

## Blu-Ray Review: Legendary Rap Icon Given Standard Biopic Treatment in ‘Notorious’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 29, 2009 - 9:43pm

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Blu-Ray Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Biggie Smalls deserves better than ‘Notorious’. It’s not that there’s anything drastically wrong with this reasonably well-made and very well-performed biopic but it’s a by-the-numbers, predictable film about an icon who was simply one of the best that ever lived. The ‘Big Poppa’ who could ‘Hypnotize’ with his rhymes should have more than an average biopic.

The problem with “Notorious” is simple - if you care enough about The Notorious B.I.G. to watch a movie about his life than you will learn absolutely nothing from the film. It hits all of the major points - his drug-dealing youth, supportive mother, relationships with Faith Evans and Lil Kim, partnership with Puff Daddy, rivalry with Tupac, the two shootings, roll credits. There’s not enough edge for a man who brought so much to his flow and not enough surprises for a man who clearly wasn’t as easy to define as this movie makes him out to be.



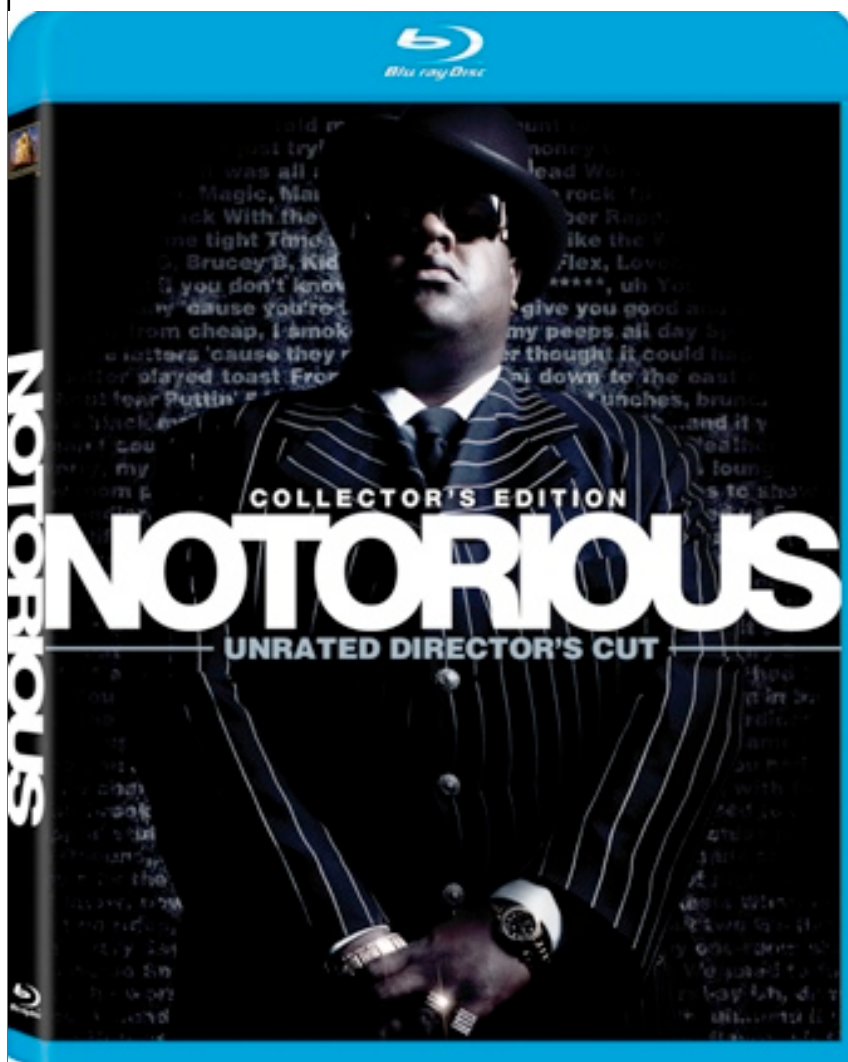
Notorious was released on Blu-Ray on April 21st, 2009.

*Photo credit: Fox Searchlight and Phil Caruso*

The script may be ultra-predictable, but “Notorious” still thumps with the amazing beat laid down by one of the best rappers that ever lived. Just the soundtrack for “Notorious” makes for an enjoyable experience and a reminder of how damn good B.I.G. was in his prime.

And the cast of “Notorious” do nothing wrong. Newcomer Jamal Woolard sells both the boy who loved his mom and tried to be faithful to his girl and the swaggering dealer who ran the corner and dropped vicious battle rhymes. He’s quite good in a performance that was underrated in theaters, even if the script doesn’t get nearly under his skin as one would hope. I never felt like I learned any more about Chris Wallace watching “Notorious,” but Woolard does a notable job of bringing him back to life.

Perhaps to off-set the risk of hiring a newcomer to play Biggie, director George Tillman Jr. assembled an excellent supporting cast including Derek Luke as Sean ‘Puffy’ Combs, Angela Bassett as Voletta Wallace, and Anthony Mackie as Tupac. Newcomers Naturi Naughton and Antonique Smith as Lil Kim and Faith Evans, respectively, are both good in roles that feel too small for the influence that these two talented women must have had on Wallace.



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Photo credit: Fox Searchlight and Phil Caruso

Ultimately, “Notorious” is a film made by huge fans of the rapper for huge fans of the rapper. It’s a highlight reel instead of the in-depth, dramatic examination of a life that it should have been. Listen to any of Biggie’s albums or watch the great doc “Biggie and Tupac” and you’ll get a better glimpse into the real life of Wallace. But take “Notorious” for what it is - a greatest hits recreation - and it could have been a lot worse.

The Fox Blu-Ray for “Notorious” continues to walk the fine line of mediocre to disappointing video/audio transfers. The 2.40:1 HD picture looks okay but just doesn’t pop like other films (including two Blu-Rays from other studios I watched immediately after this one). Fox Blu-Ray still needs some work. The audio mix of the 5.1 DTS-HD Master Audio track is better - the music is well-mixed, going a long way in the overall effect of the film - but also not spectacular.

The special features provided for “Notorious” are exhaustive and absolutely complete. The film itself deserves about 2.5/5 on the HC rating scale with the lackluster video/audio dropping it about a point and the amazing special features lifting it back up two.

What more could a Biggie fan ask for? In fact, you’ll learn more from the special features on “Notorious” than from the film itself. Those features include the unrated director’s cut of the film (which runs six minutes longer and is the only version of the film I’ve seen, making it impossible for me to tell you what’s different from the theatrical), Commentary with Director George Tillman, Jr., Co-Screenwriter Reggie Rock Bythewood, Co-Screenwriter Cheo Hodari Coker and Editor Dirk Westervelt, Commentary with Producer/Biggie’s Mom Voletta Wallace, Producer/Biggie’s Co-Manager Wayne Barrow and Producer/Biggie’s Co-Manager Mark Pitts, “Life After Death: Making Notorious,” “I Got a Story to Tell: The Lyrics of Biggie Smalls,” “Notorious Thugs: Casting the Film,” “Biggie Boot Camp,” “Anatomy of a B.I.G. Performance,” “Party & Bulls\*\*t (never-before-seen footage of the real B.I.G.),” “The B.I.G. Three-Sixty,” Deleted Scenes, and a digital copy of the film.

Ultimately, a great rapper has been given a so-so movie with a sub-par technical transfer but amazing special features. Fans of The Notorious B.I.G. should definitely take a look and if you’re not a fan yet, you should definitely take a listen.

*‘Notorious’ is released by Twentieth Century Fox and stars Jamal Woolard, Angela Bassett, Derek Luke, and Anthony Mackie. It was written by Reggie Rock Bythewood and Cheo Hodari Coker and directed by George Tillman Jr.. It was released on April 21st, 2009. It is rated R and unrated.*



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