Simply Undetectable

An uninhibited look at the protease hype

January 1, 1998 By Erik Meers

What do you get when you gather six strangers with HIV who are taking protease inhibitors? *Undetectable*. The documentary, that is – not the people. *Undetectable* is Boston filmmaker Jay Corcoran's exploration of the hard truths of the protease age. Corcoran, 39, has been following six men and women for six months, recording their every step as they go on – and off – protease inhibitors. His subject range from Matilda, a woman whose husband and eight-year-old son also have HIV, to Belynda Dunn, program manager of the Boston AIDS Action Committee.

After hearing about the grueling triple-drug therapy from a friend, Corcoran saw past the media's now familiar Lazarus-rising stories. He placed an ad in the newspaper calling for PWAs who had just gone on protease regimens and selected six people of varied race, sexuality and gender to be in his film. Since he began the project, he's seen the pitfalls of protease. "A lot of them feel defeated. Getting better, getting hopeful and then slipping – it's a mindfuck," he says. "I'm surprised more people aren't talking about this. Watching what they've gone through in just four months, there's nothing else I'd want to do."

Thus far, the sic stars have run the gamut from dramatic highs to precipitous declines once on drug cocktails. One subject, Peter, saw his health improve, but the life he returned to was in a shambles. "He's getting back into his career, but he's almost fifty and has no money saved – for the last ten years, his job was staying alive," Corcoran says. Belynda came down with a host of ailments after going on a triple-drug cocktail and had to have her gall bladder removed. She has since gone off protease inhibitors altogether. These discordant voices might be too messy for the evening news, but they'll be unmistakable in *Undetectable.*

Corcoran did not set out to document the age of AIDS. After moving to New York City in 1984, he worked as an actor. Off-stage, he tooled around with a video camera, and it changed his life. In 1994, he began shooting Tom McBride, a former model in the late stages of AIDS. McBride opened up to the camera about sex and the art of pursuit. "Then it just snowballed," Corcoran says. He continued to film McBride until his death in 1995.

The result was *Life and Death on the A-List,* a meditation on the culture of sex in gay life. After it screened at the New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 1996, *The New York Times* gave the film a glowing review and suddenly Corcoran was on the A-list himself. Water Bearer Films snapped up the video distribution rights and released it last September.

With the support of his partner, Mike Roberts, Corcoran is continuing to following his *Undetectable* subjects while he drafts grant proposals to offset costs. Shooting wraps up in June and he aims to have it ready for cable or public television by fall 1998.

However the lives of his subjects play out over the next six months, Corcoran hopes that *Undetectable* will ignite the debate that *A-List* has. A recent screening at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts inspired as argument among audience members. "Some thought Tom was repellent," Corcoran recalls. "Others thought it addressed important issues. As I listened to these people, I thought, 'Yes!' That's the point of art – to get people to think."

Erik Meers is a staff reporter for People.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/simply-undetectable-12835-3712