Mj Rodriguez Becomes First Transgender Actress to Win a Golden Globe

A “Black Latina girl from New Jersey,” Michaela Jaé Rodriguez played Blanca, a trans woman living with HIV, on the series “Pose.”

January 12, 2022 By Trent Straube

Actress Michaela Jaé (Mj) Rodriguez received a “sickening birthday present” Sunday night—she won a Golden Globe for Best Television Actress in a Drama Series for her role in Pose, making her the first openly transgender actress to win the award.

Pose, which finished its third and final season last summer, follows a group of mostly African-American, Latino and LGBTQ friends who find community in the underground house and ball scene of 1980s and 1990s New York City, the early years of the AIDS epidemic and when HIV was considered a death sentence in most cases.

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A post shared by Michaela Jaé (@mjrodriguez7)

In Pose, Rodriguez played Blanca Evangelista, a transgender house mother taking care of her "children" while dealing with her own HIV diagnosis and that of many friends.

In previous years, the awards ceremony was broadcast on TV, complete with red carpet drama, but this year, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association announced the 2022 Golden Globe winners on Sunday via Twitter.

Rodriguez took to Instagram to share her jubilation. Referring to the award as a "sickening birthday present" (she turned 31 on January 7), she wrote, "Thank you! This is the door that is going to Open the door for many more young talented individuals. They will see that it is more than possible. They will see that a young Black Latina girl from Newark New Jersey who had a dream, to change the minds others would WITH LOVE. LOVE WINS. To my young LGBTQAI babies WE ARE HERE the door is now open now reach the stars!!!!!"

Pose was nominated for Best Drama Series (it lost to Succession), and Rodriguez's costar Billy Porter, who played Pray Tell, an HIV-positive emcee in the ball scene, was nominated for Best Television Actor, Drama Series (Jeremy Strong of Succession took home the win).

In Rodriguez's biography, the Golden Globes writes, in part:

> Rodriguez was born in Newark, New Jersey, to an African American mother and a father of half Puerto Rican and half African American descent. Growing up in Newark, she caught the acting bug at age seven and became dedicated to pursuing the profession after her mother enrolled her in the New Jersey Youth Theater program at the age of 11, where she remained involved for seven years. Rodriguez attended several performing arts schools in her youth and was finally cast as Angel in a theater production of Rent, winning the 2011 Clive Barnes Award for her performance.

Coincidentally, Rodriguez appears in another 2022 Golden Globe winner set in 1990s New York City: Netflix's tick, tick…BOOM!, a semiautobiographical musical by theater composer Jonathan Larson, most famous for his smash Rent. Directed by Lin-Manuel Miranda, the story follows struggling artist Larson, played by Andrew Garfield, as he faces self-doubt, deadlines and the pervasiveness of HIV among his friends. Garfield received a Golden Globe for Best Actor in a Motion Picture, Musical/Comedy.

In related news, Billy Porter, a singer and Broadway star before Pose, made international headlines last year when he announced via a Hollywood Reporter cover story and video that he has been living with HIV since 2007. He also released a memoir. You can watch the video on YouTube or above.

Last January, the advocacy group GLAAD, which focuses on LGBTQ representation in the media, released a report finding a “drastic decrease” in HIV-positive characters on TV but an uptick in LGBTQ people of color. For more details, see “Of the 773 Regular Characters on TV, Guess How Many Have HIV.”

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