

'Pip and Zastrow' stirs audience

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Published March 16, 2008

After three years in the works, "Pip and Zastrow: An American Friendship," previewed on the silver screen last night.

The documentary laying out the 50-year friendship between former Annapolis Mayor Pip Moyer and raconteur and community activist Zastrow Simms.

It centered on their effort to keep Annapolis from erupting into violence in the wake of The Rev. Martin Luther King's assassination 40 years ago next month, though it went on to tell the pair's whole story.

It celebrated the friendship, the love between the two men, but it also touched on dicier material. It did not shun away from harsh details of Mr. Moyer's break up from wife, current Mayor Ellen O. Moyer. It did not gloss over the unintended consequences of urban renewal Mr. Moyer championed in a clear desire to improve lives.

And it did not skirt around the, well, interesting life led by Mr. Simms which provided much of the hilarity.

The sold-out house twice gave the pair a standing ovation, before and after the show.

In between they laughed, they cried. So many people showed up to see the film dozens were turned away.

Filmmakers Victoria Bruce and Karin Hayes thanked a long list of local supporters, including former County Executive Janet S. Owens and Ms. Moyer, who both helped the film with \$50,000 donations from each municipality, and asked them to introduce the film.

Ms. Owens lauded the filmmakers for recording the history of the long relationship

between the men.

"Ultimately when change happens it is because of relationships," she said. "They show the best that could happen. What a night for Annapolis."

Ms. Moyer said more but one comment cut to the core of the story.

"They trusted each other," she said.

While Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia burned in riots at the wrenching news of the civil rights leader's slaying in Memphis, tensions rose close to the breaking point in Annapolis. There were stashes of molotov cocktails in waiting, ready for the spark to set off a surge of violent reaction to the murder at the Lorraine Motel.

But it never happened here. The reason? The strength of that friendship, sparked on the basketball and rooted in respect, between a white man and a black man in still segregated Annapolis.

The film's heart lies in the love between these men, now old.

Pip Moyer's body is ravaged by Parkinson's Disease, stifling his speech but not the emotion in his eyes. The film deals in the slow, life depleting, ravages of his disease.

Zastrow Simms still dresses fine, though you won't find him without a cane. The film follows his life as well, including the unsuccessful run for city council in 2005.

The two "stars" of the film sat together during the show, chuckling at some memories, choking up at others.

The film cobbles together the story using old newspaper clips and photographs, animation, and interviews with witnesses and long time community leaders, like Speaker of the House Michael E. Busch, D-Annapolis, and Carl Snowden. George Phelps, the first black police officer in the county who played a role in keeping the lid on during April, 1968, narrates the film.

The crowd burst into applause at the end, stepping on the sound of final clips that ran with the credits.

But credit belongs to many in the community who lent time and effort, the filmmakers reiterated.

During a question-and-answer period with Ms. Bruce and Ms. Hayes, Annapolis resident Tony Evans stood to say, "Bravo and thank you," to which the crowd applauded.

He later applauded the film.

"The deft touch used to deal with some of the issues was perfect," he said. "I remember the feelings (about race) when I first came here in 1961. Seeing signs for black and white.... And the emotion, actors would have a hard time creating some of those moments."

The crowd filtered out but many came down the aisle to greet Pip and Zastrow. It took a while for Mr. Moyer to make it up the aisle as many stopped to greet him.

And Mr. Simms was in rare form as usual, announcing he is ready for Hollywood.

"If I can get Denzel (Washington) to play me and Woody Harrelson to play Pip, I'm ready," he said.

The film will be taken to film festivals in the near future and Ms. Hayes said they hope to have it become a television special documentary.

In the meantime local audiences will be able to see it again, and soon. A special showing will be held, geared to young people, at the Boys and Girls Club at the Wiley Bates Community Center.

Appropriately it will be on the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination, April 4, starting at 7 p.m.

- No Jumps-

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