Why I Don’t Have Dallas Buyers Remorse

March 3, 2014 By Shawn Decker

This year, The Academy Awards were once again touched by the hand of the AIDS epidemic. In 2013, AIDS activists rejoiced when *How To Survive a Plague* was nominated for Best Documentary. A decade before, Nicole Kidman won for Best Actress in 2003’s *The Hours*... and a decade before that, Tom Hanks got the nod for Best Actor in *Philadelphia* in what was, before this past weekend, AIDS’ greatest triumph at Hollywood’s biggest night of the year.

But a funny thing happened on the way to Oscar night...

When both Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto won Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor at the Golden Globes two months ago, each actors’ acceptance speech failed to mention AIDS. Much like the trailer for the movie, there wasn’t mention of the medical condition that figures so prominently in the movie’s plot. And, as an AIDS educator, I get it- the word “AIDS” scares a lot of people. Get them in the theater and entertain/enlighten them by any means necessary.

In regard to the AIDS community’s outrage over the Golden Globes speeches and the omission of our struggle... I really didn’t get it. I don’t expect actors to be activists. They play roles, do the job and get in and out of character and on to the next role.

I saw *Dallas Buyers Club* in a theater, which was more than I expected after hearing about the movie months before its release. I figured it would be an indie flick that wouldn’t find its way to my hometown theater and that I’d catch it half-a-year later on Netflix. The fact that it got so much buzz after its release made me happy- friends of mine were going to see it on their own without me (the “friend with AIDS”) nudging them.

So last night, both actors won again on Oscar night.

Jared Leto mentioned the millions of people who died from AIDS at the tale-end of his acceptance speech, certainly making amends with a portion of the AIDS community... but Matthew McConaughey, the biggest winner, remained mum on HIV/AIDS. He also failed to mention the name of the man whose life he interpreted for the film. Matthew did mention God, and a vision of his father doing a little victory dance in Heaven for him. Which made me wonder: if pressed, could Matthew picture Ron Woodroof in that vision of Heaven, sharing that tender moment of glory with

dad?

Who knows. I don't know Matthew personally. Perhaps he does think Ron is up there, too. And perhaps he didn't mention AIDS in his speeches for fear of offending anyone with a clumsy comment about HIV/AIDS? He has a famously loose style- so maybe we should be thanking him instead of ridiculing him for his choice of words...

I, for one, am not mad at McConaughey. He rescued a dead script from obscurity and breathed life into the performance. An actor mentioning AIDS out of obligation at an award's ceremony might give us, those living with the virus, a good feeling inside. But I believe it does very little to educate those in the dark or get them truly interested in the cause. Where an actor has true strength is in the artistry of their craft- and in choosing the role of someone living with AIDS, McConaughey took a risk and it paid off for him professionally. He did his job.

So kudos to Matthew and Jared for going out on a limb and attaching themselves to *Dallas Buyers Club*. Just because they portrayed people living with AIDS, I don't expected either of them to emerge from their roles as, say, an activist like Peter Staley of *How To Survive a Plague*. In fact, after the Golden Globes speech fiasco, Peter himself said: "I'm just happy Hollywood has made an AIDS film again. The crisis is far from over, so we still need reminding. And I hope Matthew McConaughey wins an Oscar."

Hear, hear.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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