

BOOTY CALL! BOOTY CALL! BOOTY CALL!

■ C Y N D I G E T S K I N K Y D O W N U N D E R ■

IT'S TIME TO DUST OFF THOSE SPARKLY RED HEELS, BOYS! CYNDI LAUPER'S HIT MUSICAL *KINKY BOOTS* IS SETTING UP CAMP IN AUSTRALIA. MATT MYERS BAGGED SOME FACE-TIME-AFTER-TIME WITH OUR FAVOURITE ACTRESS/SINGER/LGBT ACTIVIST.

In 1983, Cyndi Lauper released her debut album *She's So Unusual*, unleashing the classic singles *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*, *Time After Time*, *All Through The Night* and *She Bop* to a new army of fans. It went on to win her a Grammy award for Best New Artist and Lauper's star was born.

In addition to her anthemic back catalogue, Lauper's LGBTI charity work, film and TV roles and multiple awards have resulted in an enviable career. She can also tick the boxes marked Grammy, Emmy and Tony, the latter being for *Kinky Boots*, her successful new musical opening in Melbourne this month.

Those who have seen *Kinky Boots* will be aware of its feel-good element. Based on the 2005 British film of the same name, it has successfully made the leap from screen to stage, adapted by Harvey Fierstein and brought to life with music and lyrics by Cyndi herself.

"Harvey called and asked me if I wanted to write a show for him and I said 'absolutely!' because I believe he is one of the greatest musical storytellers," says Lauper. "I'd always been a big fan so it was easy to say yes!"

Inspired by true events, *Kinky Boots* tells the story of Charlie Price, who inherits a shoe factory from his father. To save the business,

Charlie forms an unlikely partnership with a drag queen named Lola. With Lola's help, Charlie develops a plan to produce a line of high-heeled boots. In the process, he and Lola discover that they are not so different after all.

Lola is, naturally, a diva.



Kinky Boots makes people happy. I used to sit in the audience and watch people laugh.

"I love divas!" says Lauper. "One of my favourites was [American disco singer] Sylvester. He was awesome! A really great guy. He and the Two Tons Of Fun! And then there's Patti LaBelle and I guess Aretha Franklin, Joni Mitchell and well, Kate Bush of course... and Deborah Harry and Yoko Ono. Then there's Wanda Jackson, Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton... I could go on. But when I was nine, it was definitely Barbra Streisand. I sang every note with her. She didn't even know me, but I was

tight with her. She never knew that, oh but me and her... Oh, then there's Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, goodness gracious there's a lot that I'm not even thinking of."

Before arriving in Australia, *Kinky Boots* played around the world. In addition to the Chicago and Broadway runs and a US tour, it has wowed audiences in Toronto, South Korea and London.

"*Kinky Boots* makes people happy," Lauper continues. "When we first started, we'd sometimes go to the theatre, sit in the audience and watch the people. This one time a guy came in and he was in a real pissy mood, like he'd had a hard day at the office. So, he's sitting there and the first song goes by, then the second, and I'm thinking, 'Oh boy, this ain't going well'. Then it gets to *The History Of Wrong Guys* song and all of a sudden he starts to chuckle a little, then he starts laughing. I thought to myself, 'Oh my God, we got him! We got 'em all!'"

The music has certainly struck a chord – the *Kinky Boots* soundtrack has now toppled *The Book Of Mormon* as the highest charting Broadway cast recording in history and earned six Tony Awards. From pop to New Wave and funk to tango, the show's diverse theme is complemented throughout.

The *Kinky Boots* story is all about diversity >>

CONGRATULATIONS
CYNDI LAUPER
HARVEY FIERSTEIN
DAY'S RECIPIENTS OF HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME STARS

Cyndi's boots are made walkin' the Hollywood Walk Of Fame!



(Photo David Buchan)



(Photo David Buchan)

Kinky Boots creators Harvey Fierstein and Cyndi Lauper.

>> and equality which, for Cyndi, of course, is nothing new. Most of her life she has supported and campaigned for the LGBTI community. Her song *Above The Clouds* was about Matthew Shephard, *Hat Full Of Stars* tackled homophobia, and her life has been filled with gay friends and family. Her song *True Colors* not only became an anthem to the gay community, but also led to the True Colors Fund, a non-profit organisation dedicated to helping LGBTI homeless youth.

“It certainly has grown,” she says. “And we’re actually making headway. We’re trying to help the homeless youth right now, and we’re just coming up to the Damn Awards. We call them the Damn Awards because they are the Give A Damn Awards for certain people in the community. We also do the *Home For The Holidays* concert every year, but we are raising awareness and working with Washington to perceptively help the kids.

“We’ve been trying to bring all the different organisations, not just government, but also the finest people and philanthropists, all together so

“I love divas! When I was nine my favourite was Barbra Streisand.”

we can more effectively help the kids. We want to give them information and we have a website that they can go on, which connects all these organisations. That was a dream of ours and now we’ve done it. And we also have a summit where the kids come and talk, because if you want to help the kids then you have to listen to the kids, right? Kids are our future.”

Cyndi is no stranger to extravagant, pro-LGBTI performances. At the 2006 Gay Games in Chicago, she took to the stage dressed as a rainbow Statue Of Liberty. Aussie fans were given a memorable performance during the 2008 Sydney Mardi Gras’ 30th anniversary where she joined on stage by Olivia Newton-John and

Margaret Cho.

Her LGBTI work is even more impactful because, in addition to this, she’s a global superstar. Lauper been on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, sang on the historic *We Are The World* single, guest starred on *The Simpsons* and has an official Barbie doll made in her honour. These are the signifiers of a true pop culture icon. In being such, does she ever stop to ponder the significance, or does she move on, head-down, to the next venture?

“No, I think of that sometimes. I hope that I did some good. You know? Music did a lot of good for me, so it’s kind of like, ‘bring it on, and pay it forward,’ as the expression goes.”

Never one to shy away from speaking out, in 2012 Cyndi told her story in *Cyndi Lauper: A Memoir*. Importantly, she spoke about her battle with depression, her experience of a sexual assault, and overcoming the odds of a difficult childhood, and yet it was frank, entertaining and uplifting. As with her music, her words have been an inspiration to many.

“You never know what’s right around the corner, and usually when a lot of bad things happen, that means you’re getting it over, because the good things are coming. Keep imagining the good things coming to you, and they will,” she says.

She’s right. Good things have come to Cyndi and in turn, good things have come to us.

Considering her successful discography, it’s no surprise that Lauper’s songs have often found their way onto movie soundtracks. The 1985 film *Girls Just Want To Have Fun*, starring Sarah Jessica Parker and Helen Hunt was almost certainly named after the song. *Time After Time*, which many critics consider to be her greatest song, has been covered at least a hundred times and was included in the classic Baz Luhrmann film *Strictly Ballroom*.

Time After Time has also appeared in TV shows and films including *Romy And Michele’s High School Reunion*, *View From The Top*, *Napoleon Dynamite*, *Up In The Air*, *Cold Case*, *Ugly Betty*, *House*, *Parks And Recreation* and *Glee*. But it was the film *Never Been Kissed* that featured *She Bop* – a song Generation X grew up dancing to without realising it was actually about masturbation.

“That’s how it was supposed to be,” says Cyndi chuckling. “Nobody was supposed to know except the adults. We didn’t want the kids to know, but I thought it was funny that the adults heard it one way, and the kids heard it another.”

Even so, the song joined the likes of Prince, Madonna and AC/DC on the so-called Filthy Fifteen list in America, which led to the creation of the Parental Advisory Sticker that used to appear on album covers. But hey, what better way to grab the attention of teenagers!

Never short of surprises, in 2011 she consoled a crowd of stranded passengers at Buenos Aires airport, with an impromptu rendition of *Girls Just Want To Have Fun*, over the airport PA.

“That happened, and that’s all I can tell ya!” she says laughing. “I just saw an opportunity and took it – the spontaneity of the experience was so nutty and funny and everyone was laughing. Of course, it was filmed by a lot of people!”

It seems that the colourful ball of infectious energy that danced and sang into our lives some thirty years ago just keeps on giving, and what better way to experience it this year than a stage full of *Kinky Boots*? ★

MORE: kinkybootsthemusical.com.au
The True Colors Fund www.truecolorsfund.org
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Cyndi Lauper on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

(Photo David Buchan)