Olivia Newton-John Was A Friend To People With HIV/AIDS

Olivia Newton-John was blindsided by the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Then she used her star power to lend a helping and loving hand.

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The entertainment world and those of us who love it are mourning the loss of Olivia Newton-John. My biggest fandom of Olivia is relegated to my childhood, when my friends and I would watch Xanadu a few years after it's 1980 release. I'm guessing we borrowed the movie from the library in those days before the rental stores started popping up all over town. Recently, in the midst of those early days of COVID-19, Gwenn and I watched the movie because she'd never seen it and I couldn't really recall any details and am always curious about how movies I loved as a towheaded kid are viewed through the eyes of a towheaded adult. As a kid, my friends and I were too busy fawning over Olivia's other-worldly beauty to worry about pacing and plotlines...

Needless to say, upon rewatching, the strange odyssey of a movie did not disappoint!

And when it came to HIV awareness and compassion, Olivia did not disappoint, either.

The epidemic hit close to home when her friend and hairdresser, Armando, who created her iconic look for the "Physical" music video, passed away due to AIDS. When Olivia found out he was sick, she was pregnant and very little was known about HIV transmission. Her doctors advised her that it would not be safe to visit her friend, and she never got the chance to say goodbye, a regret she shared during the 1992 AIDS awareness television special, In A New Light.

In 1996, she starred in It's My Party, a movie that dealt with all of the complications involved in living- and dying- with HIV/AIDS. Back in 1995, on World AIDS Day, when Margaret Cho talked to POZ about her role in It's My Party, the conversation turned to- of course!- fawning over Olivia Newton-John. Olivia was universally loved and respected by those with a heart for fairness and compassion, and she stood up for marriage equality and was always available to support HIV/AIDS causes. As recently as last November, she recorded a video message for the Village AIDS Memorial. And in 1993 portions of the proceeds from a children's book she co-authored supported AIDS research. Olivia's heart was always on display in her work, and it's comforting to know that behind the scenes that same heart was dedicated to making life better for those living with HIV.

If my suspicions of a Xanadu-like, whacky and wonderfully weird afterlife are true, I'm hoping her old friend Armando is there to greet her soul as it embarks on its next journey... to give her the

kind of collective “hug” of gratitude that can only be felt far beyond our fabulous, physical beings.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

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