

In Longform Emmy Races, *The Normal Heart* and *Fargo* Lead the Movie and Miniseries Charge

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After three years, our long national nightmare is over. The Outstanding Made-For-TV Movie and Outstanding Miniseries lineups are—after having been merged—again separate, now that enough miniseries are being produced to justify their own category. This means that FX in particular can breathe a sigh of relief that its miniseries won't have to compete with HBO for longform honors, since HBO owns the original telefilm category like nobody's proverbial business.

You've probably seen the numbers before, but they bear repeating: HBO has won top made-for-TV honors a staggering 18 of the past 21 years, or an eye-popping 88 percent. Equally impressive is that during those years, HBO generated a total of 60 nominations for its movies out of a possible 109 slots, or 55 percent. Pretty nifty stuff.

If you guessed that HBO is the prohibitive favorite once again, this time for its star-studded adaptation of Larry Kramer's iconic, Tony Award-winning play, *The Normal Heart*, you would be correct. In addition to *Heart*, HBO has made five original flicks or miniseries in which AIDS is central or tangential to the storyline: *And the Band Played On* (1994), *In the Gloaming* (1997), *Angels in America* (2004), and *Behind the Candelabra* (2013), which have a combined Emmy tally of 55 nomination and 25 wins—three for top made-for-TV movie, top miniseries, or both.

Yet there are five nomination slots in the telefilm race, and *Normal Heart* will claim only one. That still leaves four. Top contenders include Lifetime's *Trip to Bountiful*, starring Cicely Tyson and Blair

Underwood, and *Return to Zero* with Minnie Driver and Paul Adelstein; the NatGeo film *Killing Kennedy* with Rob Lowe; BBC America's biopic *Burton and Taylor*; and Larry David's *Clear History* from HBO.

Meanwhile, in miniseries, all roads lead to FX and its twin favorites *Fargo* (featuring Billy Bob Thornton and Martin Freeman) and *American Horror Story: Coven*, the latest installment in the diabolical anthology. Starz also has a pair of big-ticket mini contenders with *The White Queen*, starring Rebecca Ferguson and Janet McTeer, and *Dancing on the Edge* with Chiwetel Ejiofor and John Goodman.

All of this year's mini candidates should send a letter of thanks to HBO for opting to enter its much-buzzed anthology *True Detective* into drama series consideration. Had *Detective* opted for the easier miniseries route, the category would have a far different complexion, to put it mildly.

Here is my handicap of the made-for-TV movie candidates, followed by miniseries.



MADE-FOR-TV MOVIE FAVORITES

The Normal Heart (HBO): An all-star cast headed by Mark Ruffalo, Julia Roberts, and Jim Parsons helps lend the film an epic feel. The big question is whether *Heart* can approach the 11 wins of last year's *Behind the Candelabra*.

The Trip to Bountiful (Lifetime): Tyson reprises her Broadway role in a film that makes her an instant Emmy favorite for lead actress glory. It's a movie that tells us Lifetime has upped its game of late.

Killing Kennedy (National Geographic Channel): Based on Bill O'Reilly's book about JFK's rise to the presidency, and a disillusioned Lee Harvey Oswald's date with infamy on November 22, 1963.

Return to Zero (Lifetime): Based on the true story of a couple who undergo the trauma of a stillborn infant and struggle to find the strength to risk more grief when she becomes pregnant again.

Sherlock: His Last Vow (PBS): A modern update of the legendary Holmes tale that transports the action to 21st century London and stars Benedict Cumberbatch as Holmes and Martin Freeman as Dr. Watson.



LONGSHOTS WITH A DECENT SHOT

Burton and Taylor (BBC America): Dominic West is Richard Burton and Helena Bonham Carter is Elizabeth Taylor in this well-received biopic that looks at their tempestuous love while preparing for a 1983 theatrical production. Lindsay Lohan is nowhere in sight.

Clear History (HBO): Larry David and Jon Hamm star in this wacky, largely improvised film that plays like a feature-length episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. After years without a new *Curb* season, it went down nicely.

A Day Late and a Dollar Short (Lifetime): Based on the Terry McMillan novel of the same name, *Short* stars Whoopi Goldberg and Ving Rhames in a soapy tale of a dysfunctional family.

Flowers in the Attic (Lifetime): A chilling remake of the 1987 film about kids abused by the grandmother from Hell (Ellen Burstyn). Heather Graham also stars.



PROBABLY NOT IN THIS LIFETIME, BUT YOU NEVER KNOW

Muhammad Ali's Greatest Fight (HBO): A tad too in love with its crusading importance, *Fight* recounts Ali's battle against the Vietnam War and how it served to turn much of America against him. Christopher Plummer and Frank Langella star.

The Challenger Disaster (Science Channel): The first original film from the Discovery-branded Science Channel features a stellar cast (William Hurt, Bruce Greenwood) and looks at what really happened in the 1986 Challenger explosion.

Lizzie Borden Took an Ax (Lifetime): Christina Ricci is Lizzie Borden in this fact-based look at the 1892 murders of her father and stepmother, and the trial that resulted in her acquittal.

The Gabby Douglas Story (Lifetime): The tale of the Olympic gymnastics champion who overcame long odds to emerge triumphant at the Summer Games. Stars Regina King and unknown Imani Hakim.

And now, the miniseries handicap:



MINISERIES FAVORITES

Fargo (FX): It would be a minor miracle if *Fargo* fails to dominate, after it became the best-reviewed series in FX history, standing apart from the celebrated film of the same name thanks to cinematic production and masterful performances from stars Thornton and Freeman.

American Horror Story: Coven (FX): Nominated each year it's been eligible, *AHS* will be again for its tale about a coven of witches that stars Jessica Lange and Kathy Bates.

Dancing on the Edge (Starz): In another year, this mini would have a great shot at winning; a period drama about a black jazz band in 1930s London that stars Ejiofor (Oscar nominated for *12 Years a Slave*) and the ever-versatile Goodman.

The White Queen (Starz): Little-known Swedish actress Rebecca Ferguson turns in an astonishing performance as Queen Elizabeth in this 15th century royal drama that should do well in the costume categories.

Luther (BBC America): If the name looks familiar, it's because this British import, which stars Idris Elba as the brilliant but haunted detective, has been eligible in this category for several years—a fact that tells us all we need to know about how weird the mini category has become, along with the loose nature of its rules.



LONGSHOTS WITH A DECENT SHOT

Treme (HBO): The acclaimed miniseries about life in post-Katrina New Orleans has already earned Emmy attention—back in 2010, when it was a straight drama series. Confused? So are we. It is however, a very good show, despite the uncertainty of its packaging.

Bonnie and Clyde (Lifetime, A&E, and History Channel): A new look at the famed criminals boasts a top-notch pedigree (producers Craig Zadan and Neil Meron, and director Bruce Beresford), and charismatic stars Emile Hirsch and Holliday Grainger.

Mob City (TNT): A look at the battle between mobsters and cops in 1940s Los Angeles from creator Frank Darabont, and Edward Burns as Bugsy Siegel. It didn't quite connect with its audience as it should have.

The Spoils of Babylon (IFC): An uproarious spoof of the sweeping, melodramatic sagas that TV was so fond of in the '70s and '80s. Tobey Maguire and Kristen Wiig doing painful earnestness win for spot-on acting.



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Rosemary's Baby (NBC): A remake of the horrifying 1968 Oscar winner about a young woman who is impregnated by the devil himself. Zoe Saldana and Patrick J. Adams lead.

Klondike (Discovery Channel): A throwback saga about the 1890s Yukon Territory gold rush that made fortunes and altered lives. Ridley Scott is among the exec producers and Sam Shepard and Tim Roth the esteemed cast.

The Hollow Crown (PBS): Adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays, including *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts I and II*, and *Henry V*. Jeremy Irons is among the stars.

Hostages (CBS): That rarest of rarities: a broadcast network miniseries. This one serves up an impressive cast, headed by Dylan McDermott and Toni Collette, about the family of a doctor who must perform surgery on the President after being taken hostage by a rogue FBI agent. We're not making this up.