POZ Awards 2020 / Best in Film or Television

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

October 1, 2020

Welcome to the 5th Annual POZ Awards, which spotligh 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, 2019, and September 30, 2020.

Be sure to vote for your favorite nominees by the World AIDS Day deadline: Tuesday, December 1, 2020.

VOTING IS CLOSED

Here are the nominees:

Bully. Coward. Victim. The Story of Roy Cohn

This is a movie that is difficult to like, because it's subject, Roy Cohn, is difficult to like. Filmmaker Ivy Meeropol uses her family connection — she's descended from Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, American citizens who were prosecuted as Soviet spies by the U.S. prosecutor Cohn — as a starting point to delve into the complex and conflicting sides of Cohn. He was a politically conservative lawyer who influenced the likes of crusading anti-communist Senator Joseph McCarthy and he was a mentor to Donald Trump. Cohn was also a hypocrite who had a secretive sex life with men. Cohn was known for viciously targeting known gay men to be fired from government employment, while at the same time enjoying the company of men in his private life. He died of AIDS-related illness in 1986. The film, available on HBO, is a smart and compelling story of a faulty man, who's dastardly tactics are being used today in the person of President Trump.

Circus of Books

This delightful documentary on Netflix is about an old Jewish couple who happened to run a

hardcore gay porn shop in West Hollywood for 35 years. The charming film tells the story of owners Karen and Barry Mason, a straight couple with three children. The liberal couple came to own and run a bookstore that became the epicenter of the gay community in Los Angeles, and built a business that became one of the largest distributers of gay porn in the country. Through the decades, the innovation of VHS tapes and DVDs, and the AIDS epidemic, Circus of Books on Santa Monica Boulevard was a place where the LGBT community could socialize and shop without judgement. What makes this movie even more captivating is that it's told from the point of view of the owners' daughter, artist and filmmaker Rachel Mason. Bonus, you even get an interview with '90s adult film heartthrob Jeff Stryker!

Greenleaf

This melodrama TV series, produced by Oprah Winfrey and Lionsgate Television for the OWN network, added HIV into a storyline this season. The popular show concerns the unscrupulous African-American Greenleaf family in Memphis, Tennessee, their estate, their megachurch, their money, and all the drama that goes with it. In this season, the young and troubled AJ (played by actor Jacob Gibson) reveals that he was raped while in prison and contracted HIV. It's a dramatic plot twist, if a bit predictable. Truthfully, many people in the HIV community weren't pleased with how HIV was handled in the story, but in a media landscape with very little by way of HIV, we're glad it was included at all.

WINNER: My Friend, The Mayor: Small Town Politics in the Age of Trump

We have to admit, we're a bit partial to this ditty of a documentary. Available on Amazon Prime, it features HIV activist, author and POZ founder Sean Strub, self-proclaimed "leftie gay guy with AIDS" as he runs for mayor of the conservative small town of Milford, Pennsylvania. Dutch journalist Max Westerman follows the Democratic Strub around county lanes as he campaigns against his Republican opponent, who is the hometown favorite son. What unfolds is a picture of a modern Mayberry, with community members coming together despite political, religious or philosophical differences for the good of the town. It's everything good and hopeful about America in a 60-minute film.

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