A Love Story for the ’90s

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Independent filmmakers have done much in recent years to reverse Hollywood’s shameful silence about the ravages of AIDS among gay men. But five years ago, Greg Sims, president of the film company Devin Entertainment, started worrying that the straight world wasn’t getting the message. “The idea of someone being HIV positive in a heterosexual relationship was a topic that hadn’t been explored,” Sims says. “I thought that if you did a story in which the girl next door is HIV positive, you might open the minds of a lot of people who don’t want to know about AIDS even though it’s happening in their towns.” He sketched out a plot in which a married woman discovers she got HIV from an old boyfriend. During the course of her struggle with the disease, her relationship with her husband unfolds into an age-of-AIDS Love Story. “The concept was about two people who become stronger together than they were individually,” Sims says.

Sims began collaborating with director Gordon Boos (Red Surf), who penned the screenplay, entitled Touch Me. The pair then shopped it around the studios for funding. “We talked to the traditional financing people. They said, ’God bless you. We wish you luck, but we’re just not ready to finance it,’” Boos says. Then, late last year, the stars aligned for them when Sims and the film’s producer finally managed to scrape up private funding. What turned the tide? “I think it’s more timely now,” Sims notes. “Four years ago, there weren’t commercials about a guy and girl getting tested. You turn on the radio now and hear it all the time.”

Next came the tricky challenge of finding actors to work cheaply and accommodate the shotgun production schedule. First, Amanda Peet (She’s the One) signed on as the female lead. Then, Sims and Boos agreed on Michael Vartan (The Pallbearer) to play Peet’s husband because of his chemistry with Peet. Finally, they landed Greg Louganis for a major role (“He made fun of himself on the first day, and that put everyone at ease,” Sim says). “After the first read-through, we realized we had an extraordinary cast,” he says. “We knew we were part of something special.”

Touch Me was shot in 22 days last January - about five times the pace of a studio-financed film. Now that post-production is complete, Sims and Boos face their most daunting task: Getting the movie into the theaters. As they make the rounds of distributors, Sims is optimistic, though he concedes that any AIDS-themed movie is a tough sell. “Some distributors won’t even look at the film. There are people who said I’m out of my mind because nobody’s interested in a movie that deals with AIDS at all,” he says. “I’m hoping that’s not true.” n

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