POZ Awards 2021 / Winners

Here are the winners as voted by POZ readers!

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Best Celebrity Advocate

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.

Best in Visual Arts

U Equals Fucking U

From the brain and, ahem, other parts of him, gay adult film star Kayden Gray gives us a super sexy, funny and informative romp (or roll?) in this two-part film. Part porn, part romance, U Equals Fucking U pairs Gray with avant garde performance artist Bishop Black to navigate truly hot sex with educating viewers about HIV and the fact that someone living with HIV, on successful treatment with an undetectable viral load, cannot pass the virus sexually, a concept known as Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U). To help get the stigma-busting message across, RuPaul's Drag Race break out star Bianca Del Rio is also on hand to hilariously add her two cents on the differences between HIV and AIDS, along with tips and tricks on etiquette for conversations around the issue. Gray also issued a PG version (sexless, alas) for folks who just want the information. U=U has never been so hot!

Best in Film or Television

It's a Sin (TV Series)

The British miniseries, written and created by Russell T. Davies of Queer as Folk fame, follows a

group of young, cheeky, gay men and their friends as they navigate sex, love and friendship while the threat of a mysterious virus loomed. This sometimes funny and sometimes tragic depiction of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s in the United Kingdom, It's a Sin has quickly become part of the cannon of HIV cultural history, like The Normal Heart and Angels in America before it. With its adorable cast and honest and frank depictions of sex, relationships and the early frightening days of the HIV pandemic, It's a Sin was a hit with folks on both sides of the pond. All we have to say is "La."

Best in Literature

My Unexpected Life: an international memoir of two pandemics, HIV and COVID-19 by Martina Clark

Martina Clark was diagnosed with HIV when she was 28 and was told she had five years to live. With her life plans waylaid, she dove into activism. She had no idea that it would lead her into an international career, becoming the first person living with HIV to work for UNAIDS in 1996. Her career led her all around the world spreading HIV facts and advocacy, educating everyone from students to dignitaries to hotel housekeepers. In the book, she weaves in parallels between the HIV pandemic and our newest virus, COVID-19. She movingly tells her inspiring story with humor and insight. As Martina said on her blog, "At times I was a complete asshole. But I'm still here, and I'm privileged to get to share my story."

Best Virtual Event

HIV Stigma and Faith Summit

Produced by GLAAD (the advocacy group focused on LGBTQ representations in media), the first ever virtual summit to host discussions on HIV and faith in the South launched in February of 2021, aimed at educating and training participants on dealing with HIV issues in the southern US. The event boasted celebrities Karamo of Queer Eye, Angelica Ross of American Horror Story and director Patrik-Ian Polk (Noah's Arc), and was co-hosted by Gilead COMPASS Initiative, Emory University Rollins School of Public Health, University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, Southern AIDS Coalition, and Wake Forest University School of Divinity. The 3-day event held panels and workshops aimed at bridging the gap between faith, religion, and HIV and sexuality, along with discussions on race, queerness, and HIV stigma.

Best Reason to Keep Acting Up

HIV Criminalization

Despite the fact that HIV is considered a chronic, manageable condition, it is still a crime in the majority of US states to expose someone to the virus, with or without motive, intent, or any transmission taking place. Thirty-seven states still have laws on the books that ridiculously mainly target poorer populations, people of color, trans folk, and sex workers. Prosecution of these outdated and biased laws cause irreputable harm to the accused, whether convicted or not. Although great strides have been made some states, with Illinois, Virginia, California, Colorado, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada and North Carolina modernizing the language in their laws, so much work

needs to be done to get these unfair laws completely off the books.

Congratulations to the winners!

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