

Heartfelt Tale of Human Needs in ‘The Theory of Everything’

Submitted by [NickHC](#) [1] on November 14, 2014 - 6:32pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The life story of iconic physicist Stephen Hawking is given a well-deserved cinematic treatment this weekend with “The Theory of Everything,” an earnest presentation of an existence that defies the usual. As his personal journey required the care-taking of others, the film is not adapted from something Hawking wrote, but from his wife Jane’s personal account, “Traveling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen.”

Director James Marsh (“Man on Wire,” “Project Nim”) begins the story of Jane (Felicity Jones) and Stephen (Eddie Redmayne) as an unbeatable romance movie couple, a pairing of dreamy affection between two lovely intellectuals with a near-cosmic cuteness. From their first smiles at each other one night at a stuffy college bar, the two form the axle of “The Theory of Everything,” a story that quickly changes from that of a love story.

Whilst working on his doctorate, Hawking is diagnosed with a moto neuron disease, which progressively deteriorates his physical condition. He is told that his brain will not be affected in the process, but he will die in two years. Stubborn to let a frustrated Stephen close himself off from the world, Jane invests herself into taking care of him, and to sacrificing her own needs so that he may continue to contribute his brilliance to the science world.



‘The Theory of Everything’

Photo credit: Focus Features

Redmayne labors for a performance that tempts words like “transformative,” but he earns it. It is one of the year’s most spectacular performances in that the young actor is showing an entire physical change within one human being, bolstering his perfect casting considering his facial similarities. Starting with a soft voice and geeky gentility he creates an adoring version of Hawking as a promising philosopher of science. As Hawking’s body continues to worsen, Redmayne provides a vivid display of the man’s physical status, as we trace it to his different limbs. Redmayne illuminates the unfamiliar journey of Hawking that most only know the end of. In a performance that shows evolution in craft, he provides a spellbinding embodiment.

Often shown interacting with Redmayne’s Hawking with a significant amount of heart, Jones provides her own arduous work into her half of the film’s center relationship. As the script clearly puts more of its expositional and complicating weight toward the life of Stephen, Jones nonetheless provides an emotional foundation for a character who could have managed even more screen-time. Her presentation of Jane is definitively heartfelt, and establishes “The Theory of Everything” with its truer narrative, that of a person who took care of another, out of an indefinable mix of love and respect. Jones fortifies the film as a touching story of caretakers.



'The Theory of Everything'

Photo credit: Focus Features

“The Theory of Everything” thankfully tells its emotionally complicated story without pandering to the miraculousness of Hawking, or the vulnerability viewers have in watching characters experience such diseases. Especially with Redmayne’s fervid performance, the film has a contagious wonder that makes many parts of it radiant. But when it gets to many of what should be the most challenging scenes, where Jane & Stephen are falling apart because of the needs that make all of us human, its dramatic stimuli can feel scant. As evidence to the potential that does exist within this film, “The Theory of Everything” can wage some incredible emotional power, such as in a tearful conversation between Hawking’s computer and his defeated wife in the third act.

Vitalized by performances that provide enough character to distract from the absent dramatic meat, “The Theory of Everything” is best as a touching tribute to the spirits of Jane and Stephen. A tale shared with warm sincerity, “The Theory of Everything” is a celebration of how her unbelievable sacrifice assisted in getting his brilliance out into the world.

“The Theory of Everything” opens in Chicago on November 14, 2014. Starring Eddie Redmayne, Felicity Jones, Charlie Cox, David Thewlis. Written by Anthony McCarten, based off the book “Traveling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen” by Jane Hawking. Directed by James Marsh. Rated “PG-13”



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