

Blu-Ray Review: Sean Penn’s Oscar-Winning ‘Milk’ Will Recruit Movie Fans Around the World

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 10, 2009 - 8:17am

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Blu-Ray Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – With the help of [Dustin Lance Black](#) [4]’s Oscar-winning screenplay, [Sean Penn](#) [11]’s Oscar-winning performance, [Josh Brolin](#) [9]’s Oscar-nominated performance, [James Franco](#) [8]’s Spirit Award-winning performance and [Gus Van Sant](#) [6]’s Oscar-nominated direction, Harvey Milk has been brought back from the dead. Milk has been put back atop his soapbox and given the chance to recruit millions for the cause of human rights through the masterpiece “[Milk](#) [10]”. Harvey used to say: “My name is Harvey Milk and I want to recruit you.” Now he has another chance.

“Milk” was easily one of the best films of 2008, arguably a better choice to win than the Academy made with “Slumdog Millionaire,” and it’s an absolute must-see. Honestly, this writer feels in such agreement with Dustin Lance Black and Sean Penn’s speeches at the Oscars about the importance of gay rights and the effect this film could have on the movement that I think they should show “Milk” in school. Teach ‘em about such an important figure early.



Milk was released on Blu-Ray on March 10th, 2009.
Photo credit: Universal Home Video

Revisiting “Milk” again on Blu-Ray, I was struck by its incredible re-watchability. From the amazing period detail - captured so vividly in Universal’s nearly-perfect HD process - to the award-winning performances to the incredible structure of Dustin Lance Black’s screenplay. “Milk” is one of those things that only comes along a few times a year, if we’re lucky, a flawless movie.



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Photo credit: Universal Home Video

In the best performance of his amazing career, Sean Penn disappears into Harvey Milk, a city supervisor in San Francisco who was assassinated after only a short time in office. Milk changed the lives of millions just by being himself and refusing to live in a world where everyone wasn't allowed to do the same without trying to do something about it.

Black's incredible screenplay, one that I think stands among the best of the '00s, focuses on the movement of the last eight years of Milk's life but it does so without preaching or turning to melodrama. It perfectly places what Milk accomplished in context of not only history but humanity. Milk's message was always that gay people have the same lives and loves as straight people and Black never forgets to ground the movement in a touching human story.

"Milk" opens with Harvey and his lover Scott Smith (James Franco) moving from New York to San Francisco's Castro District, the center of the gay rights movement in the '70s. With the community around them, Harvey and Scottie realize that they have the power to rally for change. Through boycott, the hurt stores that display homophobia and even join forces with the teamsters to enact change.

Harvey, Scott, Cleve Jones (Emile Hirsch), Anne Kronenberg (Allison Pill) soon learn that they'll get a lot more done in office than they could on a soap box and Milk begins several office. They try and lose, try and lose, until Milk finally gets into the position to make a real change. In office, Milk crossed paths with the seriously damaged Dan White (Josh Brolin), the man who would shoot him and the Mayor in just a year.



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Photo credit: Universal Home Video

Watching "Milk" again, I was struck by something that Diego Luna notes in one of the special features - the film captures the "light" of Harvey Milk. It's not a depressing film, which is one of the main reasons it works. So many filmmakers mistake depressing for moving. "Milk" is never the former and undeniably the latter.



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Photo credit: Universal Home Video

My adoration for one of the best films of 2008 is clear, but the Blu-Ray release of it is a bit disappointing. I find it impossible to believe that this will be the final word on "Milk," an eight-time Oscar nominee.

The special features included are excellent and the technical transfer is typically great (Universal very rarely falters in HD and DTS Master Audio), but there's not a single word from Van Sant or Penn on the entire release, no commentary track, and only just over a half-hour of

featurettes. A movie like "Milk" deserves (and will probably eventually get) a more extensive collection of special features.

With no U-Control (Universal's great feature that allows featurette access during the playback of a film), viewers hoping for more detail about the film and its subject will want to see three great featurettes - "Remembering Harvey," "Hollywood Comes to San Francisco," and "Marching For Equality".

The first features interviews with the actual people in the movie, including Cleve Jones, and is unlikely to leave a dry eye in the house. It hammers the real-life impact that Milk had home but it could have been four times as long as its 13-minute running time.

"Hollywood Comes to San Francisco" is the only featurette to include interviews with any of the on-camera talent and Josh Brolin, James Franco, and Diego Luna do have interesting things to say. Once again, as he did on the Oscars, Dustin Lance Black tugs at the heartstrings, talking about how much Milk personally influenced him.

Finally, "Equality" focuses on the production design and how perfectly it recreated San Francisco in the '70s. "Milk" is one of the most technically impressive films of 2008. 8 minutes on how that was accomplished doesn't seem like enough.

The story of "Milk" is not over. I've long bristled against the idea that art should be used as political force, but this could be the rare exception, a film that will get people talking and influence generations to come. Harvey is still recruiting.

'Milk' is released by Universal Home Video and stars Sean Penn, James Franco, Josh Brolin, Anne Kronenberg, Emile Hirsch, and Diego Luna. It was written by Dustin Lance Black and directed by Gus Van Sant. It was released on March 10th, 2009. It is rated R.



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