

# Pedro's story finds a new voice

By **Steve Rothaus**  
THE MIAMI HERALD

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 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.

*Pedro* stars Alex Loynaz, a 27-year-old actor 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."

Diagnosed with HIV at age 17, Pedro Zamora had been an AIDS activist for several years when he sent a



Bunim-Murray Films, courtesy

Alex Loynaz portrays Miami AIDS activist Pedro Zamora in *Pedro*.



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 Jonathan 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 jackpot. 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 Nov. 11, 1994, just after the final third-season episode of *The 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 boatlift.

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.

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."

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

"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."

## If you go

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

**Where:** Colony Theater, 1040 Lincoln Road, Miami Beach

**When:** 7 p.m. Sunday

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

**Info:** [mgiff.com](http://mgiff.com)

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