The Impossible Dream

For a few years, I seriously considered becoming a professional actor.

January 3, 2022 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I was in musical theater when I was in high school. I played Mr. Applegate (aka the Devil) in Damn Yankees, Don Quixote in Man of La Mancha and El Gallo (the narrator) in The Fantasticks. For a few years, I seriously considered becoming a professional actor.

There were plenty of reasons that didn't happen, but the most pressing was my inability to remember the lines. It took way too long for me to memorize scripts. It's the same reason why I usually don't tell jokes. Some would say it's because I lack a sense of humor. But really it's because I can't remember how to deliver the punch lines.

Our cover subject, André De Shields, thankfully suffers from none of those concerns. The Broadway legend and long-term HIV survivor has a way with words. At 76, the actor, singer, dancer, director and choreographer has been wowing audiences most of his life—and he's also been living with HIV for over 40 years.

Click here to read our interview with André conducted by POZ contributing writer Charles Sanchez, who found out firsthand how brilliantly André's light shines.

We had planned to interview André over a year ago, but COVID-19 got in the way. All's well that ends well, as they say. Getting to share his return to the stage starring in the hit Broadway show Hadestown is perhaps an even better story than it would've been otherwise. But we could all have done without the trauma of COVID-19.

Indeed, the coronavirus continues to wreak havoc in our daily lives. For those of us living with HIV, there have always been added worries when it comes to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Now that COVID vaccines are widely available, many of us question how well they work for people with HIV. Overall, they are highly effective, but some folks are at risk for poorer response. Click here for more.

This special issue dedicated to African Americans also spotlights other Black advocates. Among them are Maven Lee, Marlene McNeese and the late Darrel Ellis.

Maven is the Midwest overseer of the House of Nina Oricci, which was featured in the reality show Legendary. He's been living with HIV for a decade and has been involved in ballroom and kiki

events across the nation. Click here to learn more.

Marlene is cochair of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA). As a longtime advocate working at the Houston Health Department, she has a front-row seat to the HIV epidemic. Click here to read about her advocacy goals for PACHA.

Darrel was a mixed-media painter and photographer. He died of AIDS-related illness in 1992 at age 33, but the openly gay artist and his work were starting to get recognized. In recent years, his artwork has gained in popularity. Visual AIDS has published a monograph of his artwork. Click here to learn more about Darrel and view selected works.

To set the stage for the new year, please click here for our 2022 HIV/AIDS Awareness Days poster.

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