Olmos: 'Filly Brown' debuts, 'Stand and Deliver' still resonates

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Edward James Olmos in "Filly Brown" coming out in theatres on April 19th

(CNN) -- If you can believe it, it's been 25 years since Edward James Olmos portrayed real-life math teacher Jaime Escalante in "Stand and Deliver." Escalante, a Bolivian immigrant, taught in a tough East L.A. high school and pushed his lowest-achieving students to learn calculus. The inspirational role won Olmos a Golden Globe and garnered him an Academy Award nomination for best actor, a first for an American-born Latino.

Since then, he's played memorable roles, such as Lt. Martin Castillo in "Miami Vice," Abraham Quintanilla in the film "Selena" and William Adama in "Battlestar Galactica."

Now, in his newest role as executive producer and actor in "Filly Brown," he plays lawyer named Leandro who tries to help Mexican-American hip-hop artist Maria Jose 'Majo' Tonorio, aka Filly Brown, and her family get her mom out of jail. The late Jenni Rivera plays the part of Majo's mother María and Lou Diamond Philips plays the father who takes care of Majo and her younger sister.

Olmos took some time to talk to CNN about the genuine portrayal of Jaime Escalante, what Latinos can do to make it in Hollywood and why Filly Brown's story needs to be told.

It's been 25 years since "Stand and Deliver" premiered in theaters. Did you ever imagine that the movie would be so successful and influential as its been?

I don't think anyone could've predicted that. Teachers use (it) as part of their curriculum. Millions of kids see it every year. That's why the movie is so well seen. It's amazing what that movie has done with the youth. I don't think anyone could have guessed that it would be used the way it's being used. It continues to be inspirational.

You're very well-known for choosing your roles carefully. How genuine was your portrayal of Jaime Escalante?

Everything I did was him. I just copied him as much as I possibly could. All his mannerisms, the way he moved, the way he walked, the way he touched his hair. I saw him do all these things and then just did it all. He worked with me to get the character just right and his memory was always right on. We wrote the script together from day one.

What advice do you have for other Latinos trying to make it in Hollywood?

Just don't give up. The only people I know who don't make it are the ones that quit. They must be continually educating themselves in the art form. Every day, seven days a week for eight consecutive years, I was on stage: singing, talking, acting and performing. It's like playing a piano.

Have you heard of a musician that's really successful not playing their instrument everyday? Never, never. They play religiously. If I can brush my teeth everyday, I can do something I love everyday, even when I don't feel like doing it. That's really the key to success in this industry and in anything you do. Do the things you love to do when you don't feel like doing them.

Hollywood has been known to hesitate to use Latino people to tell these Latino stories. Why do you think that is?

I don't think that they feel like there is a need a for it. The industry doesn't have anything against Latinos. If they are feeding them American food like hamburgers, and they're eating it by the billions, why do they have to feed them Mexican food? They don't because they like it. Why should Hollywood back actors who cannot bring in the money? That's going to take time.

Can you tell me a bit about your role in "Filly Brown?"

I play an attorney who tries to help Filly Brown get her mother out of prison. I've never played an attorney before. And, I'm also the executive producer for the film.

The film is a co-directed by Yussef Delara and Michael D' Olmos. How was it working with your son?

It was great. It's always fun to work with your family. I'm very grateful for it. My other son, Mico Olmos, helped produce it. It's been a family affair.

Why do you think it's so important to tell the story of "Filly Brown?"

It's a story that's never been told before in the history of film. That's a good reason to do anything. There's never been a movie of a Latina hip-hop artist who raps her poetry as well as her songs.

What was it like to work with Jenni Rivera, as this was the first time she took on an acting role?

That was probably the most inspirational part of the filming process. She ended up becoming the most inspirational artist on the set. Gina Rodriguez (who plays Majo) and her were just amazing. They just really committed, and their technique was so strong. Their ability to create the reality was just profound. Those that have seen it are left stunned. You will see if you haven't already, it's the best final scene in a movie that I've seen in years.

What do you want the audience, Latinos as well as non-Latinos, to take away with them after watching their film?

You can't go through this life alone. You don't reach the clarity that you do in life unless you work with your family. And, if the Academy has an opportunity to see this film, they will get to see truly riveting performances in a very modest film.

"Filly Brown" opens in theaters on Friday, April 19th.

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