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The space shuttle's 2009 mission to Hubble: Coming soon to a theater near you

By [John Matson](#)

NEW YORK—Back in May 2009 two of the most iconic entities in space science and exploration came together—literally—in [the final scheduled servicing mission](#) of the space shuttle to the Hubble Space Telescope. The astronauts of space shuttle *Atlantis* [plucked Hubble from orbit](#) and [in the course of five spacewalks dramatically revitalized](#) the 19-year-old observatory, which had been limping along for some time.

The mission, officially designated STS-125, drew an inordinate amount of public attention and likely will again in March, when footage from the repair mission is released in a three-dimensional IMAX documentary, [Hubble 3D](#), narrated by Leonardo DiCaprio.

The film's producers revealed a glimpse of the film to come Thursday afternoon at a screening here. (DiCaprio's voice, which a film representative said had only recently been recorded, was absent.) The 3-D footage was indeed engrossing, inducing a moment of personal panic when *Atlantis* lifted off in a blast of flame and smoke. A theater latecomer, passing in front of the IMAX screen just as the shuttle rumbled from the launch pad, looked from my vantage point as if he or she would be toasted by *Atlantis*'s rocket engines.

Seeing the astronauts' faces in such grand detail humanized them, a welcome change from the somewhat aseptic way NASA often presents its shuttle flyers. As the STS-125 astronauts suited up for launch, they looked concerned, even a little frightened—not at all surprising given their task, but not a side of space exploration the public often gets to see.

The footage of Hubble itself, with the curved Earth as a backdrop, is remarkable. I had not appreciated the size of the instrument until I saw, in the film's footage, how it dwarfed spacewalker [Mike Massimino](#) as he climbed inside its access doors to work on the telescope's innards. And [Massimino](#), who attended the screening, is no small fry—over six feet tall, solidly built, with clean-cut graying hair, he looks like a retired ballplayer.

Massimino, who flew on two Hubble missions, said that the film grants him a long-standing wish—to share the spectacular view as he saw it from 550 kilometers up. "You take pictures and try to describe it, and you just can't," he said, adding that the footage brought back a wave of fond memories from the mission. "I'm over here ready to cry, watching this thing," Massimino said. "It's OK for an astronaut to cry, isn't it?"

Photo of Atlantis's May 2009 liftoff in a measly two dimensions: NASA