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Contact: Jeff Dorta, Project Publicity
212-445-0099; jeffdorta@projectpublicity.com

MERCE, THE HIV-POSITIVE MUSICAL COMEDY WEB SERIES, RETURNS FOR SECOND SEASON

New Episodes Premiere on January 21

The award-winning HIV-positive musical comedy web series, MERCE — beloved for its MGM classic film ethos mixed with potty mouth flair — returns in January for its second hilarious season. Produced by Skipping Boyz Productions and made possible via a crowdfunding campaign on Fractured Atlas that raised over \$60,000 from fans, the second season of MERCE features eight new episodes, each with its own elaborately choreographed original musical number. All of the series favorite characters are back, too. The outrageous Southern Mama played by Tyne Firmin shines along with the fabulous fairies and, of course, the loveable Merce played by Charles Sanchez. Exciting new characters are introduced as well; among them are judgmental Aunt Bless, Lisa (with an S) Minnelli and a smattering of titillating Eye Candy Boys. The hijinks are raised to unprecedented heights in season two yet the series manages to dive into some hot button topics impacting today's HIV community as well, including PrEP, slut shaming, and gay marriage. Additionally, and most particularly mahhvelous for fans of the series, Merce finds love in season 2! *The second season of MERCE premieres in the USA on Vimeo and Youtube and in Europe on OUTtv on January 21.*

"One of the things I love about Merce as a character is that he doesn't apologize for any aspect of who he is," says Charles Sanchez, who, in addition to starring as the show's lead character, is the writer and producer of MERCE. "He not afraid of his own HIV and remains as audaciously gay as gay can be."

Like the character he portrays, Sanchez is HIV positive. He sees MERCE as an opportunity to show the world a different side of the epidemic. "While living with HIV is no picnic, it's not the drama that it used to be," he explains. "No one that I know living with HIV walks around with a sad cloud above their head."

Tyne Firmin, the show's director and producer (who also plays Southern Mama) remembers videotaping people in Central Park in 2015, before filming of the series began. "We asked them one simple question, 'Who is your favorite HIV-positive character on TV or in the movies?' The answers were mostly 'Ummm...'. A few mentioned a character from one of the historical films about the AIDS crisis but nothing current. We wanted to change that."

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He and Sanchez designed MERCE in bright, neon technicolor, and they filled it with sassy one-liners. Instead of a tragic, lonely condition, they depict a world that's joyful, funny, supportive, and where no one in his world treats Merce any differently because of his status.

They also sneak in some education for viewers. In season two, we learn about serodiscordant relationships (where one person in the relationship is living with HIV and one is not) and U equals U (Undetectable equals Untransmittable), a worldwide campaign that has shined a spotlight on recent scientific evidence that proves those with an undetectable viral load (meaning that the virus is not detected in lab tests) pose zero risk of transmitting HIV. The campaign has been a huge success worldwide but has been slow to be recognized in the USA.

"I hope people come to realize that someone living with HIV is similar to a person living with diabetes or heart disease," says Firmin. As an HIV-negative gay man, he acknowledges that the show has helped him to adjust his concept of people living with HIV and hopes it does the same for viewers. "If you take care of yourself, work with your healthcare professionals, and take your medications properly, life can be positive when you're positive!"

And musical, as well! Original songs for the second season of MERCE are composed by Rob Hartmann and Adam J. Rineer, and include titles like "Click Delete!", "Hurt Like a Bitch", "Your Cure", and "Bless Your Heart." Musical numbers are staged by Garrett Caillouet and Charles Sanchez.

The fabulous fairies are played by Sean Griffin, Alex Tomas and Alex Lawrence. Bess Eckstein plays roommate Corvette and Randall Taylor stars as boyfriend Remington. The award-winning blogger Mark S. King (from MyFabulousDisease.com) joins the cast as Aunt Bless, Amanda Bruton plays Lisa (with an S) Minnelli and Sam Given is a scene stealer as cousin Todd.

MERCE, season 2 has been included in Canada's Rainbow Reels Festival, America's Rainbow Film Festival, and it was selected for the 2019 Kaleidoscope Film Festival. OUTtv has signed on to feature the second season in its programming throughout Europe, reaching audiences in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany, Sweden, Israel, and Spain.

For more information, a complete cast list, or to catch up on season one of MERCE, visit MerceTheSeries.com. Follow MerceTheSeries on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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PRESS INQUIRES:
Jeff Dorta, Tel: 212-445-0099
JeffDorta@Projectpublicity.com