

Blu-ray Review: Nostalgic, Compelling ‘Super 8’ is a Triumph

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 7, 2011 - 9:21pm

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CHICAGO – The sincerity of “Super 8” is the wondrous highlight of this film. Director J.J. Abrams creates a valentine to the lives in his childhood, and the films within that dream state. Combining nostalgia, suspense and of course, hope, “Super 8” is one of the more emotional and impactful American films of the year.



Blu-ray Rating: **4.5/5.0**

Taking a page out of the producer Steven Spielberg’s playbook, Abrams imagines a town within that universe that is middle American and adventurous at the same time, with pesky military officials infiltrating the serenity and fabricating chaos. Part “E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial,” “Close Encounters of the Third Kind” and even “Poltergeist,” “Super 8” is an homage to the master Spielberg, while upping the ante a bit, much like J.J. Abrams did in his “Star Trek” reboot.

As the film opens in the summer of 1979, a middle school boy named Joe Lamb (Joel Courtney) has lost his mother in a steel mill accident. His bereft father, Sheriff Jackson (Kyle Chandler), blames a co-worker named Louis (Ron Eldard). Joe gets back to the only thing that makes sense to him, making Super 8 movies with his friends Charles (Riley Griffiths), Cary (Ryan Lee) and Martin (Gabriel Basso). Added to the cast is the daughter of Louis, a girl named Alice (Elle Fanning), and it’s clear that Joe has a crush on her.



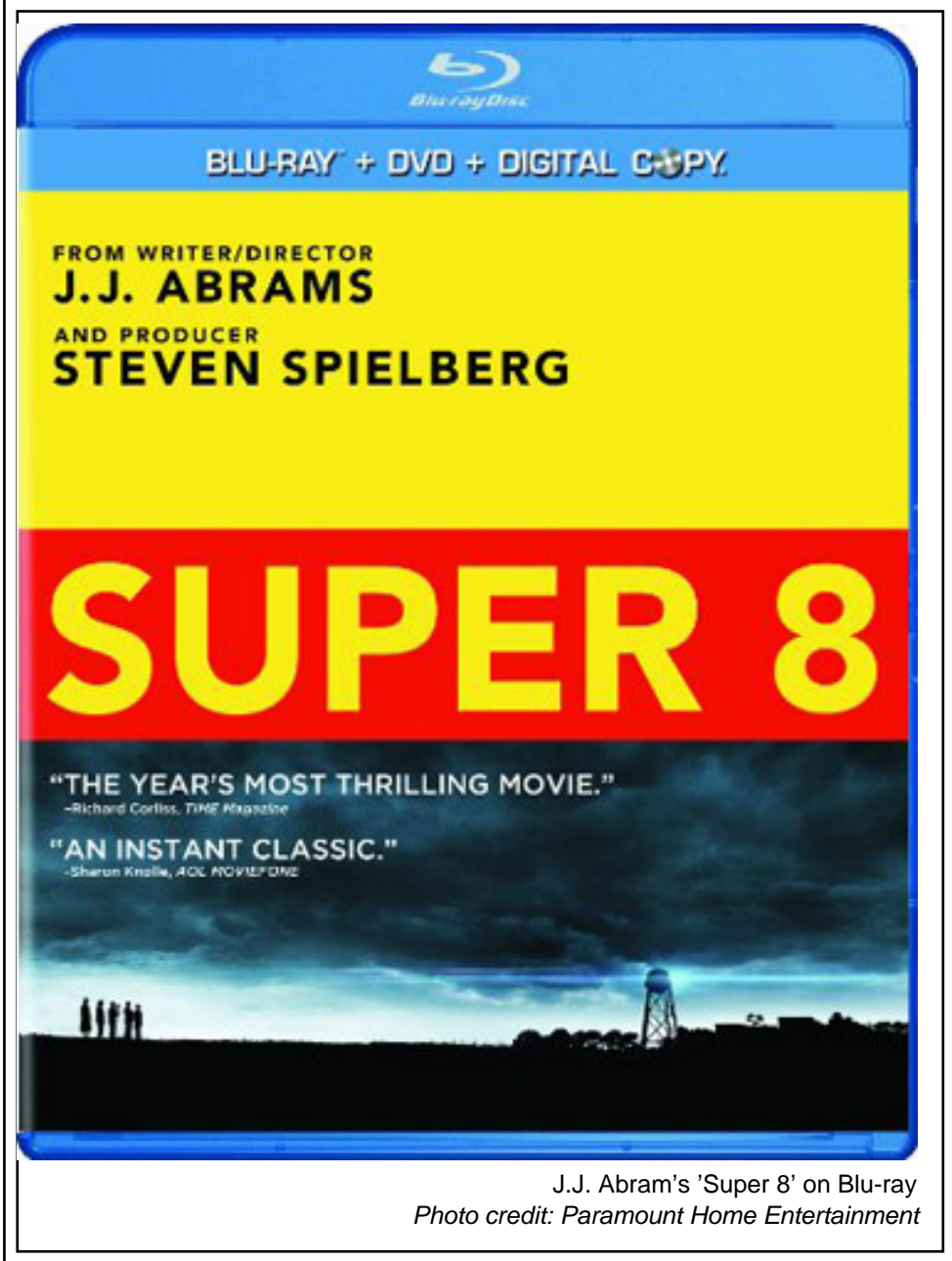
L-R: Martin (Gabriel Basso), Cary (Ryan Lee), Joe (Joel Courtney) and Charles (Riley Griffiths) in ‘Super 8’

Photo credit: Paramount Home Entertainment

When filming a key sequence in their latest zombie movie, Alice and the boys witness a horrific train accident. This starts a chain of odd events in the town of Lillian, Ohio, including missing dogs, petty thefts and disruptive accidents. The military intervenes to the point of martial law, which raises the suspicion of Sheriff Jackson. All hell begins to break loose, as the meaning of the train wreck becomes clear, and only

the boys have the key to what exactly is going on.

1970s-era boys on a unique adventure is crazily Spielberg-like, and the almost comic personalities they display are spot on for the era. Yes, there are the clothes and references to disco and “My Sharona” (the soundtrack hit to that summer), but there is no overt hey-it’s-the-1970s-everybody that makes other period attempts so weak. It’s nostalgia without leaving it in the oven too long, and the actors who recreate it are great reminders of kids in that particular era.



There is a unique use of symbolism in this film, that borders on the edge of cloying, but combined with the emergency circumstances in the film makes perfect sense. Abrams does a switch on Spielberg's “E.T.,” this time it is the fathers who are single, with one raising a son and the other a daughter, and the coming together of these opposite-in-style men with a common situation is one of the endearing qualities of the film.

Adolescence, especially the parts that are none too savory, are also on display. The awkwardness of the first girl crush is perfectly handled, down to a friendship that is almost destroyed by two boys liking the same girl. The “event” in the film will most likely be the boys-to-men moment that will leave their childhood behind, but for one last summer they savor the joy of being in that brand and time of freedom.

The Blu-ray is packed with features, which is expected in anything Spielberg touches. There is an entire short film deconstructing the train crash, and eight other featurettes that delve into other elements of the film. Deleted scenes and J.J. Abram's commentary round out the exquisite package.

The movie was filmed in my mother's hometown of Weirton, West Virginia. In one quick frame glance, the house that my mother grew up in, the one my grandmother lived in from the 1920s to the 1980s, is seen in “Super 8.” There is a certain spirituality to that, akin to the wonder and magic that the Abrams/Spielberg team crafted into this incredible homage, perfect for the summer or anytime.

Paramount Home Entertainment's presents a Blu-ray release of “Super 8.” Featuring Kyle Chandler, Elle Fanning, Joel Courtney, Riley Griffiths, Ryan Lee, Gabriel Basso and Ron Eldard. Written and directed by J.J. Abrams. Rated “PG-13”



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [16]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [15]

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