

London film festival pulls film screening in latest "no platforming"

- London Independent Film Festival pulls HIV/AIDS documentary after protest threats
- Film makers hit back, describing act as "censorship" and "no platforming"
- Film maker questions independence of festival in ignoring rights to free speech and debate

London UK. April 11, 2016. LIFF, the London Independent Film Festival (<http://www.liff.org/>), has controversially axed its screening of the film *Positive Hell*, scheduled for April 17, in a move described by the film's writer and narrator, Joan Shenton, as "blatant censorship" and "the latest case of 'no platforming'".

This morning, Ms Shenton announced that she had been contacted by LIFF director, Erich Schultz, to say that he had "pulled" the film after four HIV/AIDS charities had threatened protests at the screening venue and at festival sponsors' premises "if we [LIFF] don't comply". Schultz also said he had received "over twenty protest letters".

The axing has some echoes of Robert De Niro's decision to remove the anti-vaccination documentary *Vaxxed* from the Tribeca film festival in New York at the end of March (<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/mar/27/robert-de-niro-pulls-vaccination-film-tribeca-vaxxed>), though there is no suggestion that the two films are in any way similar.

Positive Hell - already nominated for best documentary at the *Marbella International Film Festival*, and selected for *LA Cinefest*, *Digital Griffix* online festival, and the *Indie Festival 01* - was successfully screened at the Frontline Club in Paddington, London, last year after similar threats, though no protest actually materialised at that screening.

Joan Shenton said: "*Positive Hell*, the right to free speech and the HIV-positive people honestly depicted in the film are the victims of barefaced censorship. The film presents a view of HIV and AIDS which is not shared by the giant pharmaceutical companies, their lobby groups and some activists, but it is an evidence-based view nonetheless and has just as much right to be aired and debated as any other.

"I am flabbergasted by LIFF's censorship in response to a handful of emails that were clearly designed to shut down this debate by intimidating the festival and its sponsors. It questions just how 'independent' the London Independent Film Festival really is."

The email from Eric Shultz also stated that the selection committee was "unanimous in wanting to step away from screening *Positive Hell*."

Joan Shenton responded: "This is the selection committee that originally voted in favour of the film, so it has obviously been 'got at'. And in deciding to withdraw the film like this, the committee members – all students – are creating the latest case of 'no platforming'. They've been lobbied and have chosen censorship over free speech, solid evidence and constructive debate."

"I'm concerned about the lack of freedom of speech on student campuses. Some students unions are displaying fascist attitudes. We have been penalised with no redress and no chance to air our views, let alone the science that underlies the debate."

Ends

Notes for editors

Joan Shenton is available for interviews.

Positive Hell is a 30 minute documentary written and narrated by journalist Joan Shenton and co-produced in 2015 with director Andi Reiss.

- Nominated for best documentary at Marbella International Film Festival
- Selected for
 - Los Angeles CineFest
 - Digital Griffix online festival
 - Indie Festival 01
- Selected for – then banned from – 2016 London Independent Film Festival

Positive Hell tells the stories of five individuals in the north of Spain who had been intravenous drug users or alcoholics in their teens. They were treated in rehab units and overcame their addictions but tested “HIV” antibody positive. Thirty years on, they were fit and well, despite no regime of antiviral medication. One of them, physician Dr Ramon Garrido, had never taken any antiviral medication, consciously swimming against the tide of HIV orthodoxy for three decades. Another, Manoel Penin, took antivirals for short periods of time but gave them up. Raquel Sanz stopped taking antivirals because they made her feel so ill. She married and had two daughters. Both daughters inherited their mother’s HIV antibodies but (as is common) lost them after eighteen months. Raquel’s eldest daughter went on to have six children and her younger daughter followed a successful career. Both daughters were immensely grateful to have been kept out of the “AIDS zone”.

Positive Hell may be viewed at <http://www.positivehell.com> .

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