

By ELISABETH VINCENTELLI

WHEN Larry Kramer's play "The Normal Heart" premiered on Broadway in 2011 — 26 years after its creation — its author was outside the theater, distributing leaflets about AIDS.

The guy was 76 and still out there agitating.

This speaks volumes about the firebrand activist who's now the subject of the HBO documentary "Larry

"Larry Kramer in Love and Anger"

9 p.m.

Monday on HBO

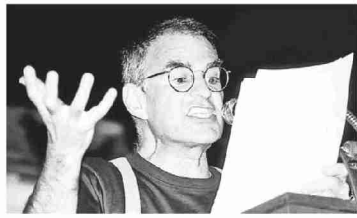
★★★

Kramer in Love and Anger. Watching the movie, you get the feeling that nothing can keep Kramer down.

Well, almost nothing — the doc features 2013 scenes

of a weakened Kramer, following a liver transplant necessitated by his living with HIV. He can barely move or speak and there he is, stubbornly turning down apple sauce.

Director Jean Carlomusto is a longtime activist and pal of Kramer's, and her movie is a loving portrait of a man famous for being a colossal pain in the rear.



Back in 1981 Kramer was among the first to spot the lethal potential of the AIDS epidemic — which he called a plague — and he dedicated his life to battling its spread. This gained him followers and enemies alike. The latter included the Koch and Reagan administrations, which Kramer accused of willful impotence in the face of catastrophe. But some foes weren't as obvious: Many gay men were annoyed by Kramer's condemnation of their unbridled sex life.

This would create huge fights within Gay Men's Health Crisis, an advocacy group Kramer co-founded — and then fictionalized in "The Normal Heart" (which was made into an HBO movie last year starring Mark Ruffalo).

Among the documentary's fun facts is that Kramer was so effective because he could afford it: Unlike many other activists, he was independently wealthy and had no job to lose.

After earning an Oscar nomination for his "Women in Love" screenplay, Kramer was hired to pen the 1973

LOOK BACK IN



Larry Kramer is arrested at an AIDS protest in front of the White House in 1987. Inset left: speaking at a Boston Gay Town Meeting.

AIDS activist Larry Kramer profiled in HBO doc

musical "Lost Horizon." The movie bombed but not until Kramer had cashed his fat check — which his older brother wisely invested on his behalf.

This left Kramer free to throw himself into AIDS activism, bringing along a flair for theatrical shock tactics — including "die-ins" and the scattering of AIDS victims' ashes on the White House lawn. "I was trained in the movie business," Kramer says. "You call it direct action; I call it putting on a show." Carlomusto's documentary is

strictly meat-and-potatoes, with the obligatory archival footage and talking-head testimonies —

mostly admiring, though we do hear from gay activist Arnie Kantrowicz, who objected to Kramer's attacks on gay promiscuity.

As for the love of the title, it does rear its head in unexpected ways. You'd need a heart of stone not to get teary when Kramer and his longtime partner, David

Webster, finally get married in 2013 — with Kramer still in the ICU. You just can't keep the guy down.

PGA GOLF ON CBS
 Third-round play in the Travelers Championship at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Ct., airs Saturday at 3 p.m.

