

## Interview: Eddie Redmayne Explains ‘The Theory of Everything’

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CHICAGO – Portraying Stephen Hawking, as Eddie Redmayne did in “The Theory of Everything,” required an intense physicality and emotionalism that was projected from different angles, much more challenging than a usual biographical role. In this instance, Redmayne projects the feeling of Hawking’s time and space.

Eddie Redmayne has been on a quick ascension path in his film career, while also conquering television and theater in his native England. After notable roles in the last three years in “My Week with Marilyn” and “Les Misérables,” Redmayne has took on the difficult task of playing Stephen Hawking from a healthy, genius-level university student to the wheelchair bound and computer-voiced theorist with a degenerative nerve disease (ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease). The performance is remarkable on many levels, but especially in communicating the soul and love – beyond a physical handicap – upon which a human being exists.



Eddie Redmayne is Stephen Hawking in ‘The Theory of Everything’

*Photo credit: Focus Features*

HollywoodChicago.com interviewed the actor, as he promoted “The Theory of Everything” during the 50th Chicago International Film Festival. Eddie Redmayne is up and coming, with perhaps some Best Actor consideration for this year’s Academy Awards.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You experienced as an actor the physicality of Stephen Hawking. Did this experience give you an idea of how his brain would think differently than a normally abled person?

**Eddie Redmayne:** What was complicated about the physicality, is that when ALS manifests itself into you, it’s a withering of the muscles. But some of those muscles end up spastic and in rigid state. The irony is I’m portraying a degenerative disease, but everything I was doing with my muscles was intense. What I found is that when you have less ‘tools’ to use, even the muscles of the eyes and the smile, and as it

became limited, you use the ones you have left with as much vibrancy as possible.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You had conversations with Stephen Hawking. What insight to his character were you most curious about, and what did he offer you that surprised you?

**Redmayne:** When I met him, he was down to using a sensor in his glasses, which his eye muscle controls, which stops on one letter at a time on his voice box computer – so it now takes him even longer to respond to a question. I spent three hours with him, and he maybe said ten sentences. So what I gleaned overall was a character image, he has one of the most charismatic faces. There is a joy of life, a vibrancy and a mischief to him that struck me, and that’s what I took away from our meeting.

We did talk about his voice, before the machine. He told me that it became very slurred, and those were the specifics that he wanted accounted for in the portrayal. But basically it was his energy that I took away.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** After doing this film, what do you think of deep thinkers, persons who use their training in high level academia to create new realities? Since this kind of work can be a happenstance of time and place, what advantages – despite his handicap – do you think Hawking had as this type of thinker?

**Redmayne:** One of the more interesting elements is that Stephen would say in some ways – because he always finds the positive – is that the disease somehow catalyzed him to make the exploration he did. He admittedly was a lazy and complacent young man, and coupled with the fear of the atomic bomb at that time [early 1960s], the idea of wasting time doing work was different.

His initial diagnosis gave him two years, and that’s when the intensity of his work began. And he also has said because he couldn’t talk, he didn’t have to lecture at Cambridge, and could work on theories even more. He always found a positive from it, and I found that extraordinary.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** The scenes of a younger, before-ALS Hawking have a deeper poignancy knowing what is coming next. Your performance of that era was profoundly correct in showing the depression and vulnerability in the early stages of the disease. What was the key to getting the right tone for the young Hawking?

**Redmayne:** The right tone was about reading around what he was like at that time. It was about his ex-wife Jane’s book, it was about meeting people who knew him then, and it was about the line in the film about his ranking at Oxford – a 2.1 borderline achievement. That was fine, but not for the extraordinary man that was to come.

And of course, he said ‘send me to Cambridge and you’ll never have to see me again.’ Having the balls to say that to those guys at that time, was a great indication of how confident he was in his ability, combined with that laissez faire attitude. He was in his own world, but he had great belief in that world.



Co-Star Felicity Jones, Stephen Hawking and Eddie Redmayne During a Set Visit to ‘The Theory of Everything’

*Photo credit: Focus Features*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** The scientific community will continue to expand the legacy and theories of Stephen Hawking for many generations to come. What conclusions of his brand of genius did you come to as a layman, and what did you want to communicate regarding that genius through the character of him that you’re playing and to other layman?



**Redmayne:** First off, I want to say that yes, I’m a proper layman. [laughs] I knew next to nothing, and gave up science at an early age. I suppose what I find most riveting is that science is an ongoing discussion. Some of the early notions that Stephen has theorized has kept those conversations continuing – with international scientists throughout that community. The idea that these people are still thinking big, and looking beyond anything that we think is possible is awe-inspiring to me.

And above and beyond anything, it’s about perspective, looking at things from such a distance and realizing we’re just tiny specks in the universe – even though our individual lives are filled with import. The idea that there is those people who are brave enough to think that big is inspiring.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You began your career notably on stage, and naturally morphed into film and television. What stage techniques do you use in the stop/start nature and time shifting of film and TV, and have you found some technique in TV/film that you’ve applied back to the stage?

**Redmayne:** I often encounter people saying [affecting an important voice] ‘theater acting, that is the only proper acting a person can do.’ I find that I do my best stage work right after I do a film. In theater, especially when I started out, I was taught to project to the audience. The honesty that a camera has, in proximity to what happens on stage, trains me better and makes me more centered.

Certainly the theater training helped me on this film. We had four months of rehearsal, and we did not shoot chronologically, I had to reverse in – in a vacuum – as a play all by myself. When it came to working with the other actors, I wasn’t consciously playing a physicality. All of that was already embedded. Then I could play the human story, which was at the forefront of the story.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You also delved into the biography of another well-known figure, Ms. Marilyn Monroe, in ‘My Week with Marilyn.’ What do you think Monroe understood about herself that her lovers and the outside world would never understand about her?

**Redmayne:** I think she knew who she was, but at the same time knew what she presented as her ‘Marilyn persona.’ I think her constant fear of people falling for that icon rather than her as a person – even though those two came together in come way – must have been crushingly difficult to deal with, and that was her life.

It was interesting that Stephen Hawking was obsessed with Marilyn Monroe – there is a picture of him in his office with an impersonator, and he always said if he could travel back in time he would go back to meet her. I put that photo on set in the design of his office, for my own in-joke in the film.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You did an oddball independent film called ‘Hick,’ in which you portrayed an United States southerner. Besides taking on the accent, what did want to get right about that brand of American swagger?



Eddie Redmayne in Chicago, October 13th, 2014

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

**Redmayne:** I’ve done two road trip American movies, which were very different, the other being ‘The Yellow Handkerchief’ with William Hurt. In ‘Hick,’ which was intense, I did spend some time in North Carolina – where we filmed – and took some time to get my Stetson hat made properly and to get the specifics of the character, by hanging around where people go in that area.

Weirdly, the two things that connected ‘The Theory of Everything’ and ‘Hick,’ was that I used James Dean as a model. They were both aspirational in that James Dean swagger, both effortlessly cool. For both films I had a picture of Dean to inspire me.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** So much of the film industry relies on the ‘tentpole’ movies, which increasingly involve comic book movies. How do you think this business model either harms or strengthens the industry, and as a commodity within that business – as an actor – where do you see the future of it all developing?

**Redmayne:** I think it’s very complicated, and I do love the comic book movies. I grew up loving Spider-Man, and even auditioned for the recent set of films. What I struggle with, because I am – as you said – a commodity, all these auditions are top secret. There is no way to develop anything for a character, because they won’t let me read a script. For me, I find that complicated, because I would have to sign into something for six years potentially, with no idea of what it is.

It’s tricky, because we’re all storytellers, and I’m want to put context into a scene. It’s about the proper mode for the acting, and getting what I need. In many ways, this film is the antithesis of the blockbuster, it’s about seeing the story and telling the story, and whilst there are many

interesting stories being told at all ends of the budget scale, I feel like there is still a market for ‘The Theory of Everything.’

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What gift about the meaning of life has portraying Stephen Hawking given you, and how do you think you will or do apply it to your everyday existence?

**Redmayne:** Certainly, from meeting Stephen and other people who suffer from ALS, it’s about maximizing our time. Stephen was diagnosed at 21 years old, told he had two years to live, and he’s now 72. He has said that every minute after that two year period has been a gift, and he makes sure he has made the most of those minutes. I feel as if I’m a person who gets caught up in the foibles of everyday life, and I respect the idea of living life fully and passionately as he does. He’s a great role model.

*“The Theory of Everything” continues its limited release in Chicago on November 14th. Featuring Eddie Redmayne, Felicity Jones, Emily Watson, David Thewlis and Christian McKay. Screenplay adapted by Anthony McCarten. Directed by James Marsh. Rated “PG-13”*



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [16]

Writer, Editorial Coordinator

HollywoodChicago.com

[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [15]

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