POZ Awards 2021 / Best Celebrity Advocate

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

October 18, 2021

Welcome to the 6th Annual POZ Awards, spotlighting the best of HIV 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, 2020, and September 30, 2021.

This year's POZ Awards are a little different, since many of our regular categories went unfilled due to challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Stage, movie theaters, music venues, and artists of all kinds were affected by this newest virus, and cultural awards reflect that. Even the Tony Awards had to eliminate categories this year. So, in that regard, you can think of this year's POZ Awards as being just like the Tonys.

Be sure to vote for your favorite nominees by the World AIDS Day deadline: Wednesday, December 1, 2021.

VOTING IS CLOSED

Here are the nominees:

Billy Porter

Category is: FABULOUS! Emmy Award winner for his role as Pray Tell in the hit FX series POSE, Tony Award winner for his star-making role as Lola in the Broadway musical Kinky Boots, and gender non-conforming fashion icon Billy Porter was already on the fast track to becoming an LGBTQ legend in his own lifetime when he chose to come out as living with HIV in May of this year. He showed style, grace, and his trademark sass as he told the Hollywood Reporter that he'd been living with HIV since 2007 and had kept it a secret because of his own shame about the diagnosis. He told The Tonight Show host Jimmy Fallon, "I lived with the shame of it for a really long time, and [with the public disclosure], I released that shame, I released that trauma, and I am a free

man, honey! Free! I've never felt joy like this before." We couldn't be happier to have Billy in our community, and we're here for whatever comes next for this triple threat performer.

Lil Nas X

Born Montero Lamar Hill, Lil Nas X stole our hearts in 2019 with his breakthrough country rap hit "Old Town Road," which spent a record 19 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100. He has followed it up with a string of hits, each becoming more and more unapologetically queer, daring his audience to lap up his unabashed (and super hot!) sexuality like honey. If that wasn't enough, Nas even came out with a children's book in January called C is for Country (along with Theodore Taylor III, illustrator), teaching kids their ABCs while taking them on a gender-blending journey that includes cowboy hats, farm animals, guitars, and even fashion ("F is for Feathers. And Fringe. And Fake Fur.") A vocal advocate for HIV issues, his 2021 album Montero listed each song alongside a charity for fans to donate to, including 13 HIV organizations. As if all that wasn't enough to make us love him, in his performance at the 2021 Video Music Awards (VMAs) Lil Nas X paid tribute to those of us living with HIV by including Mardrequs Harris from the Southern AIDS Coalition in the performance. Harris was wearing a T-shirt with the number 433,816 on it, the number of people living with HIV in the Southern United States. Lil Nas X serves us style, in-your-face sexuality, and an abundance of talent, and he knows how to put his money where his pretty mouth is.

Tony Morrison

In October of 2021, handsome Emmy Award winning senior producer for Good Morning America, Tony Morrison, decided to disclose his status as a person living with HIV on the national television show's website. In an honest and heartfelt essay published on the 8th anniversary of his diagnosis, Morrison took us through his own journey of secrets, shame and fear, a journey that many living with HIV can relate to. The 32-year-old relayed his painful dating experiences ("I earnestly thought there could be significant chemistry after a few dates, so, I felt that I had to tell them…'Sorry, it's just not my thing,' they eventually told me."). He also used the powerful essay to inform the national audience about U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable), and to educate about that HIV isn't what it was during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and '90s. Morrison's disclosure underlined the fact that an HIV diagnosis, even in modern times, can still be a devastating one, and that it can take time to come to terms with it. Tony's story was picked up by many publications and became national news, and we are proud that he has bravely shared his truth. As he said at the end of his essay, "I've found that living is a duty. And I'm choosing to celebrate life as long as I have life to live."

Miss Universe Andrea Meza

Crowned Miss Universe 2020 in May of 2021, the stunning raven-haired beauty from Chihuahua City, Mexico is more than just a pretty face. Miss Meza is a women's rights activist, a software engineer, a certified makeup artist, model, and a fitness and health aficionado. Also on her list of passions: sexual health and HIV. The 26-year-old was named the Madrina for the Latino Commission on AIDS in September (the commission has a longstanding relationship with the Miss Universe Organization), and her advocacy for HIV testing in the Latinx community is something she is vehement about. "Sometimes we don't get tested because we are afraid of the results, but

if we know if we are positive or negative, we can take action. That's why I'm doing this. That's why I want to encourage people to do it, to forget about the taboos and forget about all the stigma." Meza is as big-hearted as she is beautiful, and we are sure to see more of her dynamic self even after her reign concludes.

Anthony Fauci, MD

Fauci has become a man known to everyone in the country for his no-nonsense approach to the coronavirus pandemic and his ability to speak the truth of science even in the face of political doubletalk. We in the HIV community have known Fauci as someone long in the fight against HIV, but not without controversy. HIV activist and author Larry Kramer famously called Fauci a murderer in a 1988 "Open Letter to Dr. Anthony Fauci" for his refusal to listen to early AIDS activists. Since then, he has been a vocal supporter of people living with HIV. Fauci has always put his knowledge and experience to use for the public good. In this newest COVID-19 pandemic, Fauci has emerged as a voice of reason in a sea of misinformation (remember the idea to drink bleach?). And on this 40th anniversary year of the HIV epidemic, Fauci acknowledged the strides made in HIV treatment and prevention, and the fact that a lot of knowledge about viruses came because of HIV research. Fauci may not be perfect, but he has been steadfast in the HIV trenches since the beginning. We think that deserves a nod.

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