

## ‘Dallas Buyers Club’ is Highly Romanticized Yet Effective

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 8, 2013 - 9:18pm

- [1980s](#) [2]
- [AIDS](#) [3]
- [Dallas Buyers Club](#) [4]
- [Denis O'Hare](#) [5]
- [Focus Features](#) [6]
- [HIV](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Jared Leto](#) [9]
- [Jean-Marc Vallée](#) [10]
- [Jennifer Garner](#) [11]
- [Matthew McConaughey](#) [12]
- [Movie Review](#) [13]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [14]
- [Steve Zahn](#) [15]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Matthew McConaughey’s performance as a 1980s-era HIV positive man in the drama “Dallas Buyers Club” is a gangbusters piece of acting. However, some highly exaggerated characters and soft soaping of reality creates a more gauzy romance of the situation than true grit.

It’s not that this isn’t a compelling story – it is, and it’s based on truth – but there is a Hollywood sheen upon it that has characters miscast, motivations too noble and gay personas too queen-like to feel completely legitimate. It is the 1980s AIDS circumstance that we wished would be, with a noble cowboy taking on the Medical Industrial Complex and the government to provide healing drugs for the HIV population. It wasn’t as easy as that – see last year’s documentary “How to Survive a Plague” – and the medical community weren’t all mustache twirlers. But the film does successfully focus on the screwed-up system that allowed human beings to die because their lifestyles were counter to society and a pharmaceutical/medical bureaucracy that was blinded by money.

A roughneck, hard drinking and heterosexual oil rig electrician, Ron Woodroof (Matthew McConaughey), has been losing weight and health for months. When a workplace accident brings him to a Dallas hospital, he is diagnosed HIV-positive (he had slept with a injectable drug user). Refusing to acknowledge his fate, or his death sentence of 30 days, Ron embarks on more reckless behavior.



Taking On the System: Rayon (Jared Leto) and Ron (Matthew McConaughey) in ‘Dallas Buyers Club’  
Photo credit: Focus Features



It is a sympathetic doctor named Eve (Jennifer Garner) who convinces Ron to begin treatment, but he can't get his hands on the drug AZT, which was still in clinical trials in 1986. While getting treatment in the hospital, he meets a gay AIDS sufferer named Rayon (Jared Leto), and between the two of them they hatch a plot to run and sell non-FDA approved drugs from Mexico, Japan and Amsterdam. The Dallas Buyers Club is born.

The screenplay – by Craig Borten and Melisa Wallack – is Hollywood slick, and in its exposition prefers hyperbole to character development. The Ron Woodroof character is odd, he is presented initially as a homophobic hick who can barely hold onto a trailer residence, but by the end he has a corporation, lawyer and an elaborate network set-up, complete with “business trips” overseas. It's jarring, and doesn't feel natural for the story of this based-on-truth character.

McCounaughy does cling to his characterization, and for the most part it is memorable. There is a harrowing scene in which Ron melts down in tears, archly frustrated at his station in life. The agony in McCounaughy's face is intimate and corrosively sad. It's a fool's game to predict the Oscars at this point, but it's the type of performance the Academy loves. McCounaughy also celebrates his native Texan roots in the character, and that is the main flavor in his fight.

Jennifer Garner was miscast, but the script didn't do her Dr. Eve role any favors. Caught between the medical bureaucracy and her friendship with Ron and Rayon, the character isn't accessible and lacks direction. Jared Leto, as Rayon, is the queen-iest gay man this side of “La Cage Aux Folles,” and unfortunately is nobler-than-thou as well. Rayon doesn't play as a believable human being, especially one facing a death sentence.



Dr. Eve (Jennifer Garner) Treats 1980s AIDS Patients in 'Dallas Buyers Club'

Photo credit: Focus Features

There is some potent symbolism throw in by director Jean-Marc Vallée, and much of the Medical Industry/FDA struggle is a reminder of the same idiocy regarding healthcare today. When healthy people make decisions for sick people, especially in an attempt to balance profit and loss, It morphs into a partisan argument as to ‘who gets what’ to save lives. It's possible that the queenie characterization of Rayon was emblematic of the American view of gays in those desperate days, and the use of at-the-rodeo elements provided a shorthand for Ron's quixotic contesting of the system.

And Ron also represented the heroes of that age, dying men and women who refused to accept a government and society that would just allow them to die. Ron's evolution was about America as well, and it remains a tragedy in hindsight that so many had to die, because their inherent nature was counter to an outside perception of the word “normal.”

*“Dallas Buyers Club” continues its limited release in Chicago on November 8th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Matthew McConaughey, Jennifer Garner, Jared Leto, Denis O'Hare and Steve Zahn. Screenplay by Craig Borten and Melisa Wallack. Directed by Jean-Marc Vallée. Rated “R”*



[16]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]

Senior Staff Writer

HollywoodChicago.com

[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [16]

---

© 2013 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

**Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 29 2024 - 10:42am*):**

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/22812/dallas-buyers-club-is-highly-romanticized-yet-effective>

**Links:**

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/1980s>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/aids>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/dallas-buyers-club>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/denis-o-hare-0>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/focus-features>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/hiv>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/jared-letto>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jean-marc-vall-e>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/jennifer-garner>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/matthew-mccounaghey>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/patrick-mcdonald>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/steve-zahn>
- [16] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>