

# Gates's final speech inspires film-makers

## Legacy delivers activist's message

By FIONA HUGHES

Jon Gates will be fondly remembered for his energetic, inspirational activism, but what will likely remain his most telling act is a speech he gave at a 1992 Canadian AIDS Society meeting in Halifax.

There, Gates challenged scientists, governments, friends and foes with a formidable task: don't release an AIDS vaccine until the entire world can afford it. For the world to take on the challenge when such a drug is available would be nothing short of historic and heroic.

"In taking this action," he said, "we would send a clear message to government, and most importantly, to people living with HIV and AIDS in developing countries, that we will not allow the lifeboat to leave until... we can be assured that everyone has a chance to be on board."

He said no relatively privileged group in an industrialized country indicated to others they were prepared to make genuine sacrifices to ensure that people in developing countries would have a better life.

"If we take this action we will create a model for all other endeavours to make the world a more just place to live. We can choose to stand by and watch the sweep of history, or we can make history."

Gates's 20-minute speech is the focus of a new documentary by local film-makers. The Legacy of Jon Gates, a 52-minute film by Harvey McKinnon and Peter Davis, premieres at the Pacific Cinémathèque Dec. 13 at 7:30 and 9 p.m. It details Gates's last two

years in Ottawa working as the Inter-Agency Coalition on AIDS Development's first co-ordinator. He objected strongly to using 80 per cent of resources in the overdeveloped world when 80 per cent of people with AIDS live in the underdeveloped nations.

He helped found AIDS Vancouver, one of the first AIDS service organizations in Canada.

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"I made this film because in a 20-minute speech Jon was able to move me from feeling there was nothing I could do about AIDS to a feeling that I could do something," McKinnon said. "His passion and charisma are contagious and I believe this film will move others to action."

"The great thing about Jon is that he was iconoclastic and very funny. You are seduced by his charms. He made a tremendous contribution to the international fight against AIDS."

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McKinnon and Davis's previous documentaries include Side by Side: Women Against AIDS in Zimbabwe, and In Darkest Hollywood: Cinema and Apartheid.

Gates, who grew up on the West Side and graduated with honours from UBC, died at 37 on Dec. 9, 1992. He became well-known in the early 1980s as spokesman for the B.C. Human Rights Coalition. He was a com-

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No longer believing in the numbers game (one of his friends had a T-cell count of zero), he's definitely his own person. To the very end, he fought to bring common sense and compassion to the struggle against HIV, a friend wrote after Gates died.

A reception follows each screening.



**Jon Gates**