POZ Awards 2019 / Best Actor or Actress in Film or Television

Read about the nominees, then scroll down to vote for your favorite!

October 1, 2019

Welcome to the 4th Annual POZ Awards, which spotlight the best representations of HIV/AIDS in media and culture.

The POZ editorial staff selects the nominees, but POZ readers choose the winners.

Eligible nominees were active or were presented, published or produced between October 1, 2018, and September 30, 2019.

Be sure to vote for your favorite nominees by the World AIDS Day deadline: Sunday, December 1, 2019.

VOTING IS CLOSED!

Here are the nominees:

Murray Bartlett (Tales of the City)

In the latest incarnation of Tales of the City, Bartlett brings Michael “Mouse” Tolliver to life in all his triumph as a long-term survivor of AIDS – while never letting us forget the resilience and yes, guilt, that got him there. The handsome Aussie actor has been on our queer culture radar for years, of course, since his many seasons on the HBO series, Looking. But Bartlett’s performance provides something deeper and more satisfying here: a certain grateful-but-haunted quality that long-term survivors know so very well.

Richard E. Grant (Can You Ever Forgive Me?)

As the untrustworthy, felonious, and bitterly hilarious Jack Hock, the partner in crime to Melissa McCarthy’s Lee Israel in Can You Ever Forgive Me?, Richard E. Grant earned a well-deserved Oscar nomination. In a devastating scene late in the film, we learn that Jack is quite ill with AIDS and, given the film is set in the late 1980’s, his fate is tragically certain. The fact our heart leaps into

our throats at this realization says volumes about Grant's ability to make us care deeply for Jack, despite his many vices. Grant has said that he based the character in part on his friend, Chariots of Fire actor Ian Charleson, who was gay and died of AIDS at the height of the epidemic.'

Griffin Matthews (Dear White People)

There are scene stealers and then there is Griffin Matthews, the endlessly watchable young actor from Dear White People who plays D'Unte, a character introduced in the third season this year. D'Unte is a sexually adventurous young man living with HIV who catches the attention of the show's central queer character, Lionel (much of the plot is devoted to Lionel's education about what it means for D'Unte to be undetectable). As D'Unte, Matthews is adorable, compelling, and crafts a character who is utterly free of judgement, even toward those without his sex drive. "Yes, we have the chance to reinvent human sexuality without puritanical oversight," D'Unte says during a fetish party. "But it's perfectly valid to, you know, have a boyfriend and be basic."

Chauntae Pink (POZ ROZ)

The lead performance of the YouTube comedy POZ ROZ much anchor the short-form series, and actress Chauntae Pink brings charm and strength by the truckload. Her character, Rozzlyn Mayweather, leads a carefree life filled with gay BFFs, sorority soirees, Black Twitter arguments and "woke" posts on her social media – before an HIV diagnosis crashes the party. We related completely to Rozzlyn's initial anger and shock, and then found ourselves cheering her on as she bulldozes through life without apology or regrets. You're going to love Rozzlyn (and Chauntae), too.

Billy Porter (Pose)

It's difficult to imagine life with the cultural influence of Pose, and we wouldn't want to live in a world that does not include Billy Porter's outrageous, heartbreaking performance as Pray Tell, the elder statesperson of the show and one of its moral centers. Porter is nothing short of mesmerizing, whether conducting the ballroom festivities or dispensing advice to the people who populate it. Even outside the show, Porter is having a real moment in pop culture, owning the runway at awards shows and approaching what may be a historic win at the Emmy Awards for Best Actor in a Dramatic Series. Our judges say... 10 10 10 10!

Mj Rodriguez (Pose)

Thee house mother with the biggest heart. Mj Rodriguez has already broken barriers and made history as a trans actress leading a television series, but her performance as Blanca Rodriguez-Evangelista, the matriarch of the House of Evangelista, continues to deepen and find new shades of vulnerability. Rodriguez portrays a woman dealing with an HIV diagnosis in the 1980s, which has been heady, but the trans writers of the show provided her character with welcome joy, accomplishment, and even a love affair. We're so on board for the next chapter, thanks to Rodriguez's performance.

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