Gay Sex and the City: a Q&A With Paul Victor

After Paul Victor learned he had HIV, he created a sex-positive series called *Mess*. It's now streaming on a screen near you.

February 13, 2017 By Trent Straube

Paul Victor is a hot mess—as in, his web series Mess is a hot property picked up by LGBT network Here TV. Victor tested HIV positive four years ago, when he was 22 and had recently moved to New York to pursue an acting career. He began journaling about his experiences, which morphed into a six-episode series following a group of frisky gay guys in Manhattan, including Andy, who's played by Victor. You can watch the series on Here TV, and the first episode—clocking in under 10 minutes—is available for free on Vimeo. POZ asked Victor about his story, both fictional and real; read the full interview on POZ.com.

Courtesy of "Mess"

How did you learn you are HIV positive?

I found out on what was an overdue but routine testing. A friend and I decided to "just get it over

with," and boom! Life changed.

Did you respond like Andy, who stays in his apartment for a month and skips auditions?

After collapsing in my friend's arms and spending the rest of that day getting spectacularly wasted, I was mostly in shock for the following months. I do remember that everything had a tinge around it, a new context within which I experienced everything. There was also a weird sense of relief that really took me by surprise. I've heard that from other HIV-positive guys. As gay guys, we are often taught that this is the scariest thing that could happen to us—and here we are living and thriving while also being HIV positive.

Has Mess affected how you process your own HIV status?

I made Mess as a way to deal with my HIV. I initially didn't expect to bring it to fruition. Andy is obviously so much me, it's like a time capsule into my life then. Moving forward [in future seasons], the question becomes, How do we open up the narrative to explore issues that other factions of the gay community deal with? For example, PreP [pre-exposure prophylaxis, a daily pill to prevent getting HIV] wasn't really a thing yet when I was diagnosed.

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What messages do you hope to convey with Mess?

Life doesn't stop at HIV. Sex isn't something to be ashamed of.

Mess is chock-full of steamy sex scenes—that's not a complaint!—but what was your reasoning for including them?

The sex scenes are just as important as the social worker scene [guest starring Rent's Anthony Rapp, pictured below]. It's not for turning on the audience—although, hey, occupational hazard, I

guess—it's to explore where the characters are and how they behave and use sex as ways to deal with things. Andy's relationship with sex obviously changes when he seroconverts, so I wanted to explore that.

Courtesy of "Mess"

Was it difficult to get people involved in an HIV-themed production?

We started fundraising on Indiegogo, and people I never expected to help us did. People have an appetite to be told real, honest stories. Most of our media dealing with gay life in the 21st century sort of ignores HIV. Why is that? People are being diagnosed every day, yet there's still this idea that it's something that happened in the '80s and '90s and we've moved past it. Well, if we've moved past it, why am I HIV positive? Why are so many of my friends?

To learn more about similar shows, read "Sneak Peeks and Special Guests on Season 2 of These HIV Web Series."

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