

= Latter Days =

Latter Days is a 2003 American romantic comedy @-@ drama film about a gay relationship between a closeted Mormon missionary and his openly gay neighbor . The film was written and directed by C. Jay Cox and stars Steve Sandvoss as the missionary , Aaron , and Wes Ramsey as the neighbor , Christian . Joseph Gordon @-@ Levitt appears as Elder Ryder , and Rebekah Johnson as Julie Taylor . Mary Kay Place , Erik Palladino , Amber Benson , and Jacqueline Bisset have supporting roles .

Latter Days premiered at the Philadelphia International Gay & Lesbian Film Festival on July 10 , 2003 and was released in various states of USA over the next 12 months . Later the film was released in a few other countries and shown at several gay film festivals . It was the first film to portray openly the clash between the principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter @-@ day Saints and homosexuality , and its exhibition in some U.S. states was controversial . Various religious groups demanded that the film be withdrawn from theaters and video stores under boycott threats .

The film was met with mixed reactions from film critics , but was popular with most film festival attendees . At the North American box office however , Latter Days only made \$ 834 @,@ 685 , barely covering the production 's costs with an estimated budget of \$ 850 @,@ 000 . In 2004 , freelance writer T. Fabris made Latter Days into a novel , which was published by Alyson Publications .

= = Plot = =

Elder Aaron Davis , a young Mormon from Pocatello , Idaho , is sent to Los Angeles with three other missionaries to spread the Mormon faith . They move into an apartment next to openly gay party boy Christian Markelli and his roommate Julie , an aspiring singer . Christian and Julie work as waiters at Lila 's , a trendy restaurant owned by retired actress Lila Montagne .

Christian makes a bet with his co @-@ workers that he can seduce one of the Mormons , and soon realizes that Aaron , the most inexperienced missionary , is a closeted homosexual . Aaron and Christian become acquainted after several encounters in the apartment complex . When Christian accidentally cuts himself on a metal hose reel and faints , Aaron helps him indoors and cleans his wound . Christian attempts to seduce Aaron , but the hesitant Mormon becomes upset by Christian 's remark that sex " doesn 't have to mean anything . " Aaron accuses him of being shallow and walks out . Worried that Aaron is correct , Christian joins Project Angel Food , delivering meals to people with AIDS .

Aaron 's fellow missionary , Paul Ryder , has a cycling accident . Returning to his apartment , a distraught Aaron encounters Christian , who tries to comfort him with a hug . Both men are overwhelmed by their feelings and end up kissing , failing to notice the return of Aaron 's roommates . Aaron is sent home in disgrace , leading Christian to confront Ryder , who is angry that Christian corrupted Aaron for no reason . Christian admits that he initially just wanted to win a bet , but says " it 's not about that " anymore . Recognizing Christian 's distress , Ryder tells him that Aaron 's flight has a five @-@ hour layover in Salt Lake City .

Christian finds Aaron standing in the snow outside the airport terminal . Christian confesses his love , and despite his misgivings , Aaron admits his own feelings of love . With all flights canceled due to a snowstorm , Christian and Aaron spend an intimate night in a motel . When Christian awakes , he finds Aaron gone . Aaron 's pocket watch , a family heirloom , has been left behind . Christian returns to Los Angeles . In Idaho , Aaron is excommunicated by the church elders , led by his own father , Farron , who is the stake president . Aaron is rejected by his father and scolded by his mother , who tells him that he needs to pray for forgiveness . When Aaron suggests that he might be gay , his mother slaps him . Overwhelmed by despair , Aaron attempts suicide . He is subsequently sent by his parents to a treatment facility to be cured of his homosexuality .

Christian is desperate to find Aaron and locates his home address and phone number . Aaron 's mother informs him that " Thanks to you , my son took a razor to his wrists ; thanks to you I have

lost my son . " Believing that Aaron is dead , Christian spends the next few days thinking continually about Aaron . Julie discovers an entry about Christian 's feelings in his cellphone journal and uses it as the basis for her new song . Christian travels to the Davis home in Idaho , where he tearfully returns Aaron 's watch to his mother . During an encounter with Julie , she hesitantly shows him her new video , which upsets Christian , realizing that part of the lyrics came from his personal journal without his consent . Julie tells Christian that she hoped something good would come from it .

In the treatment facility , Aaron hears a female voice singing and investigates . He discovers a music video playing on television , the song performed by Julie . The video prompts Aaron to return to Los Angeles in search of Christian . Upon arriving at Christian 's apartment , Aaron is heartbroken when a stranger answers the door . Thinking that Christian has returned to his party boy ways and moved on , and having nowhere else to go , Aaron makes his way to Lila 's restaurant , having befriended the owner while on missionary work after her life partner died . Christian , who happens to be working there , comes out and is overjoyed to see Aaron alive . They reconcile and later celebrate Thanksgiving with Christian 's co @-@ workers . Lila tells everyone that , no matter what , they will always have " a place at my table , and a place in my heart " .

= = Cast = =

Steve Sandvoss as Elder Aaron Davis , a young Latter @-@ day Saint from Pocatello , Idaho , who falls in love with Christian and must choose between his sexuality and his church . The producers auditioned a large number of people before casting Sandvoss , saying he " blew us away . "

Wes Ramsey as Christian William Markelli , an LA party boy aspiring to be an actor , Christian has his ideas of happiness and the meaning of life challenged when he falls for the simple but kind @-@ hearted Aaron . Ramsey said on the DVD Special featurette , " The character of Christian was on so many levels intriguing to me . I was just so excited and feel very blessed to have the opportunity to tell that story through his eyes . "

Rebekah Johnson as Julie Taylor , Christian 's roommate who tries to break out into the music world and on the way stop Christian from falling apart .

Jacqueline Bisset as Lila Montagne , the owner of Lila 's , a restaurant where Christian , Traci , Julie , and Andrew work . Her lover is terminally ill in hospital , but she still finds time to support Christian and Aaron with her witty and sarcastic advice . Bisset herself said , " I like humor , so I just , I really enjoyed doing all the cracks . "

Amber Benson as Traci Levine ; Traci has moved from New York to LA to become an actress and works at Lila 's to support herself . Traci does not like living in LA , but later admits she did not like New York much either .

Joseph Gordon @-@ Levitt as Elder Paul Ryder , a prickly , judgmental young missionary assigned as Aaron 's partner , Ryder is not enthusiastic about being in LA and even less so about living next door to a homosexual . Gordon @-@ Levitt originally auditioned to play Aaron , but his aggressive attitude toward the script but good sense of humor made the producers decide he was a perfect Ryder .

Rob McElhenney as Elder Harmon , the oldest of the L.D.S. missionaries and has been assigned as their leader .

Khary Payton as Andrew , an aspiring actor , but spends more time at Lila 's gossiping and telling racy anecdotes . Andrew has been HIV positive for quite some time , but remains in good health .

Dave Power as Elder Gilford , Harmon 's missionary partner .

Erik Palladino as Keith Griffin , a gay man dying of AIDS , drowning in his own bitterness and despair until befriended by Christian . Cox said that Palladino 's performance was not how he originally envisioned it , but he could not now imagine a different person playing Keith .

Mary Kay Place as Sister Gladys Davis , Aaron 's deeply religious mother , who , despite showing unconditional love and affection toward Aaron before he leaves for Los Angeles , cannot accept the fact that her son is gay .

Jim Ortlieb as Elder Farron Davis , Aaron 's father , who serves as a Latter @-@ day Saint Stake President in Pocatello , excommunicates Aaron from the church upon learning that he is gay .

Farron is portrayed as a distant , evasive individual .

Linda Pine as Susan Davis , the only Davis who accepts her brother 's homosexuality . In a deleted scene , she tells Aaron that his homosexuality has changed nothing between them . She also discovers Aaron 's suicide attempt , and in a panic , is able to save him just in time .

= = Themes = =

Cox has stated that the film is primarily about a love story between two characters . There is also an exploration of religious attitudes towards homosexuality , and the dilemma of religious homosexuals , torn between who they are and what they believe . A non @-@ fiction film with similar themes that has been contrasted with Latter Days is Trembling Before G @-@ d .

Cox has also said that there is a massive irony , both in the film and in real life , that a religion so focused on the family and its importance is ripping families apart through its teaching on homosexuality . In fact , Cox believes one cannot be Mormon and gay . Nevertheless , a major theme of Latter Days is that there is an underlying spirituality in the world that goes beyond the rituals and dogmas of religion .

= = Production = =

Latter Days was written and directed by C. Jay Cox after the success of his previous screenplay , Sweet Home Alabama , gave him the financial resources and critical credit to write a more personal love story . Cox based both characters ? Christian and Aaron ? on himself . He was raised as a Mormon and served a mission before coming out as gay , and had wondered what the two halves of himself would have said to each other if they had ever met . Latter Days was filmed in several locations in Los Angeles in 24 days on an estimated \$ 850 @,@ 000 budget . After Cox had financed the search for initial backing , funding was acquired from private investors who wanted to see the film made . However producer Kirkland Tibbels still faced several bottlenecks , as financing the whole film remained difficult . It was distributed through TLA Releasing , an independent film distributor , who picked it up through its partnership with production company Funny Boy Films , which specializes in gay @-@ themed media .

Despite coming from a Mormon background , Cox had to research details of the excommunication tribunal , which is held after Aaron is sent back to Idaho . Former Mormons told him about their experiences and provided Cox with " a pretty accurate representation , right down to the folding tables . " According to Cox experienced actress Jacqueline Bisset also added valuable suggestions for improvements to the story .

Casting for the two main characters did not focus on their sexuality , but their ability " to show vulnerability " . In a behind @-@ the @-@ scenes commentary , Steve Sandvoss explains that he did not want to play his character as a gay character , and Wes Ramsey emphasizes that the love story aspect of the film to him was detached from the character 's gender . Due to several nude and kissing scenes , Latter Days was released unrated .

= = Release = =

Latter Days premiered at the Philadelphia International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival on July 10 , 2003 . The audience enjoyed the film so much that they gave it a standing ovation . When the cast came on stage , they received another standing ovation . The film had a similar reception both at OutFest a week later , and at the Palm Springs International Film Festival . The film also screened at the Seattle and Washington film festivals before being released across the United States over the following 12 months . Later the film was released in several other countries and shown at numerous gay film festivals , namely in Barcelona and Madrid (where it was also a popular pick) and Mexico City . Since its initial release it had received nine best film awards , as Cox mentioned in 2005 on a featurette included on the UK DVD .

The film was banned by Madstone Theaters , an arthouse cinema chain with nine theaters across

the country , which claimed it was " not up to [our] artistic quality . " The company was pressured with threatened boycotts and protests by conservative groups to withdraw their planned release . At the North American box office , Latter Days made \$ 834 @ , @ 685 from a maximum of 19 theaters . As of January 2011 , the film is the top @ - @ grossing film from its distributor TLA Releasing .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical response = = =

Critics ' reviews have been mixed ; film review website Rotten Tomatoes reported that 45 % of critics gave the film positive write @ - @ ups , based upon a sample of 44 reviews , with an average score of 5 @ . @ 4 / 10 . Frank Scheck , reviewer for The Hollywood Reporter , wrote : " Cox 's screenplay , while occasionally lapsing into the sort of clichés endemic to so many gay @ - @ themed films , generally treats its unusual subject matter with dignity and complexity . " Film critic Roger Ebert gave it two and a half stars out of four , declaring that the script was peopled from the " Stock Characters Store " and " the movie could have been (a) a gay love story , or (b) an attack on the Mormon Church , but is an awkward fit by trying to be (c) both at the same time " . Michael Wilmington of the Chicago Tribune commented " this movie is often as kitschy and artificial as ... ' Sweet Home Alabama ' " , another film written by Cox .

Other reviewers were more favourable , such as Toronto Sun critic Liz Braun , who said Latter Days was " the most important gay male movie of the past few years . " Kevin Thomas of the Los Angeles Times commented : " At once romantic , earthy and socially critical , Latter Days is a dynamic film filled with humor and pathos . " Gary Booher , an editor for the LGBT Mormon organization Affirmation , said " It was so realistic that it was scary . I felt exposed as the particulars of my experience and of others I know was brazenly spread across the big screen for all to behold . "

= = = Awards = = =

= = Soundtrack = =

Eric Allaman scored the soundtrack to the film after shooting wrapped , and composed much of the score himself . Several scenes featuring the rapid passing of time , such as Christian 's desperate search for Aaron at Salt Lake City Airport , were scored with techno style beats , and scenes with emotional content were given a more " ambient ' tronica feel " . A total of three songs were written by C. Jay Cox for Rebekah Johnson to sing : " More " , " Another Beautiful Day " , and " Tuesday 3 : 00 a.m. " . Allaman was very impressed with Cox 's musical ability , and both men composed more songs as background music .

The official soundtrack album was released on October 26 , 2004 . Due to contractual reasons , Johnson did not appear on the album , and her character 's songs were performed by Nita Whitaker instead .

= = Novelization and other releases = =

In 2004 , the Latter Days screenplay was adapted into a novel by freelance writer T. Fabris , which was published by Alyson Publications . The book was faithful to the film , but added several extra scenes that explained confusing aspects of the film and gave more about the characters ' backgrounds . For example , the reason Ryder tells Christian where to find Aaron is his own broken heart over a girl he fell in love with while on his mission training . The novel also added dialogue that had been cut out of the film : finishing , for example Christian 's cry ? in the film ? of " That 's the hand I use to ... " with " masturbate with . "

In France , Latter Days has been titled *La Tentation d 'Aaron* (" The Temptation of Aaron ") , and

the DVD given a cover showing Aaron in a nude and suggestive pose . A new trailer was also released , which is considerably more sexual than the original . In Italy , Latter Days is distributed by Fourlab . The film has also been titled " Inguaribili Romantici " , shown on pay @-@ TV on Sky Show in December 2006 , and then released on DVD by Fourlab 's gay @-@ themed label " OutLoud ! " . The film is also available in an Italian @-@ language @-@ dubbed version .