

## MOVIE REVIEW

# A candid look at HIV among blacks

GARY GOLDSTEIN

By turns frightening and fascinating, compassionate and compelling, the tough-titled documentary "Why Us? Left Behind and Dying" is an all-too-essential look at the disproportionately high rate of HIV/AIDS in black America and sub-Saharan Africa. Claudia Pryor Malis' candid, compactly informative film, showing for one week to qualify for much-deserved Oscar consideration, examines an extremely complex issue in a laudably accessible yet hard-hitting way.

Part feature film, part research project, "Why Us?" follows 20 curious, courageous inner-city teens from Pittsburgh's academically challenged Westinghouse High School as they explore the history and profusion of HIV/AIDS throughout their community and culture. These kids pose probing questions about the disease to a series of school visitors, including straights, gays, intravenous drug users, HIV-positive locals (several of whom are separately profiled as well) and doctors and scientists from America and Africa. The students also take pains to open up directly to director Malis about their own safe — or unsafe — sex practices and fears about HIV/AIDS. Wes-

tinghouse alumna Tamira Noble, 20, nicely serves as the film's narrator.

The intertwining explanations for the HIV/AIDS explosion among blacks — low self-esteem, distrust of science and the healthcare system, poverty, gender inequality, trouble squaring racial and sexual identities, a history of secrecy and shame, and even a possible genetic variation — are vividly presented here. But it's a hard look at the black church's ingrained homophobia and long-time reluctance to deal with HIV/AIDS that perhaps prove the most disturbing. As a more enlightened Baptist pastor chillingly says here of the epidemic, "This is real whether you accept it or not. You don't lead a dead man to God." Amen to that.

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## 'Why Us? Left Behind and Dying'

MPAA rating: Unrated

Running time: 1 hour, 26 minutes

Playing: At Laemmle's Grande 4-Plex, downtown Los Angeles

# To be the toast

[Toronto, from Page D1] post-"Juno" feature film script by writer Diablo Cody, directed by Karyn Kusama and starring Megan Fox as a high schooler possessed by a demon.

Running through Sept. 19, this year's TIFF will screen more than 250 feature films from more than 60 countries. Last year the fest provided an early launching pad for award juggernaut "Slumdog Millionaire," which had its world premiere at Toronto following a sneak preview just days before at the Telluride Film Festival. This year, "Up in the Air," "An Education" and "The Road" are among the titles working the Telluride-to-Toronto shuffle, playing alongside high-profile for-sale titles such as "A Single Man," "Agora," "Chloe" and "Love and Other Impossible Pursuits."

The art-house movie business continues to struggle. A number of specialty labels (Warner Independent, Paramount Vantage among them) have closed, and ticket sales for highbrow films remain soft. Sales at Toronto, not surprisingly, will likely be slower than in years past, but many remain hopeful that there will be an uptick in deals as companies such as Overture Films (which has Michael Moore's "Capitalism: A Love Story" in this year's fest) and Summit Entertainment (which bought Toronto's "The Hurt Locker" last year) become more active on the festival scene.

"I'm not sure there will be



'CREATION': Married co-Connolly play Charles Durning

Classics, which enters the festival with the awards contenders "An Education," "The White Ribbon" and "Broken Embraces."

While Hollywood may be concerned with awards and acquisitions, the average festivalgoer cares only about seeing good films. Every year some supposedly hot titles fade after their festival screenings (see last year's "Me and Orson Welles") while others suddenly jump to the fore ("Rachel Getting Married"). It's the discovery, and the hunt for the next surprise, that keeps the annual event interesting. With that in mind, here's a rundown of some of the festival's buzz-worthy movies:

## 'Juno's' kids

Two years ago, "Juno" was the darling of the festival