

Years after his death,
a young AIDS activist's
is celebrated on film

REMEMBERING PEDRO

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Fifteen years after Miami's Pedro Zamora became a national symbol for living with HIV — and dying of AIDS — a new drama about his life will soon debut on the network that made him a reality TV star.

Pedro, a film written by Dustin Lance Black, who won an original-screenplay Oscar for *Milk*, will be simulcast April 1 on four MTV networks. The Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival will screen the film Sunday night at the Colony Theater in Miami Beach.

Zamora's older sister Mily, who raised him after their mother died, and nursed him until his own death at age 22, will attend the Colony screening.

"It's a piece of my heart that I'm going to share with the world," she said.

At first, Mily Zamora didn't think she could relive the pain of Pedro's illness and death.

"When they first asked me about making the movie, I was thinking very selfishly about dealing with this again," said Zamora, now 44. "But when I sat down and thought about the movie, and I thought about Pedro and what he wanted and his life, I had to say yes. He wanted to reach as many people as possible. He wanted to reach everywhere."

Zamora attended a screening of *Pedro* last week at Florida International University.

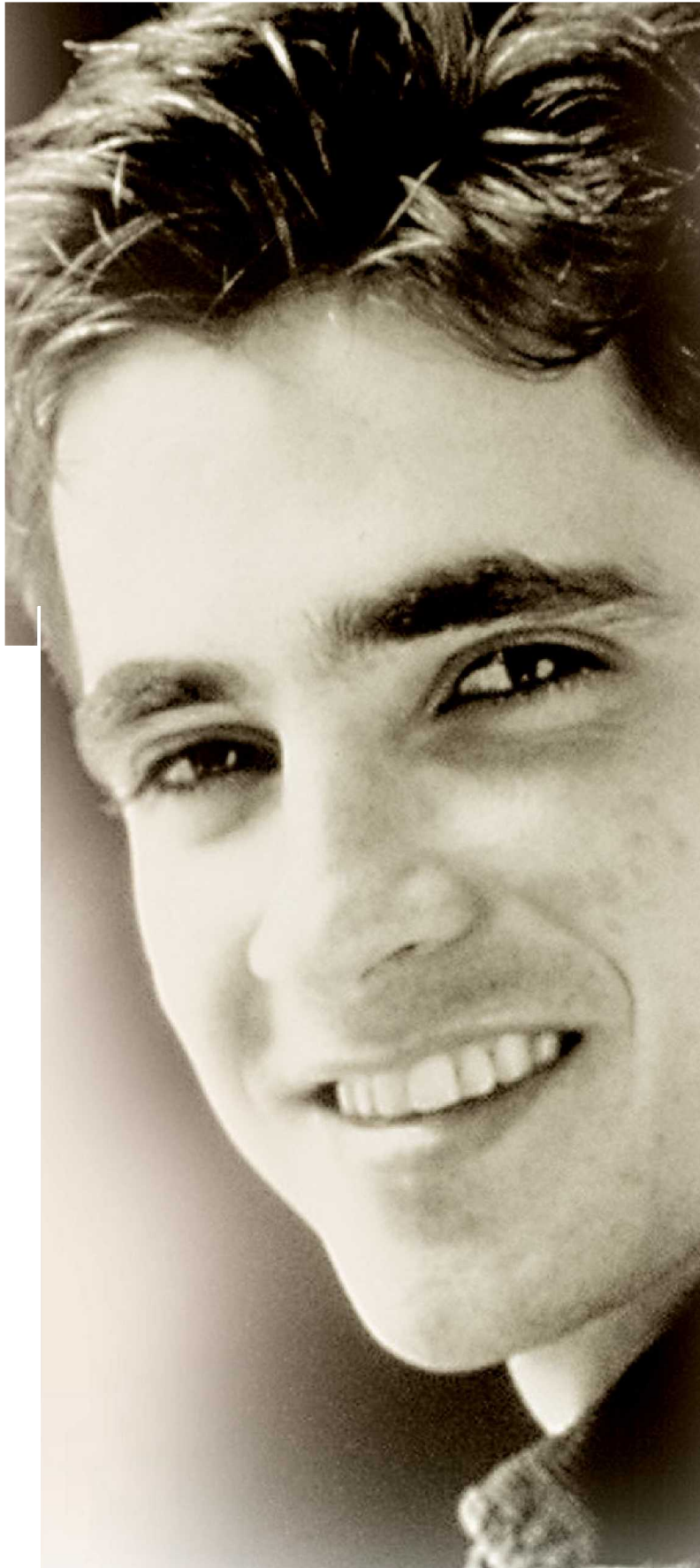
"We spoke with Mily after the show. She's a very strong woman," said Rashad Subhan, 18, a member of FIU's gay fraternity, Delta Lambda Phi.

Subhan said he loved the film.

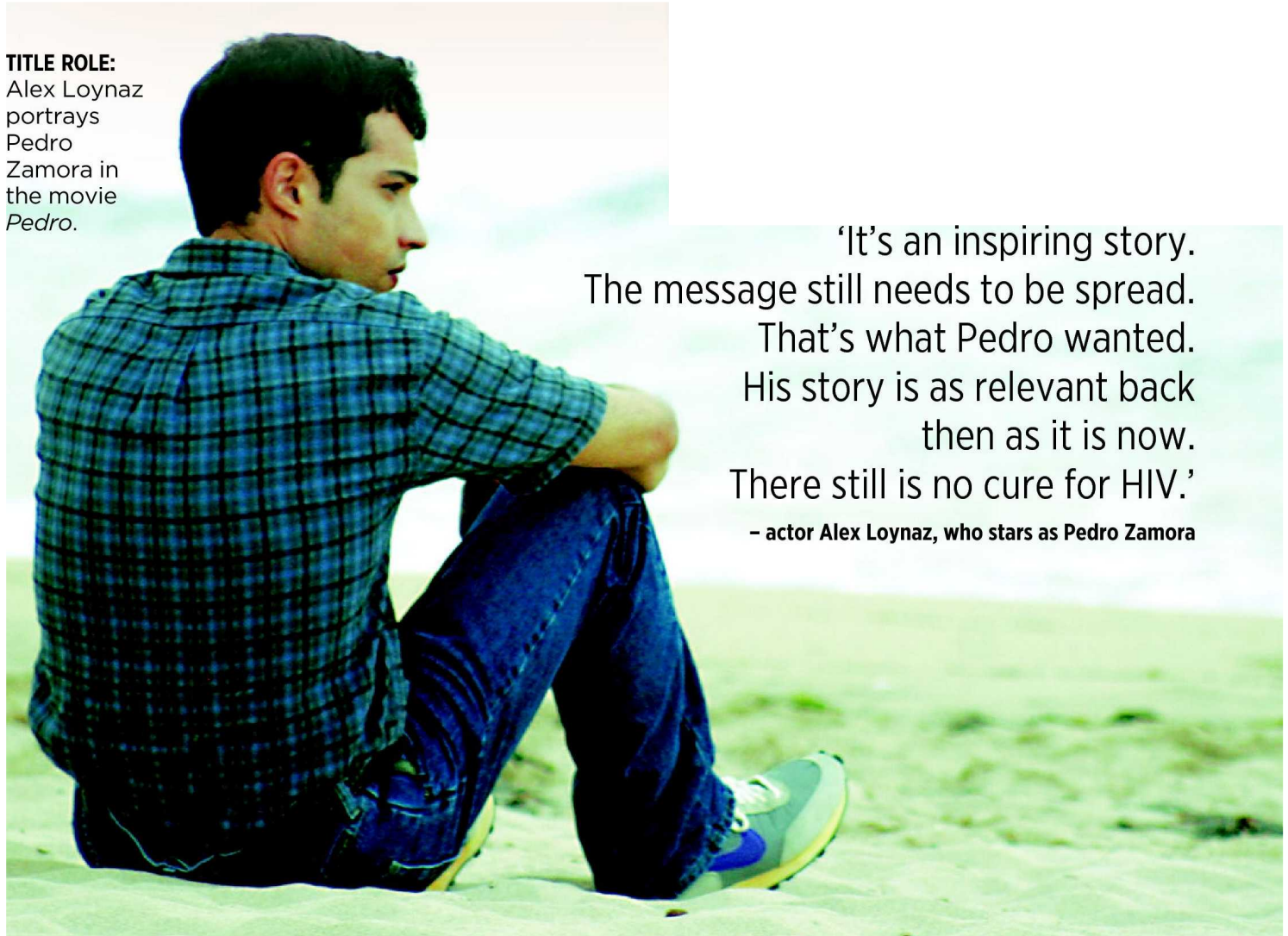
"It was very emotional. It pulled on your heartstrings," he said. "The acting was pretty spot on."

Pedro stars Alex Loynaz, a 27-year-old actor originally





TITLE ROLE:
Alex Loynaz
portrays
Pedro
Zamora in
the movie
Pedro.



'It's an inspiring story.
The message still needs to be spread.
That's what Pedro wanted.
His story is as relevant back
then as it is now.
There still is no cure for HIV.'

– actor Alex Loynaz, who stars as Pedro Zamora

from Miami Beach, in his first big part.

"It's an inspiring story," said Loynaz, who now lives in Los Angeles. "The message still needs to be spread. That's what Pedro wanted. His story is as relevant back then as it is now. There still is no cure for HIV."

'THE REAL WORLD'

Diagnosed with HIV at age 17, Pedro had been an AIDS activist for several years when he sent a letter to producers of MTV's *The Real World*, asking to be on the show.

"He was one of the first people to use a reality show for a greater purpose," said Jon Murray, co-executive producer of *Pedro* and *The Real World*.

"We got this letter from out of the blue from this kid in Miami," Murray recalled. "There were pictures of him that were done on a Xerox machine. He was stunningly handsome. I remember opening the letter and saying, 'Oh my God, we've hit the jack-

pot. Not only is this kid HIV positive, but he can speak eloquently of it.'"

Murray and others came to Miami to interview Zamora.

"He was having diarrhea and other issues faced by people with HIV at the time. There was no [drug] cocktail then. We asked him how he's doing. He bluffed his way through the interview saying he's very healthy," Murray said. "I talked to him about the stress of doing a reality show. He said, 'Jon, I've protested in front of the White House.'"

Murray cast Zamora on *The Real World* for season three, set in San Francisco.

Midway through filming the series, Zamora's health suddenly declined.

"He got sick much faster than he expected," Murray said. "That's when he made us promise to tell his story till the end." Zamora died



BUNIM-MURRAY FILMS

FAMILY TIES: Alex Loynaz as Pedro Zamora and Justina Machado as his sister Mily.

Nov. 11, 1994, just after the final third-season episode of *Real World* aired.

Pedro begins with Zamora being hospitalized while promoting *The Real World*. The story is told in flashbacks, including how some of the Zamora family left Cuba in 1980 during the Mariel boat-lift. The Cuban government allowed parents Julia Zoraida and Hector Zamora to leave the island with Mily and youngest sons Jesus and Pedro. Five other siblings were not allowed to leave.

At age 13, Pedro lost his mother to cancer. Soon after that, he began having sex with men. He contracted HIV at 17. Mily, eight years older, took care of him.

Pedro enrolled at Miami Dade College and became an AIDS activist. A magnetic personality, he spoke to other young people about HIV prevention and keeping themselves safe.

PEDRO'S MESSAGE

After he died, Mily continued spreading Pedro's message through public speaking.

"I do it with my love, because I promised him," she said. "It's never like the way he would do it, but I'm trying with all my love."

She is angry that HIV is still rampant in our community. The Miami and Fort Lauderdale metropolitan areas have the highest AIDS rates in the United States, according to Care Resource, South Florida's largest AIDS

service agency.

"We talk and talk and talk to the people and they don't listen," she said. "I feel frustrated. I don't have the words to express the feelings. It's not easy for me to leave my family behind to go to a school and speak. And when I go to a hospital and meet young people who are sick, I say why?"

"They say, 'Everybody is stressed and we have a couple of drinks and we don't think.' I say, 'What do you mean you don't think? It's your body! It's the most important thing!'"

Mily Zamora first saw *Pedro* last fall at the Toronto Film Festival. She attended the screening with trepidation and much emotion.

If you go

What: 'Pedro' presented by the Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival

Where: Colony Theater, 1040 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach

When: 7 p.m. Sunday

Cost: \$7 film festival members, \$11 nonmembers. Tickets can be purchased at Colony box office noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and noon till showtime on Sunday.

Info: www.mglff.com

'Pedro' will be simulcast at 8 p.m. April 1 on MTV, MTV TR3S, mtvU and LOGO with an introduction by former President Bill Clinton. It will be released June 9 on DVD.

"I cried. I felt like I wanted to scream. I wanted to see my real Pedro again," she said. "I was afraid that they would not show the real Pedro and not the real message. But the message in the movie, they could not have done it better. I'm very proud. Amazing."