

Matthew McConaughey delivers Oscar-quality performance in bittersweet biopic

Written by Kam Williams

Ron Woodroof (Matthew McConaughey) was informed that he had just 30 days to live when he was diagnosed as HIV+ in 1986. At that time, the Food and Drug Administration was dragging its feet in terms of finding a cure, perhaps because AIDS was still considered by many to be a gay disease.

While pharmaceuticals elsewhere around the world were studiously testing hundreds of chemical compounds in hopes of developing an antidote, the only one approved for distribution in America was AZT, a medication so toxic to Ron's system that it almost killed him. Rather than resign himself to a quick demise, the tough as nails Texan resolved to fight for his life.

First, he visited a clinic in Mexico promoting a promising cocktail of alternative therapies, purchasing a supply sufficient to test the experimental regimen on himself. When the trial proved effective, he snuck back across the border, posing as a priest, to smuggle a trunk full of pills out of the country.

Soon thereafter, the enterprising electrician founded the Dallas Buyers Club as a viable way of skirting the law to distribute unapproved substances such as Interferon, Peptide T and Compound Q. A mere \$400 per month would afford members access to a variety of state-of-the-art, AIDS remedies.

Despite his homophobia, the gruff, good ol' boy went into business with a partner with deep roots in the gay community. Flamboyant Rayon (Jared Leto), an HIV+ transsexual, played a pivotal role in attracting a loyal clientele of fellow AIDS patients, since Ron was a given to employing offensive slurs when referring to homosexuals. Together, the unlikely pair built the fledgling enterprise into an economic success which provided a priceless service for patients frustrated by the FDA's delayed response to the epidemic.

Directed by Jean-Marc Vallee (Café de Flore), "Dallas Buyers Club" recounts Ron Woodroof's desperate struggle to survive in the face of a governmental bureaucracy that appeared to not care. The movie was inspired by *Buying Time*, an article by Bill Minutaglio which appeared in the Dallas Morning News on August 9, 1992.

Riddled with historical inaccuracies, the bittersweet biopic frequently plays fast and loose with the facts in favor of fashioning an entertaining tale as dictated by the Hollywood fantasy formula. Truth be told, the real-life Ron was apparently not as intolerant of homosexuality as depicted. Furthermore, he was initially given a two-year life expectancy by his doctor, not the mere month stipulated in the picture.

Perhaps most importantly, some of the overpriced drugs he imported were banned for very good reason. Nevertheless, the fairytale related here is a terrific tour de force likely, at last, to land Matthew McConaughey that elusive Oscar nomination.

For, not only does the lanky thespian convincingly convey the acute mental anguish of an AIDS-ravaged soul but he even shed about 50 pounds for the role. Sexual politics make strange bedfellows, too!

