10s Across the Board!

Pose and the Latex Ball serve HIV realness.

September 24, 2018 By Trent Straube

The category is: Best Presentation of HIV Realness in a Television Series or Show.
Darlings, if you've seen even one episode of FX's hit Pose, then you know who's taking home this trophy. Set in the house and ball scene of 1980s New York City, the eight-episode story follows predominantly Black and Latinx LGBT outcasts struggling to survive the streets and the AIDS epidemic. They build community by living together in "houses" that function as families, complete with mothers; different houses compete against one another in balls that feature voguing and runway categories.

The show, coproduced by Ryan Murphy, made history for featuring "the largest cast of transgender actors in series regular roles as well as the largest recurring cast of LGBTQ actors ever for a scripted series," according to FX. Often overshadowed is this noteworthy aspect: The show highlights the devastation of HIV/AIDS in these communities. Two of the lead characters are HIV positive at the close of season 1, which ends in 1988, eight years before the advent of effective HIV treatment.

Bill Porter in a scene from “Pose”

Mj Rodriguez in a scene from “Pose”

Fast-forward to real life, 2018. HIV remains prevalent among minority LGBT communities, and New York City's ball culture is still thriving, as evidenced by the legendary Latex Ball, produced by GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis). This year's theme was "The Kingdom of Africa." Founded in 1989 as a way for GMHC to reach members of the ball scene with HIV prevention and safer-sex messaging, the Latex Ball still serves this vital public health function.

Spotted among this year's extravagant festivities and runway were several of the cast and creators of Pose, including Murphy, transgender activist and series writer Janet Mock and stars Mj Rodriguez, Dominique Jackson and Ryan Jamaal Swain. Perhaps they picked up some pointers for season 2. According to E! News, the series will continue its HIV storylines—including Sandra Bernhard as an AIDS ward nurse. That season will end in 1990, when the underground ball scene gets thrust into the global spotlight thanks to Madonna's "Vogue."

Walking the runway at the Latex Ball in New York CityCourtesy of GMHC/Dustin Moore

“Pose” cocreator Ryan Murphy, GMHC CEO Kelsey Louie and “Pose” writer Janet Mock at the Latex Ball

Fellas That Were in the Mood

Speaking of Madonna and “Vogue,” two of her dancers from that legendary video—Salim “Slam” Gauwloos and Carlton Wilborn—are both surviving and thriving with HIV. Read “The Re-invention Tour” on POZ.com to learn more about their stories and to see them strike a pose on the cover of this magazine.

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