

ROB EPSTEIN

b. April 6, 1955

OSCAR-WINNING DIRECTOR

“[Filmmaking] gave me the opportunity to speak to the world.”

He is a multi-award-winning nonfiction filmmaker whose work focuses on LGBT issues.

Rob Epstein is an American film director, writer and producer, and the cofounder of the production company Telling Pictures. Best known for his groundbreaking feature-length documentaries, he is the first openly gay director to win an Oscar for an LGBT-themed film.

Epstein was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey. At age 19, he moved to San Francisco. He started his career as one of the six-member Mariposa Film Group. Mariposa created “Word Is Out: Stories From Some of Our Lives” (1977), the first feature-length

documentary by and for LGBT Americans. The pioneering film aired nationally in theaters and on primetime public television, increasing visibility for the gay community during a transformative period in the LGBT rights movement.

Epstein conceived, directed and co-produced his next project, “The Times of Harvey Milk” (1985), about the slain gay San Francisco board supervisor. Premiering at the Telluride and New York film festivals, the film touched audiences worldwide. It won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, along with Peabody, Emmy and Sundance Awards. It made Epstein the first openly gay director to win an Oscar for an LGBT-themed movie. In 2013 the Library of Congress selected “The Times of Harvey Milk” for the National Film Registry. The prestigious Criterion Collection also includes it in their catalog.

In 1987 Epstein and his husband, Jeffrey Friedman, founded Telling Pictures, a San Francisco-based production company. Together they produced “Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt” (1985), an HBO documentary about the AIDS epidemic, for which Epstein won a Peabody and his second Academy Award. Their box-office hit, “The Celluloid Closet” (1995), a retrospective of LGBT images in Hollywood, featuring interviews with luminaries such as Tom Hanks and Whoopie Goldberg, won a Peabody and an Emmy Award. Other acclaimed films by Epstein and Friedman include “End Game” (2018), “State of Pride” (2019) and “Paragraph 175” (2000). Shifting from documentary to biopic, the duo also collaborated on “Lovelace” (2013), starring Amanda Seyfried, Peter Sarsgaard and Sharon Stone, about the porn star Linda Lovelace, and “HOWL” (2015), starring James Franco as the famous gay poet Allen Ginsberg.

In addition to filmmaking, Epstein is a professor and co-chair of the film program at California College of the Arts. He has served on the Sundance Institute's board of trustees and on the board of the governors of the documentary branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. In 2008 he received the Pioneer Award for distinguished lifetime achievement from the International Documentary Association.



© GETTY IMAGES

lgbtTM
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright © 2020 – A Project of Equality Forum