

HERE IT COMES

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Here it Comes is a compelling and lyrical examination of the way one young man makes life-altering decisions in a matter of seconds. The four-minute version of the film ran on MTV on World AIDS Day. And for good reason. *Here it Comes* packs a serious punch.

What follows is an interview with the film's writer (*Steve Connell*), director (*Peter Smith*) and producer (*Amir Proushani*).

1. Where did the original inspiration/impetus to make this film come from? Was it one individual's idea, or did a group decide to do it together? There were a lot of people involved. What was the process like?

Peter: The inspiration to make this film came to me when I saw Steve Connell perform his poetry. The threat of HIV had overshadowed my life recently and I was deeply moved by Steve's poem. I approached him as well as Amir, and from there the project began to take shape. The creative process was intense. The poem was our map, and together the three of us plotted what we would see for each and every line of the poem. There were rewrites and bitter fights, but the integrity of the piece was never compromised and I believe the final piece does justice to the depth of emotional anguish in Steve's poetry.

Amir: This is the first film I've ever produced, so it was vital for me to get a good group of people together who were willing to commit to a project that had no guarantees. We ended up using about twenty actors/extras and a crew of over eight people. The community of Thousand Oaks was very kind to us, allowing us to film in several different locations for free. Local eateries donated a lot of food to feed the cast and crew.

2. What made you decide to put it to music? Did you want it to come across as more of a music video than a dramatic piece? Do you think you would get the same response if it wasn't accompanied by music/rap?

Peter: The movie not a music video. First of all, it follows a narrative, and traditionally music videos do not. Second, it doesn't feature Steve, but follows Chris Paulson's character. Mark Jasper composed an incredible soundtrack considering we were under the gun to make the deadline for World Aids Day, however the music will be less intrusive in the final cut of the film.



Steve: The music was primarily Peters' idea, (which was exciting because I'd never had the chance to combine my poetry with music before), however it was clear to us all that a synergy between the music and the vocals would be the best way for people to retain and be affected by what they heard. In response to the question would people respond the same to the piece without the music, I don't think so. Still, we have yet to finalize the music for the piece and so I don't know how the music ultimately works. What I do know is the strength of the poem based on the myriad of performances I've had without music and the care with which we married the visuals to the words. Thus, while they would not respond the same I feel the piece would still elicit a strong reaction. I am excited to see the piece complete with music and hope it lives up to our intent of a piece where the music complements the words and they both complement the vocals and vice versa.

3. How do you think young audience members react when they watch "Here it Comes?" Do you think it is still a shock to some to hear about young people contracting HIV through heterosexual sex?

Peter: Once, after a screening, this guy came up to me and he was very emotional. He said he knew a sixteen year-old girl who had found out she was positive. As he was telling me about her he started crying. I think people still experience shock and disbelief that kids could contract HIV through heterosexual sex, and they have to continue to be reminded. So the truth about prevention will spread instead of the virus.

Steve: From the beginning, at least for myself, the goal was two-fold. On one level the goal was to create a piece that we could be proud of artistically. At the same time I've labored for several years educating kids about HIV and AIDS with theater and it was crucial to me that the final result was one that could be effective in continuing the goal of education. I hope they recognize themselves in the lead character. If they do they must see his problems as their own. AIDS and HIV are a real danger to all people who engage in risk behavior. Alcohol and drugs can play a significant role in making poor decisions with grave consequences. I hope they empathize with the mother and see the struggles that parents go through as their child grows up. If they do they will realize that parents make mistakes while raising children and the love parents have for their children is never in question. They will understand that the choices we make affect ourselves most significantly and should not be made lightly because while the act may be a moment its' effects can last a lifetime. -in regards to the question what kids know about AIDS ("is it a shock for kids to hear you can get HIV through heterosexual sex")?

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Steve: The only thing that still shocks me about AIDS is the atrocious way that our public schools have dealt with educating our children. It would not surprise me at all to hear what kids don't know. I have dealt extensively with schools while trying to educate kids about HIV and AIDS and I was stunned to see the amount of ignorance permeating the adults that run our schools. If this is true of educators then how do we expect our children to have solid information with which to make decisions?

Amir: Most of the people who have seen the film are young (18-24). They seem to really enjoy the angle of the story. That means a lot to me, 'cause we made this film with the intention of young people trying to communicate with young people. It's time for our generation to stand up and be accounted for.

4. You mentioned you are working on an 8 minute version of the film. What will that include that this version did not? Is the poem itself longer?

Steve: The film when finished will include the original poem in its' full 8 minute length. This includes a sequence where he learns the glory of sex from an older boy. This shows how peers influence each other and indicates how sex can be seen as a substitute for love in a way that makes abstinence an incomplete solution to some kids problems. We see a drinking sequence that further shows the effects of peer pressure, gives insight into kids experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and illustrates how drugs and alcohol can be linked to unsafe and unwise behavior. The mother features in more prominently giving you a fuller sense of the dynamic between the mother and son, including a sequence where the son asks his mom how to use a condom. In this and the above drinking sequence parents see how keeping their children safe and healthy means giving them honest information and talking with them, allowing them to make an informed and responsible decision. Most exciting to me is a 40 second sequence towards the end that shows the boy dealing with the traumatic news more fully and realizing that his mom loved him despite her inability to show him in the way he needed.

5. The film talks a great deal about death and the ultimate result of contracting HIV. Similarly, you use the words AIDS and HIV synonymously. Was this a conscious choice? Does the longer version suggest any of the more up-to date sense of the virus, ie, that it is not a death sentence, but a manageable disease for many of those who have access to antiviral medication?

Peter: The words AIDS and HIV are not used synonymously. The girl develops AIDS, then calls the boy, who then tests positive for HIV. I don't believe the film has a responsibility to address antiviral medication. It's not about the virus as much as the psychology of a kid who facing the concept of his own mortality.

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Steve: There is no doubt that due to modern technology and breakthroughs in medicine A.I.D.S. need not be the death sentence it once was, but to speak of aids in any light that presents it as tolerable is a mistake that I did not want to make, especially considering the huge majority of the world that can't afford the treatments. My intent was to show AIDS as a monster to be feared, to be avoided, and to be conquered, not to be embraced and kept around as if a friend. Friends are the ones who are stricken with AIDS and HIV, not the disease that strikes them. I hoped to make the distinction between H.I.V. and A.I.D.S. and the people who get it by showing the main character as a person we can relate to: A person who errs, forgives, and struggles to understand. A person for kids to see themselves, and their friends in. And most importantly, a human being with a mother who loves him. Once they see him in this way they then seek to avoid A.I.D.S. without abandoning those afflicted by it. I deliberately chose to use the terms AIDS and HIV as interchangeable because in educating children I learned that the distinction between the two is made only by those with in depth education about the subject. This is not the boy in the piece nor the people watching it. I felt the distinction was negligible in that the same behavior prevents them both.

6. I appreciated the part where you tie the use of a condom in with self-esteem. As in the section "no guy had ever bothered to use one before/so she thought it didn't matter or she didn't matter/and she must've convinced me then." Do you have any more to say about this and how it ties into the rest of the film?

Steve: I believe that anyone who knowingly engages in behavior that jeopardizes their health does so because on some level they don't value themselves enough. Amongst peers, value comes from surface things such as things you do or things you possess. Parents need to be the ones who value you because of who you are as a person. If you are taught early on that your worth is determined by matters of consequence like how you treat people and acting on your convictions and not superficial issues like clothes or who you sleep with you will tend to make choices that make you feel good about yourself when you are alone and that is the surest sign that you have high self esteem.

Peter: I know that line is one of Steve's favorites. It was important to him to hint at the character of the girl. I believe the same theme is repeated in the boy's relationship with his mother. When negative behavior is reinforced it repeats. Behavior can be reinforced simply by suggestion. A mother says "You're a bad son," the son begins to believe he is, and then goes about making bad choices.

Amir: I agree with Steve and Peter. This film, as short as it is, speaks to a lot of people. I think the power in this is that HIV doesn't usually come around by itself. We need to look to the way we are living our lives, the ways people respect themselves and each other. A huge problem lies right there.

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7. What about the main character's relationship to his mother? It seems to be at the center of the film in a way I really appreciated. What are some ways, in your mind that young people can bridge the gaps between their parents disapproval and their own risk-taking and search for identity?

Steve: I think that the relationship between parent and child, whether seen as positive or negative, is the most significant relationship in determining the person a child will become. The way they talk, think, act, interact, believe, and perceive things is largely determined by how they are raised and how their parents are around them. If there are gaps in the relationship between parent and child it is largely because the parent is unable to grow with the child especially when parents disapprove of the directions the child is going. The parents hold the power in the relationship but if they take that power for granted they will push the child away. In my opinion, the child will only be as mature and open as they are taught to be by their parents. The parents must make decisions for their child's well being but it is important that especially when their child disapprove of the decision they are fully informed of why the decision was made. Open and honest communication from the parent will encourage the same in the child.

Peter: Communicate with your parents. Be truthful. Be a witness to your own behavior. Most choices in life we make unconsciously. You can take more control over those choices, simply asking yourself "If I do this will the consequences be negative to me and the those that love me?" If the answer is yes, don't do it. It's as simple as that. There's something empowering in that simple method of living.

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