

Funding for the film was made possible through a campaign on crowd-funding platform, Hatchfund. Donations ranged from \$10 to \$2000, and 142 individual donors contributed a total of over \$22,000 in exchange for exclusive project "perks" including autographed scripts, film props, and invitations to an exclusive staged reading of the screenplay with the cast and crew.

What is the running time of the movie?

THE SPY WHO KNEW ME is 67mins, including credits.