



Bros is a Love Letter to the AIDS Community (and a hilarious movie!)

This weekend I went to see Bros. Here's why Hollywood's first major studio gay-centric rom com was a can't miss for me.

October 2, 2022 By [Shawn Decker](#)

I hadn't see the MTV Video Music Awards in years... I'm 47. If I'm watching MTV these days it's in bed at the end of the day beside Gwenn. Watching Ridiculousness, for us, is a nice way to wrap up the day's affairs. But, recently, we were flipping around the Awards show just happened to be on.

We couldn't turn away. Maybe the show was for us these days, after all? The Red Hot Chili Peppers performed. Each segment, presenter and performance was titilating enough to keep us glued to the TV. Then Billy Eichner appeared. I know he does a thing called Billy On The Street, but I know him because enough people I follow on Twitter follow him, so he posts pop up. I've seen him on late nite talk shows, and he's an engaging presence.

When he spoke at the VMAs, he was imploring people to go see Bros, a gay rom com he helped to create and that he stars in. Billy explained that it's the first gay rom com supported by a major studio, and the passion behind his speech reminded me of a lot of what I've seen in the AIDS community. You see, I feel a kinship with the gay community, and have for a really long time.

When I was diagnosed with HIV in 1987, I always heard that gay men and people with hemophilia (I was the latter) were in the initial high risk groups for infection. As time went on, I got more and more comfortable with being positive myself, but I remained in my viral closet until the age of 20. I'm glad that I felt that kinship and didn't fall victim to some of the homophobia that can persist in a small, rural town in Virginia, because when I came out of my viral closet the gay community within the AIDS community sensed my ease. They helped me become a better HIV educator. A better writer. They encouraged me that I'd find love, what, with my dimple and quick wit...

How could I not?

One of my favorite things I've ever written is [a love letter to the gay community](#) that I penned for POZ in 1999. In it, I explain that if sexual orientation was a choice I'd have traded in my jersey to play for the other team.

Back to Billy's speech at the Video Music Awards. It was one of the most powerful things I'd seen on that stage- and I saw the Madonna and Britney kiss in person, back when me and Gwenn had

access to such shindigs. It kind of reminded me of Larry Kramer. I knew I was going to see Bros, and that was before I found out that Billy's co-star and love interest was none other than Luke fuckin' MacFarlane.

See, around the time that Trump got elected, Gwenn and I started watching Hallmark Christmas movies. The innocence of them was a chaser to the cruel reality of living in a country that can give someone with Trump's level of depravity the keys to the car. At first, I kind of laughed at the movies... then I found myself actually being moved by them in a genuine way. It was Luke MacFarlane that did that. Which made it even more of incentive to get to the theater to celebrate in the next leveling that such a big break can offer his career.

Luke was great in Bros. No surprise there. Billy was hilarious, too. No surprise there. What I wasn't expecting was a love letter to the AIDS community. One of the first things you see as Billy's character is being introduced is a picture of him with Larry Kramer. The same elder Kramer that Gwenn and I got to meet in person in Charlottesville when he was in town promoting his book. We got to drive him and his partner to and from the gig, and share some stories about this crazy little world we live in- him as a famous activist and Gwenn and I was one of the only mixed status straight couples out there educating about HIV.

All throughout the movie, there are obvious references to the role that AIDS has played in the lives of gay Gen X men trying to connect, whether it's to have sex (the sex scenes are as touchingly earnest as a movie-ending Hallmark kiss on the lips and hilariously raunchy) or to fall in love... or, as many of us attempt, achieving both. One of the best laugh lines, for me, was Billy lamenting about the generational divide that exists between his experience growing up gay and the generation below him: "You had Glee. We had AIDS."

At one point the guys head to Provincetown to visit a wise, loveable elder gay played by Harvey Fierstein. Luke and Billy's characters notice a group of hotties in a framed photo. Weinstein says it was taken in the mid-90s and a lot of the people in it aren't here anymore.

Gwenn gasped. She thought she recognized one of our friends in that framed photo. A friend who passed in 2000. ([Stephen Gendin](#)- I wrote [this on the ten year anniversary](#) of his passing.) When I get a chance to watch the movie where I have the God-like ability to pause space and time to inspect that photo, I'll find out if Stephen got his cameo. But the fact that it's a very real possibility is heartwarming enough on its own. Oh, another Easter egg is that I thought I saw two copies of [Peter Staley's Never Silent](#) sitting on a desk in the opening scene. "Oh really?" Gwenn said when I told her after the movie.

Now, HIV and AIDS aren't part of the plot in Bros. There are plenty of movies that walk that walk, and the success of Bros is really dependent on it's ability to be accessible to the largest audience possible. I didn't expect HIV or AIDS to be mentioned more than once, so when it did get referenced I was delighted to see it weaved into the script in such a realistic, conversational way.

At one point Luke's character laments the seriousness of Billy's character, that everything doesn't have to be gay rights and HIV prevention. How the two come together (in every sense of the word)

shows, regardless of sexual identity, the importance of stepping out of your self-imposed walls is a huge part of finding love. And it's not easy to allow and trust someone you are attracted to help break down those barriers, or to be comfortable enough to let someone know the reasoning behind those self-defense mechanisms.

Bros is a hilarious love story that isn't afraid to be fantastical and real. The movie's ability to bounce between those two realms is what makes it such a joy.

OK, I'm logging off here. I won't spoil anymore Bros jokes or wrinkles that make it special. What I will say is that I believe that whether you are gay, straight, questioning, oversexed, undersexed, asexual, naysexual... wherever you are with all of that, Bros is a movie you should consider seeing. You'll laugh, you might even cry. In the end, we are all human and we're all trying to figure this life and love thing out, whether we are searching or whether we are trying to be the best partner to the love of our lives.

And every laugh and tear along the way makes the journey that much easier to understand.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

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