AIDS In America

Pop culture timeline of AIDS-themed entertainment

December 1, 1994 By Casey Davidson

1981

The New York Times runs a short article about a new mysterious “gay cancer.”

1985

Big-screen sex symbol Rock Hudson dies of AIDS. People notice.

Buddies, a film directed by Arthur J. Bressan Jr., and described in Vito Russo’s *The Celluloid Closet*, is hailed as “the first feature film about AIDS.”

Larry Kramer’s breakthrough play, *The Normal Heart*, opens Off-Broadway in New York City.

As Is plays in a New York City theater.

An Early Frost, the first TV movie about AIDS, airs and wins an Emmy for best script.

American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmFAR) founded by Hollywood icon Elizabeth Taylor. The actress goes on to become America’s most famous AIDS activist.

1986

Parting Glances, a charming look at gay life, opens, along with a nonthreatening portrait of someone with HIV.

Grammy award-winning songwriting duo Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer Singer write “That’s What Friends Are For,” which is recorded by Dionne Warwick and friends. Proceeds from the single’s sale are marked for AIDS research.

1987

Randy Shilts releases his book *And the Band Played On* about the early years of the epidemic and

it becomes a best-seller.

1990

Longtime Companion is the first mainstream movie about AIDS.

1991

ABC airs *Our Sons*, a made-for-TV mocie about a gay male couple, one of whom is HIV positive, and their mothers' (played by Julie Andrews and Ann-Margret) attempts to overcome society's many prejudices about AIDS.

The play *Marvin's Room* debuts in New York City.

PBS cancels its broadcast of *Stop the Church*. The network cites concerns over the reaction of affiliate stations and the impact the video documenting ACT UP/New York's 1989 demonstration at St. Patrick's Cathedral would have on their programming.

1992

Sunday night drama about growing up autistic, *Life Goes On*, takes on AIDS by adding an HIV positive character to the mix, becoming the first series on television to have one on a regular basis.

David Drake's *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* opens Off-Broadway.

1993

Paul Rudnick's play *Jeffrey* is a hit. Cast members include Olympic gold medalist Greg Louganis.

Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* gets rave reviews and sellout crowds. The play easily sweeps the Tonys.

After years of trying to translate the watershed book to the screen, *And the Band Played On* is dramatized, but rather than a Hollywood film or miniseries, it's an HBO movie.

Living End opens in movie houses as one of the first really un-PC AIDS movies.

Philadelphia is the first studio movie about AIDS to be released. Wins two Academy Awards.

1994

MTV producers include Pedro Zamora, a Cuban-born HIV positive AIDS educator, in *The Real World*, the channel's *cinema verité* soap opera.

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