

OUR STRAIGHT MATES

With Matthew Myers



Mandy Patinkin

He's a show-tune-singing gay rights advocate who has worked with Streisand, Madonna and even kissed Rove. No, we haven't put him in the wrong section; he's straight. Matt Myers speaks to actor Mandy Patinkin as he prepares to tour Australia with Patti LuPone.

DNA: Thanks for being our Straight Mate.

Mandy Patinkin: I'm very flattered, but are you sure you've got the right guy? Don't forget I sing show tunes! It's tough enough being a straight guy with the name Mandy. A lot of people can't believe I'm straight!

Well, you did kiss Rove McManus.

All straight guys kiss each other. Gay guys never kiss each other on talk shows [laughs]! **Rove spoke about your kiss when he did this interview.**

Oh, he did! Did he feel I was a good kisser? **He said he couldn't help it because you had just recited your famous line from *The Princess Bride*.**

So he felt a little kissing was warranted! **Your new show covers works from Stephen Sondheim to Richard Rodgers. Is there one career performance that stands alone?**

I've been so blessed in my career. I hate to single them out but *The Princess Bride* was a film that I loved doing. And I got to play Georges Seurat in *Sunday In The Park With George*. I just finished playing Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which I loved. I can't wait to see what I do next.

Both you and Patti won Tony Awards for *Evita*. How would you describe your relationship with her?

She's a great old friend. We met 30 years ago when I was doing *Evita*. When I look into her eyes I feel like I'm 30 years younger. It's a fountain of youth working with her. She's got more energy than any child I've ever known. She's one of the greatest people to be on stage with and I'm one of the luckiest guys in the world.

What did you think of the *Evita* film?

I never saw it. I was supposed to do the movie with Meryl Streep when Oliver Stone had the screenplay. We were about to get on a plane to Argentina to do some walk-around rehearsing and then the financing fell through. Then several years later they made the one with Madonna.

Speaking of which, you had a role in *Dick Tracy* and also appeared in *Bed With Madonna* [Truth Or Dare]. What are your memories of working with her?

She's a great talent as far as I'm concerned. One of the real joys was going to the dance rehearsals. She is one hell of a dancer! I've been to her concerts and you never see her dance like she can. I've never seen her do it like she did in that rehearsal room! Warren Beatty's a dear friend of mine and I love what he did in that movie but they cut all the dancing and you never really got to see her dancing ability.

You co-starred with another gay diva – Barbra Streisand in *Yentl*. What was that experience like?

It was wonderful. She is an astounding talent. For anyone who's been around movies, it's tough enough to do one job let alone all of them. She directed, produced and starred in

it – everything! I'll never forget one day, during a dinner scene, she bounced a light off a spoon into her eye. She had such a sense of lighting. Our cinematographer was going to pass out. He'd never seen anything like it. I worked with her for a year before I even had the part and I never thought they were going to hire me. I thought they were going to hire Richard Gere! When I first read the script I had problems with it and she wanted to know what they were. She insisted. So we sat down and talked and then she said, "Will you help me work on this?" So I started working on the script with her. She wanted to hear everything I thought, which was extraordinary, and then one day she said, "Would you play the part?" I said, "Yeah!" **You once played Marvin in a production of the AIDS themed play *Falsettoland*, and are an advocate for AIDS awareness. Do you think the world is still taking the issue of AIDS seriously?**

I hope so, because there are still too many

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people dying from AIDS all over the world. They've found cocktails that can keep our loved ones alive but they have not found a cure. Until they do find one for AIDS, cancer and all kinds of other diseases, I think we all hope they keep the pressure on and that these things don't fall to the back burner. Otherwise it's going to hit home.

There was a situation back in the early '90s where you were playing in Denver, Colorado and wanted to support a boycott over its anti-gay stance.

Amendment Two had passed in Colorado, which allowed people to be discriminatory against gay people and say they could choose not to rent an apartment to them or to not give them a job... it was outrageous! Barbra Streisand was asked to boycott Colorado. I already had a contract with the Denver Performing Arts Center to do a concert and if I had boycotted they could have sued me. So I called them and said that because the amendment had passed no artist wanted to work in Colorado. I said I would do the concert so long as they doubled my fee and gave it to the American Civil Liberties Union. They agreed and then we went out and raised money with four other concerts. We raised about \$60,000 and gave it to the ACLU who printed an awareness pamphlet that went out to all 50 states. It was part of a huge campaign and eventually Amendment Two was defeated. After every show I'd walk out to the audience and say, "I need to talk to you." I would say,

"You may not be gay, or even know anyone who is gay, but I can guarantee that if you let this kind of thing pass, and do not fight it, one day your nephew, niece, grandchild, cousin or neighbour will not be able to get a roof over their head." We were overwhelmed with the turnout and how passionate people were. After they had spent their hard-earned money on the concert they emptied their pockets into a cardboard box to fight this discrimination. This friend of mine who was working with us said, "You know, I'm a gay man and I'm pretty private about it, and to be a part of this... I've never been so proud in my life! I was very moved. This guy had hardly ever said a word and it unlocked him. He said, "This is who I am and I have the same right that every other human being has." My wife and kids joined me in collecting money, too. We're making a lot of progress in this area. Gay marriage is being accepted now, gradually state-by-state, and I think that soon

[opposition] is going to be a thing of the past. **You were a series regular on *Criminal Minds* but left the show. Do you plan to return to television roles?**

I'd love to return to television as soon as I find a project I like. I'd be there in a heartbeat. **You've also added a cartoon character to your credentials, playing Lisa's future husband on *The Simpsons*. Was that a fun experience?**

It was a blast! Those people are so fast and funny and hilarious. I was doubled over with laughter. We sat in a semi-circle and recorded it and then they sent it off to get animated. I'd never seen myself animated before and it was funny. I got a kick out of being a part of it.

What can people expect to see in *An Evening With Patti LuPone And Mandy Patinkin*?

We've put together a figurative journey of two souls using familiar and unfamiliar material, both spoken and song. We do like a miniature version of plays, which I put together, but it all keeps moving and one thing leads to another. The bottom line is that the whole evening is really just balls-out entertainment. It's a celebration of these two people loving each other, loving life and not fucking around with wasting time. It's figurative but I feel it gives a sense of a journey, as opposed to just one song after another. We had a blast together. It's some of the greatest songs and themes ever written and I'm very proud of the way it's come out.

An Evening With Patti LuPone And Mandy Patinkin plays
Brisbane July 18, Melbourne July 21 and Sydney July 24.