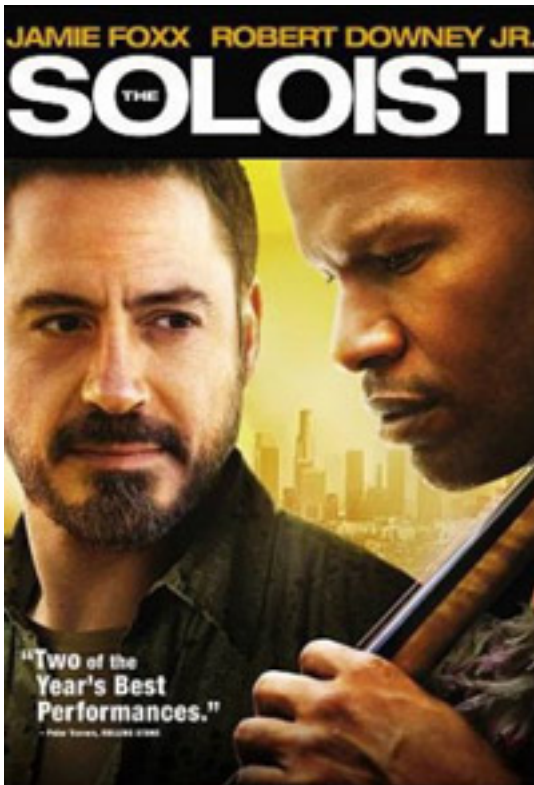


## Bio-pic starring Jamie Foxx as homeless savant arrives on DVD

Written by Kam Williams

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Despite being raised in the 'hood by a single-mom, child prodigy Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx) exhibited such promise on the cello that by the time he graduated from high school in 1970 he had earned a scholarship to Juilliard. But unlike his classmates such as Yo-Yo Ma, Nathaniel would never get a chance to realize his full potential, because during his sophomore year he began exhibiting symptoms of the schizophrenia which would derail his dream of a career in classical music.

Soon, he had to drop out of school and return home to Cleveland where he was cared for by his mother until she passed away in 2000. At that juncture, he headed west, prompted by a delusion that his long-lost father resided in Los Angeles. Instead, Nathaniel only ended up on the infamous Skid Row, leading a hand-to-mouth existence in obscurity alongside thousands of the equally destitute and less-fortunate.

There, the only hint of his musical past was revealed when he periodically played the violin in the park while standing beneath a statue of Ludwig Van Beethoven. Nonetheless, Nathaniel generally went unnoticed by passersby until the fateful day, Steve Lopez (Robert Downey, Jr.), a writer for the L.A. Times, was struck by the virtuosity being exhibited by this homeless man on a battered, old instrument with only two strings.

The intrigued reporter introduced himself, and was shocked to hear semi-lucid Nathaniel, during rare moments of clarity, assert that he had once studied at Juilliard. After confirming that rarified pedigree with the school's administration office in New York, Lopez decided to write a series of feature stories about how someone so talented could end up a street musician begging for tips. However, he gradually found himself crossing the line from dispassionate journalist to friend and benefactor as he became increasingly involved with rehabilitating his subject, not only finding him an apartment, but arranging for violin lessons and mental health treatment as well.

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Thus, "Can this lost soul be saved?" is the burning question posed by *The Soloist*, a bittersweet bio-pic based on Mr. Lopez's best-seller of the same name. Directed by Joe Wright (*Atonement*), the film features Jamie Foxx who does a magnificent job in his most challenging outing since *Ray*. Here, he convincingly conveys the tragic plight of a man still capable of flashes of brilliance who is more often than not betrayed by his own brain.

A compelling cross of a couple of Academy Award-winning Best Pictures, *A Beautiful Mind* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which is capable of holding its own up against those similarly-themed, screen classics.

### **Excellent (4 stars)**

Rated PG-13 for mature themes, drug use and profanity.

Running time: 116 minutes

Studio: Dreamworks Home video

DVD Extras: Deleted scenes, director's commentary, "The Making of" plus a couple of other featurettes.

To see a trailer for *The Soloist*, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrrLJT4YS9I>