

## Blu-ray Review: ‘Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close’ Marred By Awful Acting

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on April 9, 2012 - 8:38am

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CHICAGO – So there I was at a packed awards consideration screening for Stephen Daldry’s latest prestige-filled tearjerker. Though a few of my fellow colleagues were grumbling about the grim task of sitting through more Daldry Oscar bait, my heart was filled with goodwill. I loved Daldry’s feature debut, “Billy Elliot,” and had plenty of favorable things to say about “The Hours” and “The Reader.”

Yet it was only 10 minutes into “Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close” that I began to wonder if the projectionist was playing a practical joke on us. Surely this picture couldn’t have been the work of a three-time Oscar nominee. On the occasions when it became too painful to keep my eyes focused on the screen, I glanced at the expressions of my peers, which looked like outtakes from the “Springtime for Hitler” sequence in “The Producers.” When the horrible reality sunk in that the lead performance was not intended to be a joke, I braced myself for what proved to be one of the worst moviegoing experiences of my life.



Blu-ray Rating: **1.0/5.0**

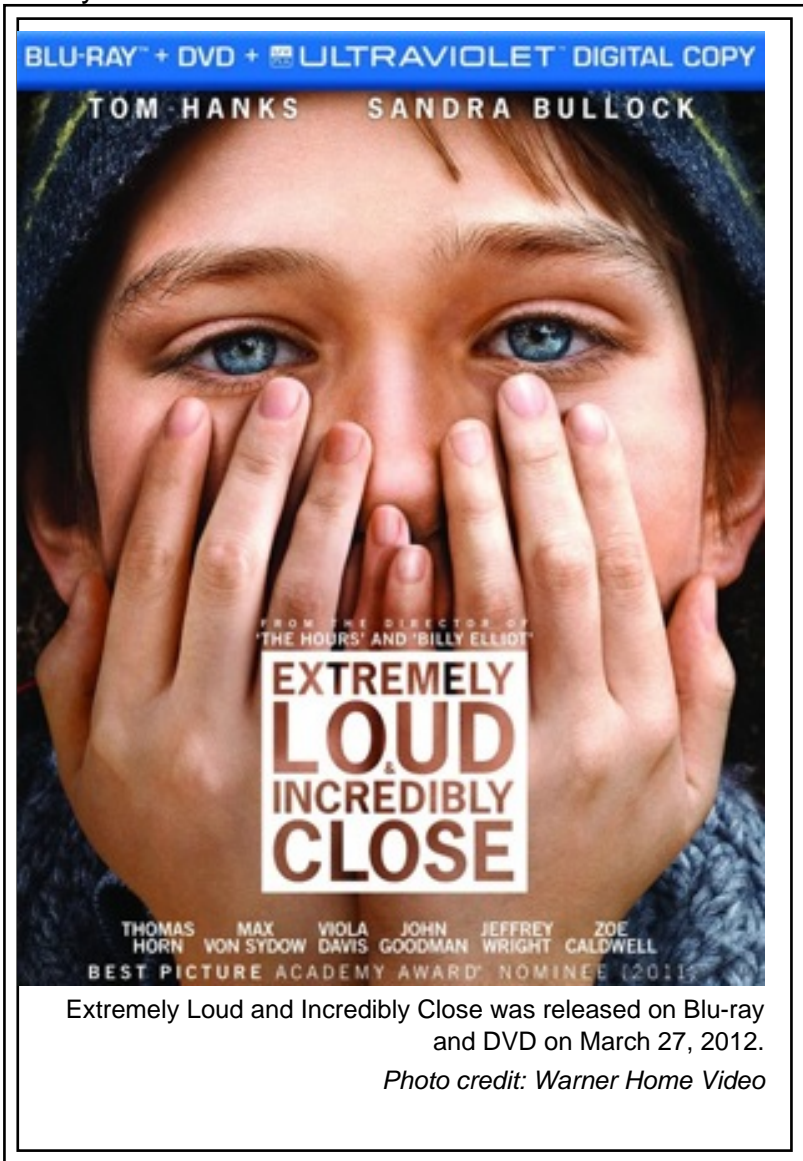
In the past, Daldry has been especially adept at coaxing remarkably raw and vulnerable performances from young actors such as Jamie Bell and David Kross. I fully expected the director to achieve that same magic with his new leading man, pint-sized “Jeopardy” champion Thomas Horn. Yet this risky casting decision proved to be the most disastrous miscalculation of his career. As a sad but plucky boy afflicted with Asperger’s Syndrome, Horn delivers the most cloyingly artificial and thoroughly repellant child performance I’ve ever seen. He over-enunciates his dialogue with such self-consciously labored mannerisms that he single-handedly grinds every single scene to a thudding halt. Daldry surrounds him with the crème de la crème of A-list talent, but their efforts are in vain. Horn acts his little heart out, but there isn’t a frame where he actually appears to be inhabiting his character’s skin. His performance is series of postures—happy postures, sad postures, angry postures—that might look great in a film still but are glaringly unconvincing when seen in motion. He delivers his lines as if he’s reading a dramatic book report for his fourth grade class. The kid gets an A for effort and an F for execution, and Professor Daldry is entirely to blame. There are several moments when Horn’s character is so shrill and irritating, particularly when he’s acting opposite a silent Max von Sydow (who scored an Oscar nod—perhaps out of sympathy), that the film stops merely being bad and descends to depths occupied only by the truly unwatchable.



Thomas Horn stars in Stephen Daldry's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*.

*Photo credit: Francois Duhamel*

Of course, the casting of Horn can't be faulted alone for this crock pot of shame. The script by Eric Roth, adapted from Jonathan Safran Foer's less-than-beloved 2005 novel, is a travesty of carefully calculated exploitation. Its cynical use of the September 11th terrorist attacks as an easy emotional anchor to carry the audience through a series of phony plot contrivances is beyond shameful. We're expected to believe that 9/11 victim Thomas (a bored Tom Hanks) was a heckuva good dad to little Oskar (Horn), especially when he took advantage of his kid's overactive mind by entertaining it with pointless scavenger hunts. After Thomas's death, Oskar finds a key in his dad's closet that he decides must have been left for him to find. So Oskar searches for the corresponding keyhole by walking all over New York City by himself, entering strangers' homes and thankfully not running into a single pedophile. Meanwhile, distraught mom Linda (Sandra Bullock) wallows in despair at home without bothering to question her son's transparent lies. To describe this plot as "improbable" would be like calling Oscar the Grouch "mildly cantankerous."



*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* was released on Blu-ray and DVD on March 27, 2012.  
*Photo credit: Warner Home Video*

Horn clearly was never meant to be an actor, but I'd imagine that even his most gifted peers (such as Asa Butterfield and Kodi Smit-McPhee)

would have tremendous difficulty lending credibility to Roth's script. Oskar is the latest Hollywood character whose Asperger's is used to justify gobs of hyper-articulate exposition delivered with the precociousness of an insufferable class know-it-all. Oskar comes off as such an entitled little brat that it's impossible to feel any sympathy for his plight. When doorman Stan (John Goodman) reasonably asks him a question, the boy responds, "Succotash my Balzac, dipshiitake!" a hideous line that should, in all fairness, be credited as a Foer original.

Perhaps the most wince-inducing scene of all occurs when Oskar feels betrayed by von Sydow (as he often does), and verbally berates him while running alongside his taxi. I'm already waiting for the inevitable YouTube parodies of this scene in which Oskar is crushed by an anvil. With the affected emotion of a soap starlet and the focused eyes of a newscaster glued feverishly to a teleprompter, Oskar boasts about his late father: "He loved the smell of gasoline! He hated tomatoes! He never talked to me like I was a kid! So, in a way, your boots are heavier than mine." Somehow, this cataclysmically awful line is made even worse by Daldry's decision to place Oskar's extremely loud jibber-jabber incredibly close to the lens.

"Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.4:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, French and Spanish audio tracks, and includes a Blu-ray, DVD and digital copy of the film. Extras include a 20-minute making-of featurette, a rather dull 44-minute profile of von Sydow directed by his son (too bad he wasn't around to chronicle his dad's work with Ingmar Bergman), and a dutiful look at one of the real-life 9/11 victims whose picture is seen in the film. Of course, the only extra that sparked my morbid interest was the 7-minute "Finding Oskar" featurette, which offers a few hints as to what went wrong. Dialogue supervisor William Conacher claims that anyone can act just as long as they get the right help off-camera. He says that he gave Horn a verb for him "to play on every line," and in a brief behind-the-scenes excerpt, is seen telling Horn precisely what words to emphasize during a particular shot. It's clear from the "Jeopardy" footage that Horn is exceptionally smart for his age, and his onset perfectionism made him an instant delight to his co-stars. Alas, Horn's meticulous attention to the calculated math of cinema has caused him to ignore the instincts that would've resulted in intuitive naturalism. He's too clever by half.

*'Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close' is released by Warner Home Video and stars Thomas Horn, Max von Sydow, Sandra Bullock, Zoe Caldwell, Viola Davis, John Goodman, Jeffrey Wright and Tom Hanks. It was written by Eric Roth and directed by Stephen Daldry. It was released on March 27, 2012. It is rated PG-13.*



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