Exploring HIV and AIDS Through Film

A collection of movies about HIV and AIDS.

November 4, 2025

Since the earliest days of the HIV epidemic, film has played a powerful role in shaping public understanding, challenging stigma and honoring the lives of those affected by the disease. Below is a list of movies that explore the impact of HIV on individuals and communities around the world. Click on a title to learn more about each film. Most of these films are available to stream or purchase. Something missing from this list? Click here to send us your recommendations.

Click here for a list of documentaries about HIV and AIDS.

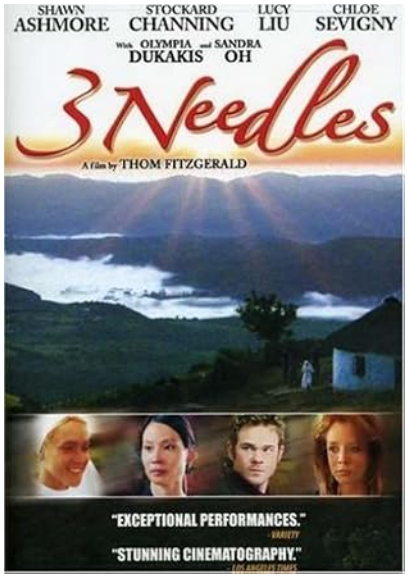
- 1985
- 3 Needles
- And the Band Played On
- After Louie
- Angels in America
- Bohemian Rhapsody
- Boys on the Side
- BPM (Beats Per Minute)
- Breaking the Surface: The Greg Louganis Story
- Buddies
- The Cure
- Dallas Buyers Club
- An Early Frost
- The Event
- Fairyland

- Fatal Love
- Gia
- Holding the Man
- In the Gloaming
- It’s My Party
- Jeffrey
- Life Support
- The Living End
- Longtime Companion
- Love! Valour! Compassion!
- The Normal Heart
- One Week
- Parting Glances
- Pedro
- Philadelphia
- Philomena
- Precious: Based on the Novel “Push” by Sapphire
- Pushing Dead
- Rent
- The Ryan White Story
- Three Months
- The Trip
- Yesterday
- Zero Patience

1985 (2018)

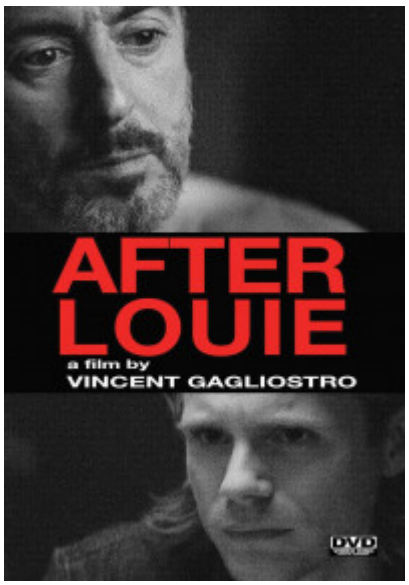
Cory Michael Smith, Virginia Madsen, Michael Chiklis, Aidan Langford, Jamie Chung

Set during the early years of the AIDS crisis, the film follows Adrian, a closeted young man who returns home to Texas from New York City for Christmas in 1985. As he reconnects with his conservative Christian family, Adrian struggles with the emotional weight of his secret — that he is gay and terminally ill.



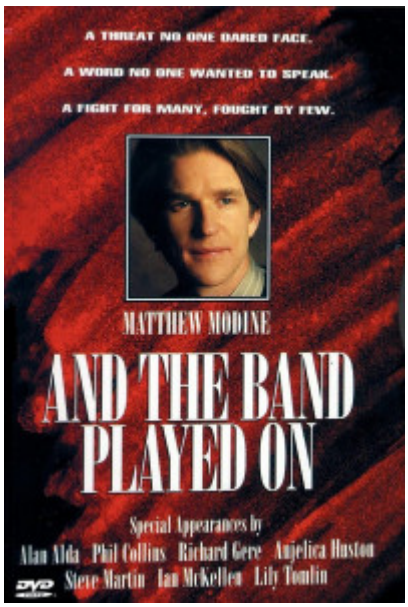
3 Needles (2005)
Chloë Sevigny, Lucy Liu, Shawn Ashmore, Stockard Channing

In China, Ping (Lucy Liu) is a pregnant young woman running a black market blood collection scam that creates a mini-epidemic in a rural village. In Montreal, Denys (Shawn Ashmore) is a porn actor hiding his positive HIV status in order to continue working and supporting his mother (Stockard Channing), who herself goes to extreme lengths to provide for the family's future. And, in Africa, Sister Clara (Chloë Sevigny) is a young novice nun driven to convert the rapidly dying Africans to Catholicism before it's too late who makes a desperate bargain with a corrupt plantation owner to help prevent the spread of HIV in the region.



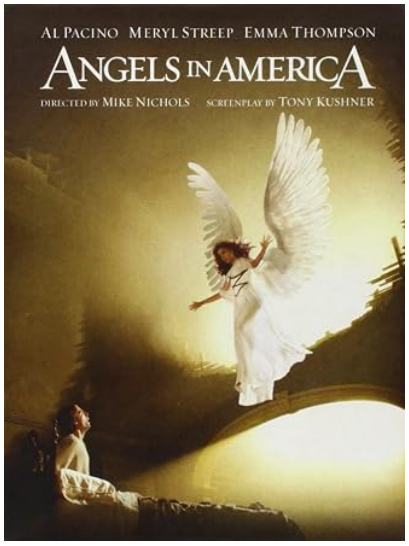
After Louie (2017)
Alan Cumming, Zachary Booth, Sarita Choudhury, Patrick Breen, Wilson Cruz

After Louie follows Sam (Alan Cumming), an artist and activist from ACT UP who lived through the early years of HIV/AIDS a man scarred and still struggling with survivor's guilt. Cemented into an oppressive past, he is bewildered by a younger generation of carefree gay men with their uninhibited use of social media, sexting, and seeming political indifference. But when he meets the seductive young Braeden (Zachary Booth), an intergenerational relationship blossoms between them—one capable of reawakening Sam's artistic soul and reviving his wilted heart.



And the Band Played On (1993)
Matthew Modine, Alan Alda, Patrick Bauchau and Nathalie Baye

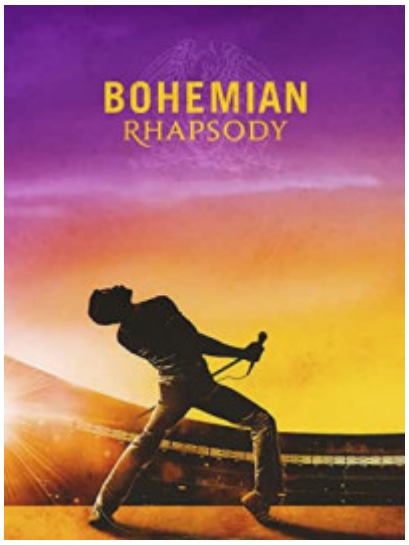
A deadly epidemic is spreading around the world. But when it first began, no one paid attention. Not the government, not health officials, not the press—not even the people who were dying. By the time we awoke up to the danger, it was too late…and thousands continue to die. Matthew Modine stars in this medical thriller as a young doctor tracking the disease halfway around the world and across two continents—and whose work is thwarted at every turn by fear, official indifference and bitter medical rivalries.



Angels in America (2003)
Al Pacino, Meryl Streep, Emma Thompson and Patrick Wilson

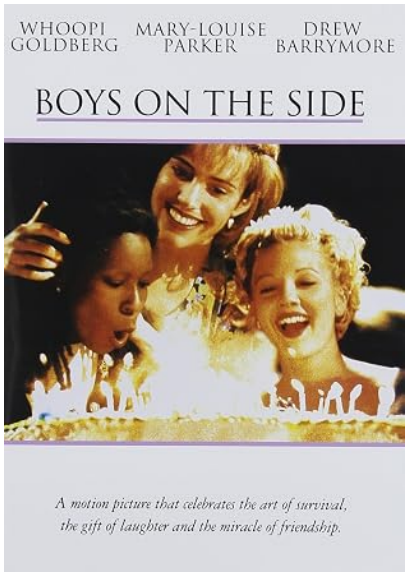
Extravagantly mounted on a budget that reportedly topped $60 million, this small-screen adaptation of Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning play is an extraordinarily complex and rewarding work of art. Set during the mid-'80s, when America was being battered by the first wave of AIDS deaths, it depicts the variegated reactions of numerous people whose contact with the dreaded disease, however ephemeral, irrevocably changes their lives.

Bohemian Rhapsody (2018)



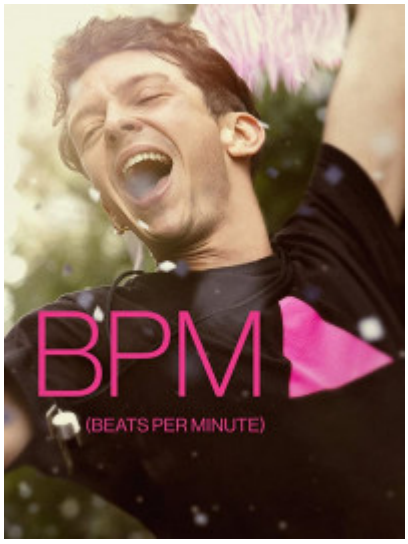
Rami Malek, Lucy Boynton, Gwilym Lee, Ben Hardy, Joseph Mazzello

An enthralling celebration of Queen, their music and their extraordinary lead singer Freddie Mercury, who defied stereotypes and convention to become one of history's most beloved entertainers. Following Queen's meteoric rise, their revolutionary sound and Freddie's solo career, the film also chronicles the band's reunion, and one of the greatest performances in rock history.



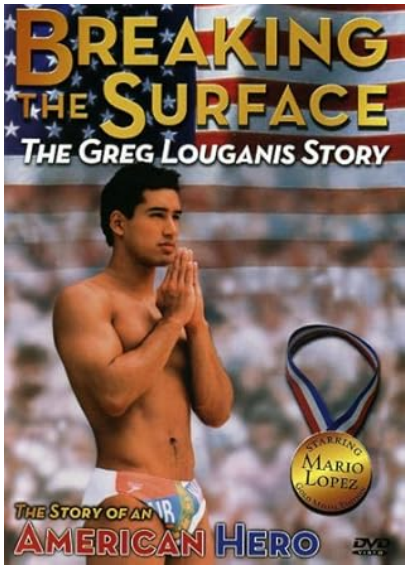
Boys on the Side (1995)
Whoopi Goldberg, Mary-Louise Parker and Drew Barrymore

Raucous, heartwarming gals-on-the-road odyssey with lesbian lounge singer Whoopi Goldberg and real estate salesperson Mary-Louise Parker heading on a cross-country car trip. Along the way they're joined by flirtatious Drew Barrymore, and before they reach their Southern California destination, the trio encounters a series of happy and sad surprises.



BPM (Beats Per Minute) (2017)
Nahuel Pérez Biscayart, Arnaud Valois, Adèle Haenel

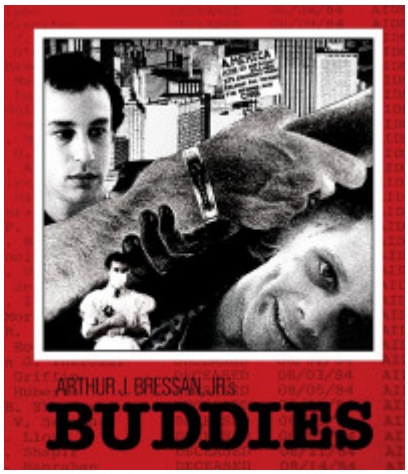
Set in early 1990s Paris, BPM follows members of the activist group ACT UP-Paris as they campaign for greater government and pharmaceutical action to combat the AIDS crisis. The group uses bold, confrontational tactics to raise awareness and demand access to life-saving treatments. At the heart of the story is Nathan, a newcomer to the group, who becomes romantically involved with Sean, a passionate and outspoken activist living with HIV. As their relationship deepens, the film explores the personal toll of the epidemic—both emotionally and physically—against the backdrop of intense political activism.



Breaking the Surface: The Greg Louganis Story (1997)

Mario Lopez, Michael Murphy, Rosemary Dunsmore and Jeffrey Meek

The real-life story of Olympic diver Greg Louganis is chronicled in this made-for-television drama. Mario Lopez stars as Louganis, an adopted child who went through a difficult adolescence, only to emerge as a world-class diver in the 1988 Olympics. After a notorious diving injury during those games, Louganis went on to win two gold medals. After the games ended though, Louganis was forced to face an even more challenging period and go public with his homosexuality and deal with his HIV-positive status. The film is based on the book of the same name.

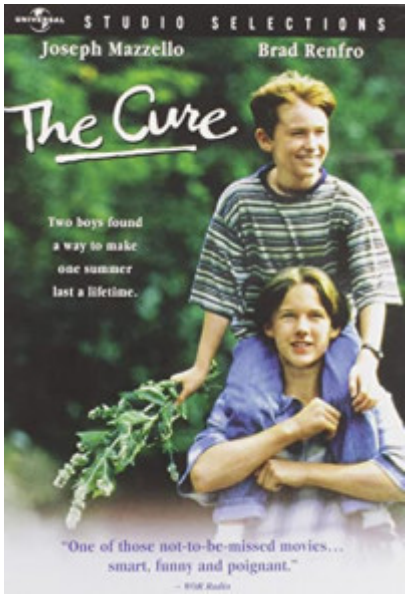


Buddies (1985)

Geoff Edholm and David Schachter

David (David Schachter), a naive graduate student, has volunteered to work as a 'buddy' for people dying of AIDS. Assigned to the intensely political Robert (Geoff Edholm), a lifelong activist whose friends and family have abandoned him following his diagnosis, the two men, each with notably different world views, soon discover common bonds, as David's inner activist awakens and

Robert’s need for emotional release is fulfilled.



The Cure (1995)

Joseph Mazzello, Brad Renfro, Annabella Sciorra

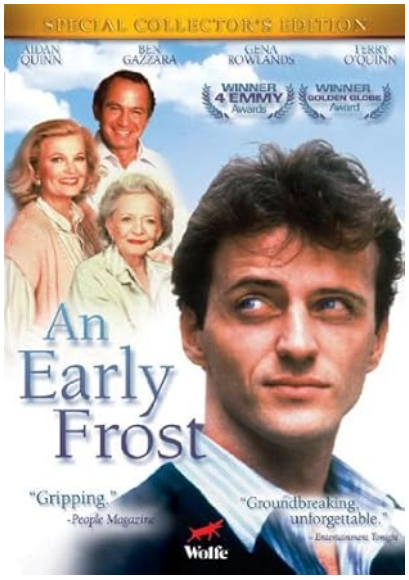
New to a quaint, riverside community, eleven-year-old Dexter (Mazzello) and his single mom are quickly shunned when it’s learned the boy has AIDS. Next door lives Erik (Renfro), a lonely latch-key bully who surprisingly initiates a friendship. But trouble soon finds the twosome after they read a tabloid that suggests a New Orleans doctor has a cure. Determined to find him, the boys build a raft and set sail down the mighty Mississippi, “Tom Sawyer” style, in a magical, often hilarious journey that gives Dexter a chance to experience life as it should be lived and will change both boys’ lives forever.



Dallas Buyers Club (2013)

Matthew McConaughey, Jared Leto, Jennifer Garner

Inspired by true events, Texas cowboy Ron Woodroof (McConaughey) sees his free-wheeling life overturned when he’s diagnosed as HIV-positive and given 30 days to live. Determined to survive, Woodroof decides to take matters in his own hands by tracking down alternative treatments from all over the world by means both legal and illegal. After finding an unlikely ally in Rayon (Jared Leto), he establishes a hugely successful “buyers’ club” and unites a band of outcasts in a struggle for dignity and acceptance that inspires in ways no one could have imagined.



An Early Frost (1985)

Gena Rowlands, Ben Gazzara, Sylvia Sidney and Aidan Quinn

It is 1985 and Michael Pierson (Aidan Quinn) is a successful young lawyer in Chicago who has just been made a partner at his law firm. But he lives a double life, keeping his boyfriend a secret from both family and co-workers. Everything changes when he gets sick with pneumonia and is diagnosed with AIDS, forcing him to be open about the disease and his homosexuality for the first time. Back home with his family, they learn to adjust to the son they never knew, and realize that they love him just the same.



The Event (2003)
Parker Posey, Don McKellar, Olympia Dukakis and Brent Carver

The Event centers around a series of unexplained deaths that occur among the gay community in New York's fashionable Chelsea district. Nick, a district attorney investigating the most recent case, a suspicious apparent suicide, and her interviews with friends and family of the deceased trigger extensive and intricately interwoven flashbacks that reveal surprising facts about the man's life.



Fairyland (2023)

Emilia Jones, Scoot McNairy, Nessa Dougherty, Geena Davis, Adam Lambert

Alysia Abbott and her father, Steve, move to San Francisco after the death of her mother. In their new location, Steve is able to be an openly gay man and live his bohemian life. But their relationship is strained by his newfound freedom and the independence that Alysia is given from a young age.



Fatal Love (1992)
Molly Ringwald, Lee Grant, Christopher Meloni and Perry King

Molly Ringwald stars as Alison Gertz, a young, affluent straight woman from Manhattan who believes she's invincible to AIDS. At age sixteen, she has a one-night stand with an older man and contracts HIV. Rather than giving up, Alison decides to use her experience to educate others. She becomes an AIDS activist, speaking out in high schools, raising awareness of how HIV can affect anyone—even those who don't fit the stereotype, and emphasizing safe sex.



Gia (1998)

Angelina Jolie, Elizabeth Mitchell, Faye Dunaway

Gia Carangi rises rapidly to fame in the fashion world, becoming a top model known for her beauty, attitude, and raw energy. Despite her success, she struggles with deep emotional insecurities, loneliness, and the pressures of fame. She begins to spiral into drug addiction and as her career declines due to her erratic behavior and heroin dependence, Gia contracts HIV from

a contaminated needle. The film follows her physical and emotional deterioration, leading to her tragic death from AIDS-related complications at the age of 26 in 1986.



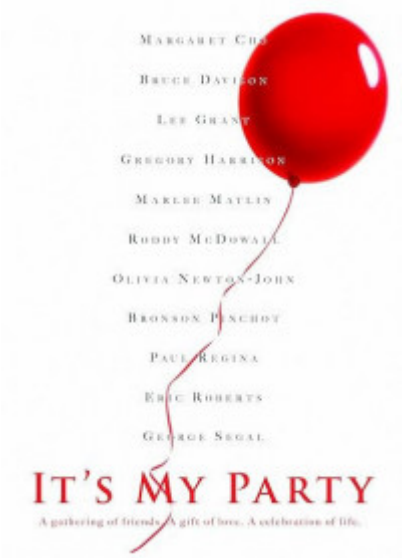
Holding the Man (2015)
Ryan Corr, Craig Stott, Guy Pearce, Geoffrey Rush, Anthony LaPaglia

Based on the international best-seller, Holding the Man is the sweeping love story of two high school boys, one the hunky captain of the football team and the other a sensitive drama student. After a sweet courtship, the two fall madly in love and traverse an enduring relationship over 15 years.



In the Gloaming (1997)
Glenn Close, Bridget Fonda, Whoopi Goldberg, David Strathairn, Robert Sean Leonard

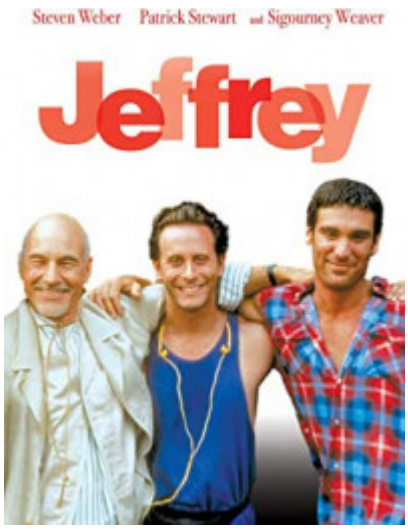
A moving film about a young man dying of AIDS (Robert Sean Leonard) who returns home to reconcile with his family. Based on short story written by Alice Elliott Dark and directed by Christopher Reeves.



It's My Party (1996)

Eric Roberts, Margaret Cho, Bronson Pinchot, Roddy McDowall, Randal Kleiser, Olivia Newton-John, Sally Kellerman

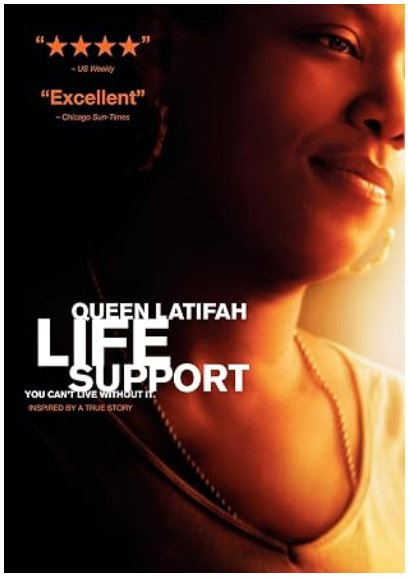
Nick (Eric Roberts), is nearing the end of a 3-year battle with AIDS and makes arrangements to die. He hosts a party to say goodbye to friends and family. His ex-partner, Brandon (Gregory Harrison), attends and things get complicated.



Jeffrey (1995)
Steven Weber, Michael T. Weiss, Peter Jacobson, Tom Cayler, David Thornton

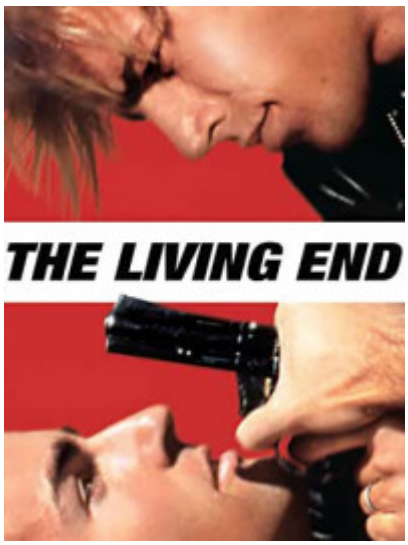
Meet Jeffrey (Steven Weber), a struggling actor in the New York scene who has just made the biggest decision of his life: he's swearing off sex…forever! No sooner has he made this startling vow than he meets the dreamy and sensitive Steve (Michael T. Weiss). With the help of his friends Sterling and Darius, Jeffrey decides to give love a second shot. But some unexpected news puts Jeffrey in a bind, forcing him to decide if he should take a risk on what could be the love of his life.

From acclaimed director Christopher Ashley and writer Paul Rudnick, this hilarious and touching film redefined the romantic comedy for the LGBTQ+ community living in the age of AIDS in the 90s.



Life Support (2007)
Queen Latifah

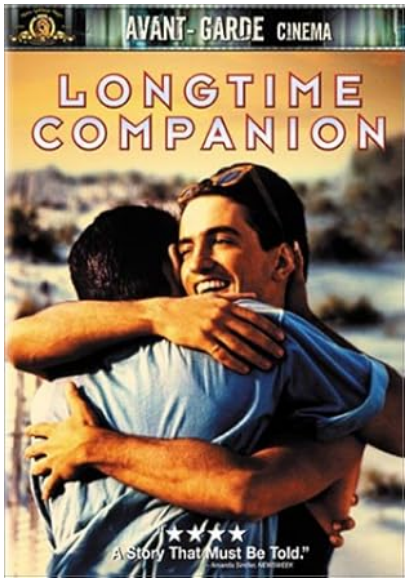
Queen Latifah stars as Ana, an HIV-positive former drug addict from Brooklyn, desperately struggling with her past and passionately trying to make things right with her involvement in an AIDS outreach group, Life Support. Inspired by a true story, Life Support is a touching, poignant tale of loving, losing and letting go.



The Living End (1992)
Mike Dytri, Craig Gilmore, Mark Finch, Mary Woronov, Johanna Went

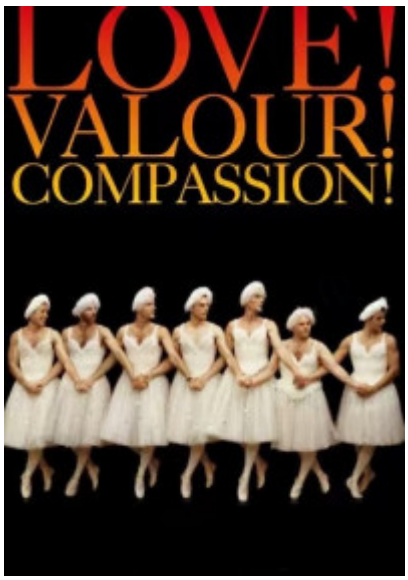
Luke (Mike Dytri) is a a gay hustler. Jon (Craig Gilmore) is a movie critic. Both are HIV positive.

They go on a hedonistic, dangerous journey, their motto “F*** the world”



Longtime Companion (1989)
Stephen Caffrey, Patrick Cassidy, Brian Cousins and Bruce Davison

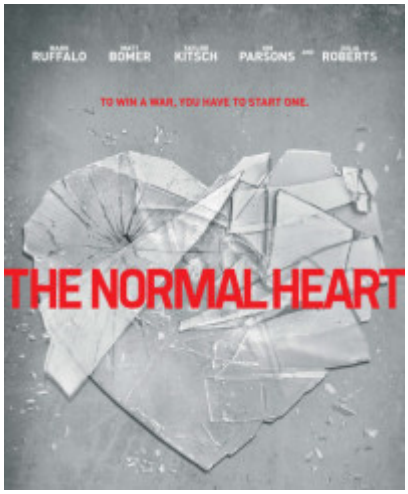
During the summer of 1981, a group of friends in New York are completely unprepared for the onslaught of AIDS. What starts as a rumor about a mysterious “gay cancer” soon turns into a major crisis as, one by one, some of the friends begin to fall ill, leaving the others to panic about who will be next. As death takes its toll, the lives of these friends are forever redefinedby an unconditional display, of love, hope and courage.



Love! Valour! Compassion! (1997)

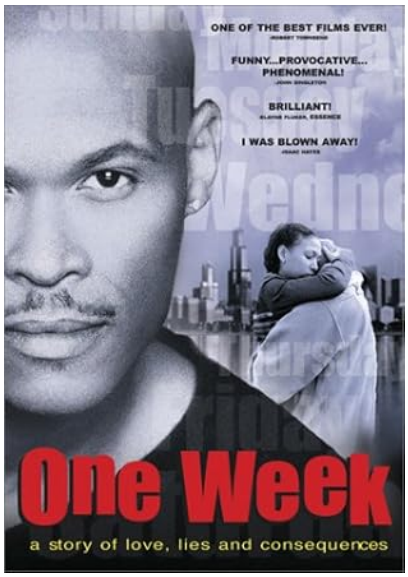
Jason Alexander, John Benjamin Hickey, Randy Becker, Justin Kirk, Saul Elkins, Joe Mantello, Stephen Spinella, Stephen Bogardus

A group of gay friends spend summer weekends together at a lakeside house in upstate New York. As the season progresses and secrets begin to surface, the complex relationships within the group are sometimes strained and sometimes strengthened.



The Normal Heart (2014)
Mark Ruffalo, Matt Bomer, Taylor Kitsch, Jim Parsons and Julia Roberts

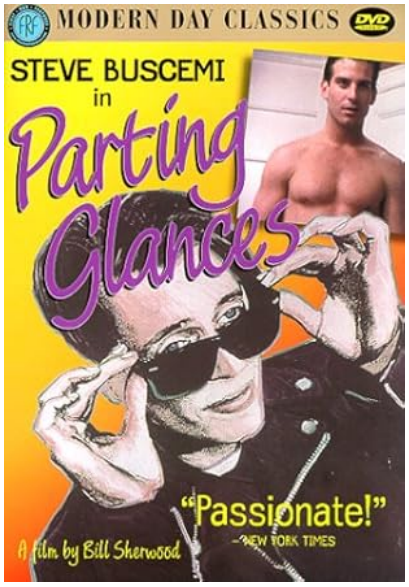
The Normal Heart tells the story of the onset of the HIV/AIDS crisis in New York City in the early 1980s. Based on Kramer's Tony Award winning play of the same name, it takes an unflinching look at the nation's sexual politics as gay activists and their allies in the medical community fight to expose the truth about the burgeoning epidemic to a city and nation in denial.



One Week (2001)
Kenny Young (II), Saadiqa Muhammad, Eric Lane (III) and Milauna Jema

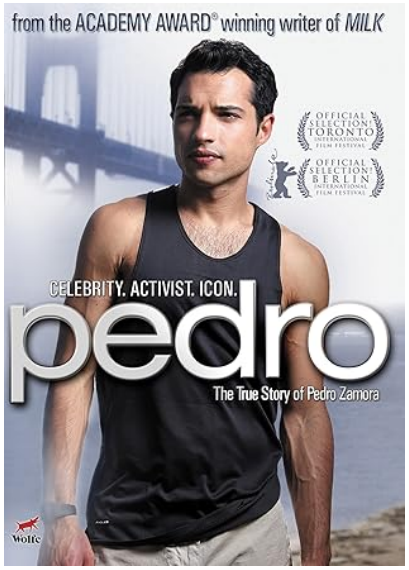
In this independent drama, Varson (Kenny Young) is a week away from marrying his long-time girlfriend Kiya (Saadiqa Muhammed), and things ought to be going well for him. But that's hardly

the case; Varson is having serious trouble negotiating the corporate battlefield at work, and his friend Tyco (Eric Lane) has taken up residence on his couch (and isn't taking the hint that it's time to leave). But these problems seem like small potatoes when Varson is informed that his name appears on a list of men who slept with a woman who has tested positive for HIV, leaving him to wonder if he's contracted the AIDS virus.



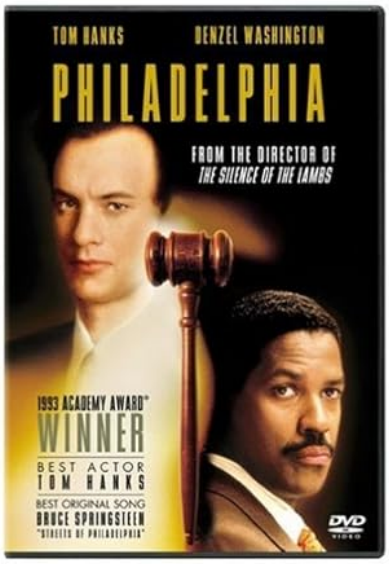
Parting Glances (1986)
John Bolger, Richard Ganoung, Steve Buscemi, Adam Nathan and Kathy Kinney

As Michael and Robert, a gay couple in New York, prepare for Robert's departure for a two-year work assignment in Africa, Michael must face Robert's true motives for leaving while dealing with their circle of eccentric friends, including Michael's ex-lover, Nick, who is living with AIDS.



Pedro (2008)
Alex Loynaz, Justina Machado, Hale Appleman

A biographical drama about Pedro Zamora, a Cuban-American AIDS educator and activist who rose to national prominence when he appeared on The Real World: San Francisco in 1994. The film follows Pedro's life from his early years through to his illness and eventual death, highlighting both his public activism and personal relationships.



Philadelphia (1993)
Tom Hanks, Denzel Washington, Roberta Maxwell and Buzz Kilman

Fired from his job for having AIDS and out of legal options, Andrew Beckett (Tom Hanks) seeks the help of homophobic lawyer Joe Miller (Denzel Washington) in a courtroom battle for his rights and human dignity.

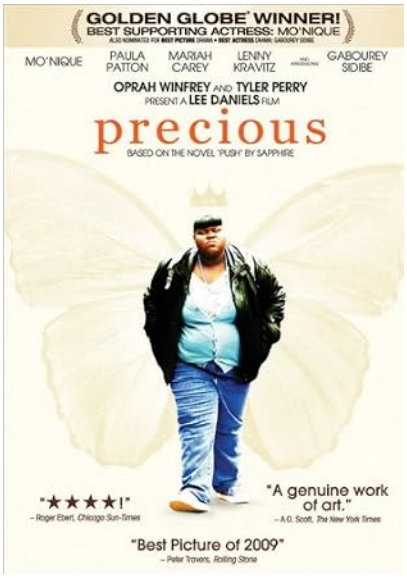


Philomena (2013)

Judi Dench, Steve Coogan

Academy Award-Winner Judi Dench stars as Philomena, a woman who alongside a grumpy reporter

(Steve Coogan) journeys to America to find the child she put up for adoption so many years ago.



Precious: Based on the Novel "Push" by Sapphire (2009)
Gabourey Sidibe, Mo'Nique, Paula Patton

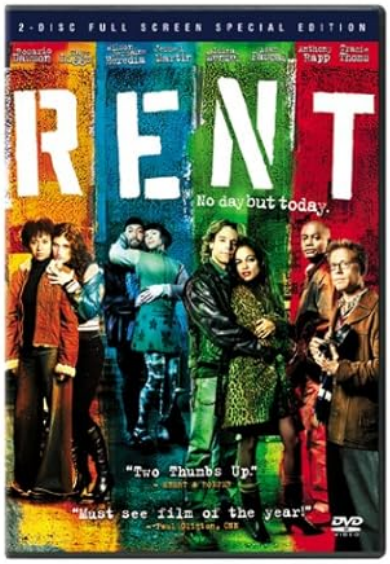
Lee Daniels' adaptation of author Sapphire's best-selling novel about an overweight, illiterate African-American teen from Harlem who discovers an alternate path in life after she begins attending a new school. Clareece "Precious" Jones is only a teenager, yet she's about to give birth to her second child. Unable to read or write, Clareece shows little prospect for the future until discovering that she has been accepted into an alternative school. There, with a little help from a sympathetic teacher (Paula Patton) and a kindly nurse (Lenny Kravitz), the young girl receives something that most teens never get— a chance to start over.



Pushing Dead (2016)

James Roday Rodriguez, Danny Glover, Robin Weigert

When a struggling writer, HIV positive for 20+ years, accidentally deposits a $100 birthday check, he is dropped from his health plan for earning too much. In the new era of sort-of universal care, can he take on a helpless bureaucracy or come up with $3000 a month to buy meds on his own?

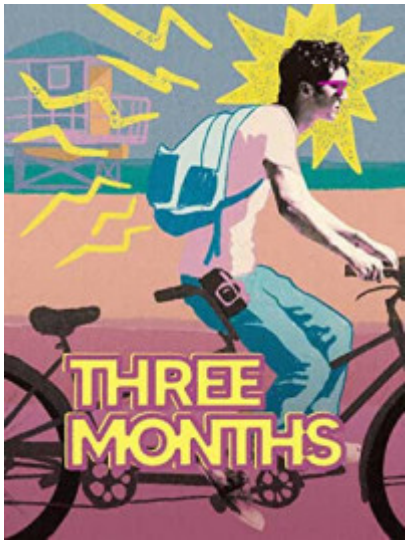


Rent (2005)
Taye Diggs, Wilson Jermaine Heredia, Rosario Dawson, Anthony Rapp and Adam Pascal

The passion to create and the courage to love are the ties that bind a group of struggling artists in Lower Manhattan in 1990 as they deal with friendship, life, and death in the shadow of AIDS. Jonathan Larson's Tony-winning Broadway hit, which shifted the story of "La Boheme" from 1890s Paris, makes the leap to the screen in this vibrant musical. Original stage stars Taye Diggs, Wilson Jermaine Heredia, Jesse L. Martin, Idina Menzel, Adam Pascal and Anthony Rapp are joined by Rosario Dawson and Tracie Thoms.

The Ryan White Story (1989)
Judith Light, Lukas Haas, Michael Bowen

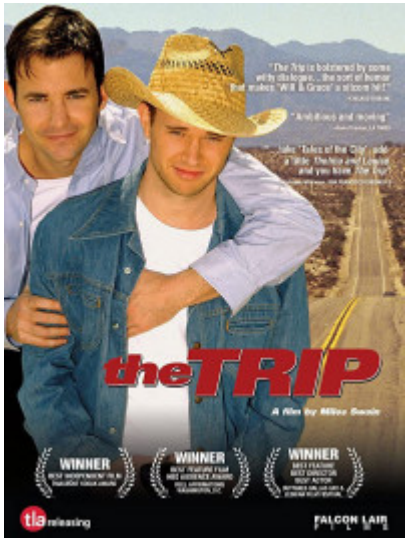
A made-for-TV biographical drama about Ryan White (Lukas Haas), a teenage hemophiliac who contracts HIV through a contaminated blood treatment. When his Indiana school bans him from attending due to fear and stigma around AIDS, Ryan and his mother (Judith Light) fight a legal and public battle for his right to attend school. The film portrays the intense discrimination they face, but also highlights growing public awareness and compassion. The story ends with Ryan finding acceptance in a new community, becoming a national symbol for AIDS education and anti-discrimination.



Three Months (2022)

Troye Sivan, Viveik Kalra, Javier Muñoz, Judy Greer

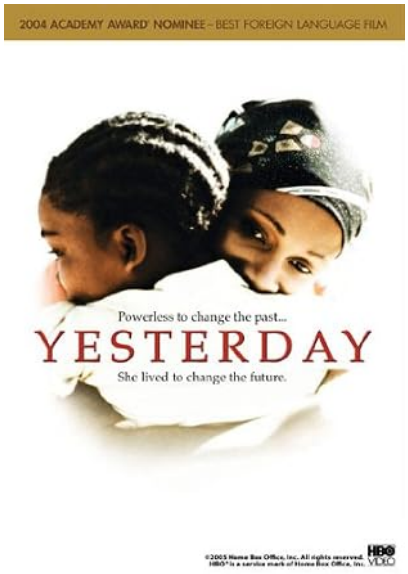
A comedic, coming-of-age film about a punk gay teenager from Miami exposed to HIV the weekend of his high school graduation, who starts a new relationship with someone from his support group as he waits the three months to get tested.



The Trip (2002)

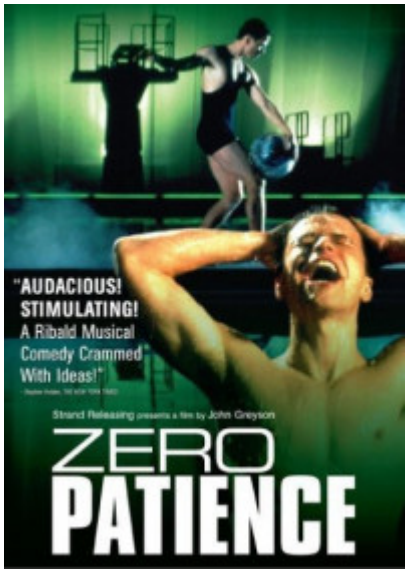
Steve Braun, Larry Sullivan, Jill St. John

Tommy is a sexy, blond gay activist who meets the handsome, muscular Alan, a closeted Republican, at a party in 1973. An intense love affair ignites, setting in motion a torrid and unpredictable relationship that steers its way through the turbulent political and social climate of the ’70s and ’80s.



Yesterday (2004)
Kenneth Khambula, Leleti Khumalo, Harriet Lenabe and Lihle Mvelase

A impoverished young mother with few creature comforts but an unbreakable spirit determined to see that her growing daughter receives an education after suffering a crippling setback in this affecting drama from director Darrell James Roodt. Yesterday’s family is poor, and despite the daily toil suffered by her husband in the mines of Johannesburg, she still manages to maintain a bright outlook on life thanks to her energetic seven-year-old daughter, Beauty. Upon falling ill, Yesterday is diagnosed with AIDS and her already harsh life appears to take a turn for the worse. Though Yesterday herself never received an education, the revelation of her declining condition inspires the young mother to cling to life so that she may see her growing daughter attend her first day of classes and die knowing that there is hope for a better life.



Zero Patience (1993)
John Robinson, Normand Fauteux, Dianne Heatherington, Richardo Keens-Douglas, Bernard Behrens

Zero Patience is a Canadian musical film directed by John Greyson. It’s a bold, satirical, and unconventional take on the AIDS crisis—particularly the myth of “Patient Zero,” a term wrongly attributed to Gaëtan Dugas, a French-Canadian flight attendant who was unfairly blamed for starting the AIDS epidemic in North America. The film critiques the media’s handling of AIDS, the scapegoating of individuals, and the scientific community’s role in shaping public perception.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.