

Blu-Ray Review: Honest, Human Drama of Excellent ‘The Messenger’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 25, 2010 - 12:08pm

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CHICAGO – Just before the Oscar nominations for 2009 were to be announced, a few pundits went out on a limb and predicted that not only would Oren Moverman’s “The Messenger” be nominated for Best Supporting Actor (Woody Harrelson) and Best Original Screenplay but that it would also find its way into several more categories, including even Best Picture. If more people had seen the film, I believe it would have made the Academy’s top ten. It’s a spectacular drama, one that gets richer and more impressive on repeat viewing. And its recently-released Blu-ray edition treats this spectacular film with the respect it deserves.



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

The two-disc special edition of this expertly-made and performed drama includes both Blu-ray and DVD versions of the film along with excellent bonus material and even packaging that stands apart from the traditional release. It reminds me of a Criterion release, complete with an essay on the case by Anthony Swofford, the author of “Jarhead”. So many studios, especially independent ones who may be strapped for cash, unceremoniously release their smaller films on bare-bones, lackluster DVDs. Oscilloscope deserves an amazing amount of praise for treating a small film with the respect it deserves.



The Messenger was released on Blu-ray and DVD on May 18th, 2010

Photo credit: Oscilloscope

With a shocking lack of manipulation, melodrama, or easy lessons, “The Messenger” says more about honest, relatable humanity than most dramas of the last few years. It deals with the unpopular issue of not just the cost of war but how common it is for people to refuse to address universal issues like loss and grief. But it does so merely by staying true to its characters, some of the most well-rounded and believable of the year. It’s one of those rare films where it feels like every character in it existed before the first scene and after the last. It’s not an easy film to

watch, but it's required viewing.



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Photo credit: Oscilloscope

Giving the best performance of his already-promising career, Ben Foster stars as Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery, a troubled soldier who has just returned home from his tour due to injury but has a few months left to serve. He is assigned to the Casualty Notification Office - the men and women who knock on the door of the next of kin when their loved one has been killed in the line of duty.

Will is partnered with the more-experienced and tough Captain Tony Stone (Oscar nominee Woody Harrelson, reminding all of us how incredible an actor he can be with the right material). Stone and Montgomery do have something of a traditional arc in that they start off noticing their differences and end up noticing their similarities, but the development of their dynamic never feels false. The genuine relationship at the core of "The Messenger" can be at least partially credited to perfect chemistry between two great actors.

Debut director Oren Moverman constantly made the right decision as a director when options were placed in front of him. Working collaboratively with his cast - most of the casualty notifications were unscripted - and largely with unbroken takes, he has crafted a film where the viewer often feels like they're a third member of the CNO, learning how to deal with grief along with Will and Tony.



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Photo credit: Oscilloscope

Oscilloscope knows this is the most important film of their short existence and have treated it as such, releasing a combo disc set that unfolds like a Criterion release for an acknowledged classic. And the technical elements of the Blu-ray transfer are flawless. The HD picture doesn't look overly polished with just the right levels of color and line detail. It's not "Avatar," but it's a great transfer.

The special features are similarly above par including one in particular that works as an amazing companion piece to the film called "Notification". In the research process for the film, a documentarian went along with Moverman as he was allowed to actually experience the world of the CNO. It's a tough piece to watch but it illustrates the depth of the research for this film and how seriously Moverman and his team took their sensitive subject matter.

Other great special features include an audio commentary by Moverman, Producer Lawrence Inglee, Ben Foster, and Woody Harrelson; "Going Home: Reflections From the Set;" Variety Screening Series Q & A with Moverman, Harrelson, Co-writer Alessandro Camon, Inglee, and Director of Photography Bobby Bukowski. All of the special features feel like they enhance the experience of the film instead of merely serving as filler.

"The Messenger" was one of the best films of 2009 but that doesn't always translate to the world of DVD and Blu-ray. I wish I could personally thank the team at Oscilloscope for this release, easily one of the best Blu-rays of the year to date.

'The Messenger' is released by Oscilloscope and stars Ben Foster, Woody Harrelson, Samantha Morton, Jena Malone, and Steve Buscemi. It was written by Alessandro Camon & Oren Moverman and directed by Moverman. It was released on May 18th, 2010 and is rated R.



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