AIDS Activism Wows Sundance

January 25, 2012 By Peter Staley

I got the chance to see AIDS activism wow a crowd at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, during the premiere of HOW TO SURVIVE A PLAGUE on Sunday. Garance Franke-Ruta and Ron Goldberg, veterans of ACT UP New York, were also able to attend. In a spooky coincidence, it was the 20th anniversary of the day TAG, the Treatment Action Group, was formed. TAG's early work is prominently featured in the documentary.

Seeing it on a big screen kinda blew my mind, and judging by the audience response (two standing ovations), I wasn't alone. I can't walk ten feet in this town without someone wanting to talk about the impact the film had on them. Most (especially those under 45 years old), had never heard about this history before, and it deeply moved them. They also thought the film had many lessons for today's activist movements, including Occupy Wall Street.

Director David France and his team should be very proud of doing the near impossible -- carefully honoring a remarkable moment in history that could fill dozens of books (and hopefully will). Many of those we lost and loved appear in the film, and can now be remembered again. As the late Bob Rafsky put it so eloquently during an amazing scene in the film, "when the living can no longer speak, the dead may speak for them."

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