Film Close-Up: Leonardo DiCaprio

by Joey_Berlin

After Leonardo DiCaprio's career triumphs of 2006, including a Best Actor Oscar nomination for his role in "Blood Diamond" and a co-starring turn in the Best Picture-winning "The Departed," the 32-year-old superstar is taking on perhaps his most challenging role yet: activist.

LEONARDO DICAPRIO - Leonardo DiCaprio may just be taking on his most challenging role yet: activist. DiCaprio is the narrator, screenwriter and producer of 'The 11th Hour.' CNS Photo courtesy of Warner Independent Pictures. DiCaprio does not just lend his name and fame to the documentary "The 11th Hour." As its co-producer, co-writer and narrator, he devoted a considerable amount of effort to the project. It is a film he no doubt ranks as the most important of his career. Directed by sisters Nadia Conners and Leila Conners Petersen, "The 11th Hour" warns we are in the final moments before a cataclysmic environmental crisis brought on by our unchecked consumption of the Earth's resources.

And it offers solutions, as well. Great scientists and global leaders, including Stephen Hawking and Mikhail Gorbachev, also weigh in on the issue. While the actor is making activism more of a priority, he will continue to star in feature films, too. DiCaprio recently reunited with his "Titanic" co-star Kate Winslet to film "Revolutionary Road," a 1950s drama directed by Winslet's husband, Sam Mendes.

Q: You realize, of course, that "The 11th Hour" is not the first documentary about our impact on the planet. What does this film add to the ongoing discussion of the issue?

A: We show the harsh realities of what will happen if we continue with business as usual. But we also highlight the great possibilities that are out there. There are technologies that are in place right now that can reduce the ecological imprint by 90 percent. And it's time that we, as the people, started urging the powers that be to try to infuse this into our daily lives to the point where we don't even need to think about it anymore.

Q: How do you respond to deniers and skeptics who do not believe the film's warnings about how our energy consumption is affecting the environment?

A: My response to that has always been, how could we as a country not be for wanting to be energy independent and not reliant on foreign oil? If you don't believe in the overwhelming scientific community that is in agreement that mankind is playing a major role in this, how could we not want cleaner air, cleaner water? These are fundamental human rights issues. So I think it crosses political boundaries in a huge way. And that's my big statement in response to the skeptics.

Q: Actors often say, the less you know about me, the more you will buy into the characters that I play.

A: Hmm, I say that a lot!

Q: Now that we know what you care about and what your commitments are, how do you balance that with your acting career?

A: Truthfully, it's not something that I think about in this particular case. This has always been a huge passion of mine ever since I was very young. I was very affected by the media, much like this movie. I was very affected by documentaries that I saw as a young kid, about the rain forests and the mass extinction that's going on right now.

So for me it's a merging of two worlds, and I think that this film is the culmination of that. This comes from my experience in this business and learning how to affect people emotionally through film and my passion for environmental issues.

Q: How do you prioritize the two passions? With so many potential films to get involved with, how do you know what to drop and what to go forward with?

A: That's a good question. That's what I'm dealing with right now. But I'm taking one thing at a time. And this has been a three-year process, this movie. This has been a homemade movie in a lot of ways and very unique in my career.

It's much different from going off filming for three or fourth months. This has been hundreds of hours with Nadia and Leila in the editing room condensing thousands of hours of footage into an hour and a half. We were trying to make a film that will really impact people, to the point where they leave the theater seeing the harsh realities of what will happen to this planet and us in the future if we don't make change - however, also highlighting and hopefully inspiring people to realize that there are a lot of solutions out there if they become active.

Q: You personally try to limit your impact on the environment, but sometimes the media still nitpicks about your personal consumption. How do you feel about that?

A: Well, I think it's unfortunate that in a lot of media debates about this issue we aren't looking at the bigger picture. It becomes this constant rhetoric and this constant argument about the specifics of what we do personally.

This is my new statement after making this movie and listening to experts: We all can do only so much, considering the types of lifestyles that we have. And the environmental movement isn't about telling people how to live or pushing our viewpoints on others. It's about being more aware of these global forces that are out there and being more aware next time you buy something. And being more aware next time you vote for someone.

Â© Copley News Service