POZ Awards 2020 / Winners

Here are the winners as voted by POZ readers!

December 9, 2020

Best Celebrity Advocate

Karl Schmid

Since coming out as living with HIV in 2018, the debonair Australian-born television host and correspondent has gone full force with his anti-HIV stigma message. In the last year, Schmid has become the editorial director of +Life, a digital platform inspiring and lifting up people living with HIV and their supporters. His interviews with luminaries like the renowned American hero Anthony Fauci, MD, and segments that highlight and discuss U=U and PrEP, propel his cause to normalize HIV in conversation and dispel HIV stigma. Schmid hosted the Virtual Daily show for the International AIDS Conference in July 2020, featuring fabulous high-profile guests and community members. Schmid strives to reach people and educate them about HIV and sexual health, and most recently produced and co-hosted a special on ABC7 in California showing people “the truth about what HIV means in 2020.”

Best in Film or Television

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.

Best in Visual Arts

Still Beginning: A Day With(out) Art

To commemorate the 30th Day With(out) Art, Visual AIDS commissioned artists Shanti Avirgan, Nguyen Tan Hoang, Carl George, Viva Ruiz, Iman Shervington, Jack Waters/Victor F.M. Torres, and Derrick Woods-Morrow to create a kaleidoscope of short videos in response to the ongoing HIV pandemic. The result was Still Beginning, a bold and creative collection of films with topics like

anti-stigma, public sex, ongoing AIDS activism and intergenerational conversations. The seven works together create a powerful hour-long program, which was screened on World AIDS Day/A Day With(out) Art on December 1, 2019, in over 115 locations across the United States and internationally in Brazil, Canada, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey and the United Kingdom!

Best in Performing Arts

One in Two

Also opening in New York last November, One in Two was a show performed Off Broadway at the intimate Signature Center on Theatre Row on 42nd Street. Writer Donja R. Love took inspiration from the 10th anniversary of his own HIV diagnosis to create a play that explores the experience of being queer and Black in modern society. He took the title from a 2016 statistic from the CDC that said that one out of every two Black gay or bisexual men would be diagnosed with HIV in his lifetime. Using both humor and honesty, Love created a work that resonated a lot with audiences. The show was performed in a limited run of seven weeks. However, in June 2020, it had a mini-revival. As part of Playbill's Pride Plays (virtual productions), the actors from the Off Broadway production recreated their fantastic performances online to benefit Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS.

Best Virtual Fundraiser

AIDS Walk: Live from Home

With so many events being cancelled this year because of COVID-19, it seemed likely that the iconic annual AIDS Walks in New York and San Francisco would be as well. But GMHC in New York and San Francisco's PRC joined forces and, in partnership with iHeart Media, launched a virtual extravaganza, AIDS Walk: Live from Home, held July 19,2020. The star-studded event benefited not only GMHC and PRC, but also more than 45 other agencies that provide HIV/AIDS care, advocacy and prevention services throughout the tri-state and Bay areas. And studded with stars it was! Bette Midler, Vanessa Williams, Matt Bomer, Alan Cumming, Laura Linney, Gloria Estefan, Megan Hilty and Ross Matthews all made appearances, plus Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and a few of RuPaul's Drag Race stars to even things out! And that's just to name a few. And Matt Bomer! (We know we mentioned him before, but he's always worth repeating.)

Best in Literature

Lyrics of My Life: My Journey with Family, HIV and Reality TV by Branden James

Branden was a bundle of nerves when he took the stage for Season 8 of the reality hit America's Got Talent, but when he opened his mouth to sing the opera classic "Nessun Dorma" by Puccini, the audience rose to their feet and the celebrity judges beamed. What they didn't know, and what even his family didn't know, was that Branden was living with HIV. In this frank autobiography, the handsome singer tells his life story, growing up in a conservative, religious household, discovering music at a young age, wrestling with challenges of God versus gay, his career, and finally love and acceptance. Branden's story is honest, charming, relatable, and gives you just a glimpse of the

struggles of a professional singer and what happens behind the glamour.

Best Reason to Keep Acting Up

Black Lives Matter

The BLM movement has been active since it was formally founded in 2013 as an international anti-racist protest and advocacy organization. In 2020, because of the protests surrounding the violent deaths of George Floyd, Breanna Taylor, Ahmad Arbory and so many more, the Black Lives Matter movement has gained more strength and support. Adding to the cases of police brutality, diagnoses of HIV and COVID-19 cases show up disproportionately in people of color. The time to stand up for Black lives is now.

Congratulations to the winners!

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