

Blu-ray Review: ‘Hyde Park on Hudson’ Wastes Audacious Turn by Bill Murray

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on April 12, 2013 - 1:38pm

- [Bill Murray](#) [2]
- [Blu-ray Review](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Hyde Park on Hudson](#) [5]
- [Laura Linney](#) [6]
- [Matt Fagerholm](#) [7]
- [Olivia Colman](#) [8]
- [Roger Michell](#) [9]
- [The King’s Speech](#) [10]
- [Universal Studios Home Entertainment](#) [11]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [12]

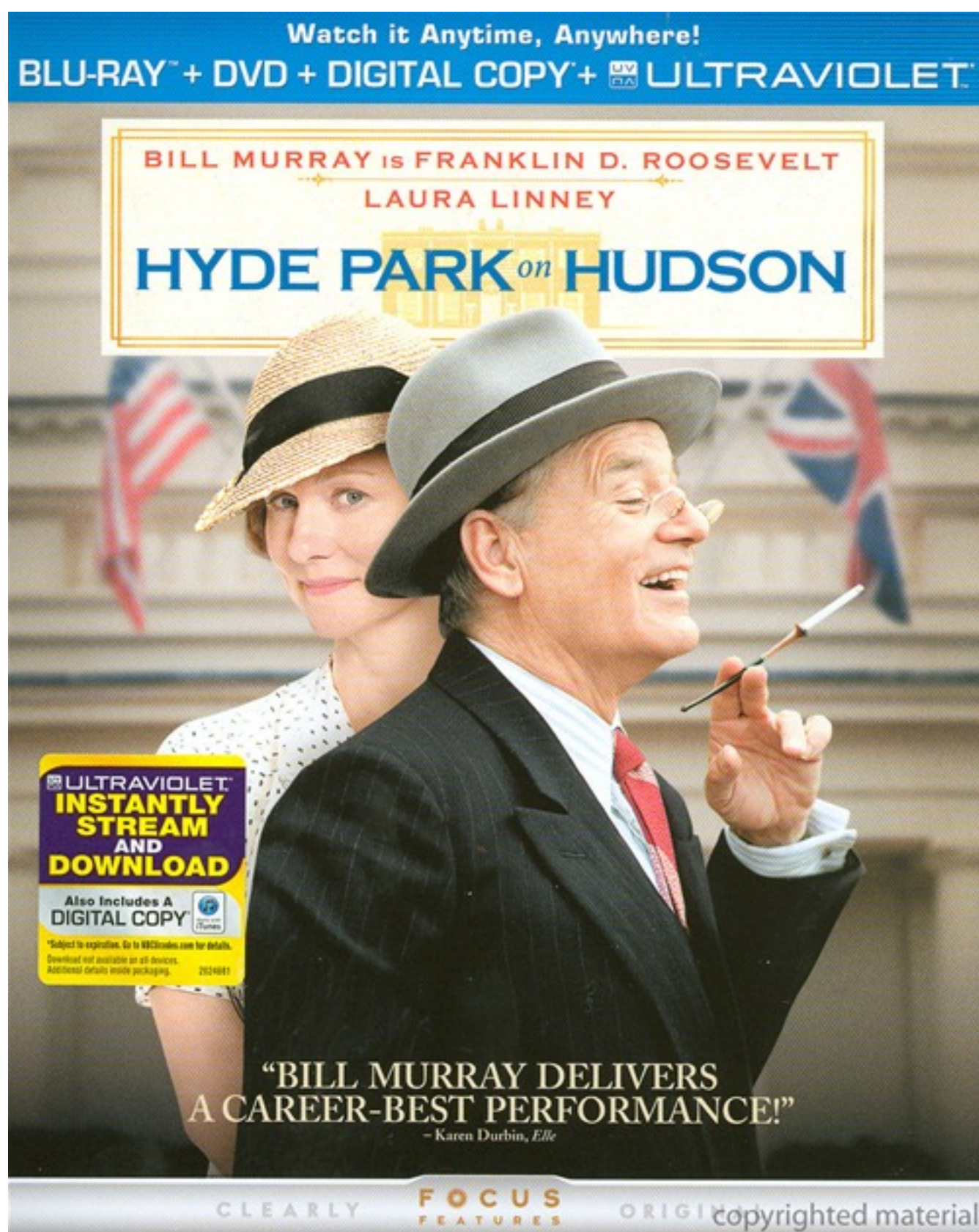
CHICAGO – I’m always astonished when a filmmaker takes a fascinating figure immortalized in history and decides to explore one of the least interesting aspects of their life. “The Iron Lady” was so fixated on celebrating Margaret Thatcher’s gender that it ignored both her achievements and her controversies. “My Week with Marilyn” made the maddening decision to view its titular Hollywood icon through the perspective of a starry-eyed bore.

And now here’s “Hyde Park on Hudson,” a ghastly piece of would-be Oscar bait sure to offend every history buff eager to see a solid biopic (or, at the very least, character portrait) of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This is a president whose policies are still a vital part of the national discourse today, and whose steadfast determination to pull America out of a hellacious Depression led to its transformation. Ed Asner has been touring the country in a one-man show about the last days of FDR’s life, and it’s just wonderful (I saw it a couple years ago in the Chicago suburbs). This film doesn’t have a sliver of that bare-bones production’s insight.



Blu-ray Rating: **1.5/5.0**

Whereas a great picture like Steven Spielberg’s “Lincoln” took a small vignette from its immortal leader’s life, and used it to illustrate so much about the man’s methodical genius, his intriguing contradictions and his complex personality, Roger Michell’s “Hyde Park on Hudson” reduces a great man to a twinkly, perverse caricature. This is a profound disappointment, considering how devoted its star, Bill Murray, was to fully submerging himself in the role. This film marks the first time in years Murray has ventured far outside the boundaries of his typical misanthropic persona, and he’s initially captivating to watch. But it soon becomes clear that the script by playwright Richard Nelson has little interest in understanding what made the towering president tick. It’s more preoccupied with the rumored fling Roosevelt allegedly had with his distant cousin, Daisy (an uncommonly drab Laura Linney). They share a squirm-inducing scene in a parked car about 15 minutes into the picture that suddenly paints FDR as pathetic lecher. It’s such a jarringly distasteful (not to mention ahistorical) sequence that the film never recovers from it, especially as it strains to deliver broad farce when King George VI (Samuel West) and Queen Elizabeth (Olivia Colman) pay a visit to FDR’s country home. Colman is one of the most underrated actresses in the business—she proved her comedic chops on the uproarious UK series, “Peep Show,” and was unforgettably wrenching in Paddy Considine’s “Tyrannosaur”—and her delightfully befuddled chemistry with West is the sole highlight of “Hudson.”



Hyde Park on Hudson was released on Blu-ray and DVD on April 9th, 2013.

Photo credit: Universal Studios Home Entertainment

Yet as good as West and Colman are in the roles, they are pale reflections of the royal couple portrayed in Tom Hooper's infinitely superior drama, "The King's Speech." Whereas that film built a convincing case that George's severe speech impediment was greatly diminished by his sessions with a therapist, "Hudson" points to FDR as George's potential savior. That's frankly impossible to believe, considering that all FDR does is tell George to loosen up and eat a hot dog. The script's lackluster portrayal of FDR's diplomatic maneuvers is laughably shallow, while its portrayal of his domestic life consists of irritating stereotypes (his extraordinary wife, Eleanor, is particularly ill-served by her worthless scenes). Roger Michell has directed some good films over the years, including "Notting Hill," "Venus," and especially "Changing Lanes," featuring Ben Affleck and Samuel L. Jackson in what may be their best performances. "Hudson" is an embarrassment no one deserves to sit through.

"Hyde Park on Hudson" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, French and Spanish subtitles, and is available in a Blu-ray/DVD/digital copy/UltraViolet combo pack. Extras include two deleted scenes, two featurettes and a commentary track where Michell and producer Kevin Loader discuss the formidable task of attempting to contact Murray, which could be the subject of a film in itself. They ended up getting the script to him through veteran props master Kris Moran ("The Royal Tenenbaums"), and Murray accepted the role via text. Memo to all filmmakers wishing to cast Bill Murray: hire Kris Moran.

'Hyde Park on Hudson' is released by Universal Studios Home Entertainment and stars Bill Murray, Laura Linney, Samuel West, Olivia Colman, Elizabeth Marvel and Olivia Williams. It was written by Richard Nelson and directed by Roger Michell. It was released on April 9th, 2013. It is rated R.



[13]

By [MATT FAGERHOLM](#) [14]

Staff Writer

HollywoodChicago.com

matt@hollywoodchicago.com [13]

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/blu-ray-review>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hyde-park-on-hudson>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/laura-linney>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/matt-fagerholm>
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