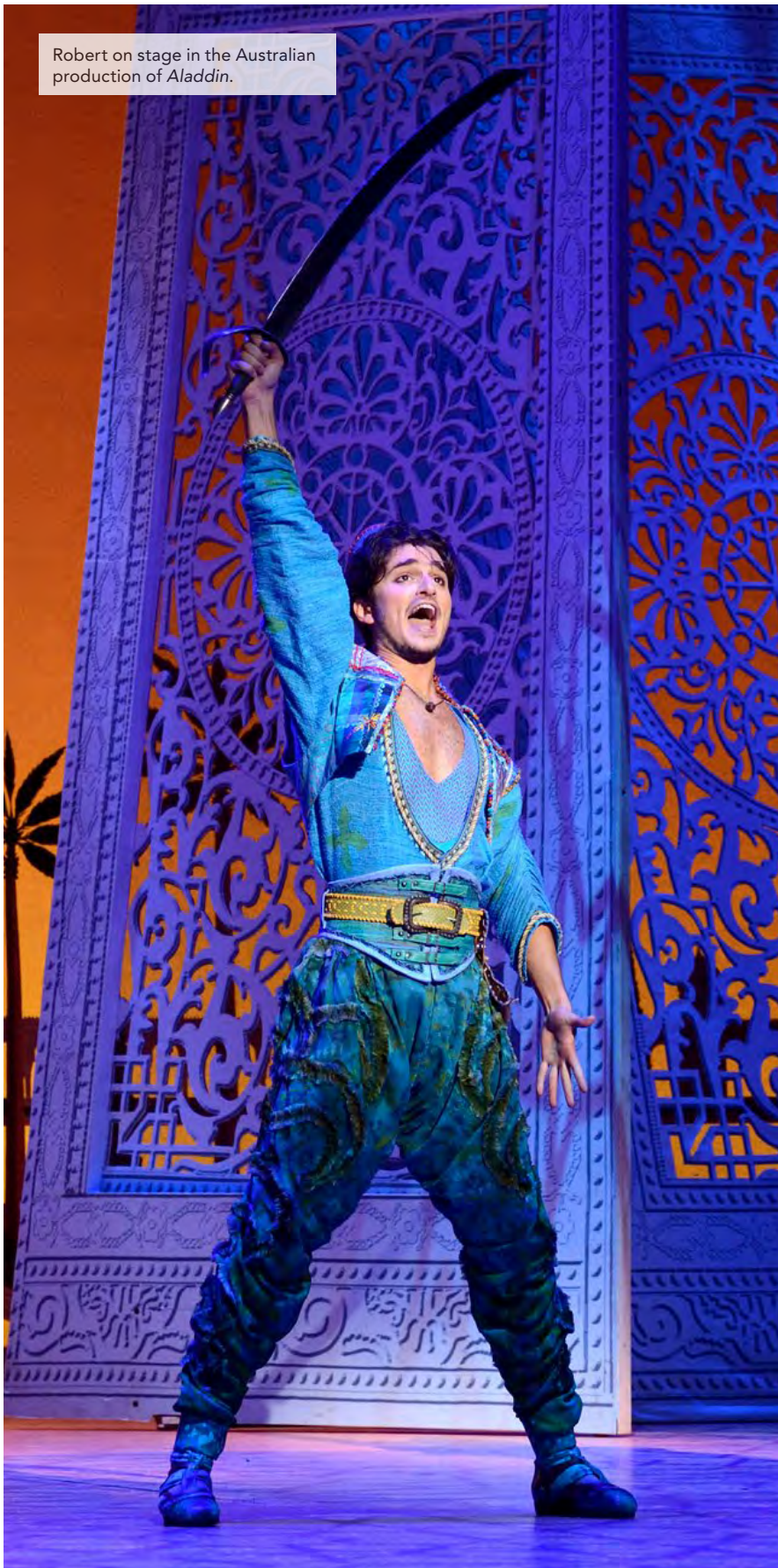


Robert on stage in the Australian production of *Aladdin*.



# Is that a sword in your harem pants or are you just pleased to see me?

GROUP CHEST-WAXINGS, SWORD FIGHTS WITH THE BOYS, PINK SCARVES... COULD THIS MONTH'S STRAIGHT MATE SOUND GAYER? QUITE POSSIBLY! ALADDIN'S ROBERT TRIPOLINO TELLS MATT MYERS ABOUT CRUSHING ON JON SNOW AND HIS "LITTLE MONKEY".

**DNA:** You play Omar, one of Aladdin's close mates (along with Kassim and Babkak). He's a bit of a scene stealer, would you agree?

**Robert Tripolino:** He's definitely the positive one. He's a puppy with a bone and always finds the good in everything. Omar is great to play because I get to find all the heart and positivity in the show's story. In fact, he's the reason the guys attempt to save Aladdin. It's Omar's idea, kind of by mistake, as he really just wants to get his pals back together.

**He's optimistic and also flamboyant!**

A little too flamboyant, some would say!

**And wants to be a choreographer. He's Aladdin's gay mate, right?**

Well, that's it. I think the pink scarfs at the end of the show say it all. It sums up Omar to a tee. There's also the scene with the limbo and we say that it's Omar's fantasy because all of a sudden things turn into a happy place where he's not being hunted down by guards. He's just singing, dancing and being joyous.

**Speaking of choreography, what kind of training did you do for the sword fighting scenes in *Aladdin*?**

Pre-production I had no training whatsoever. The idea was that from day one for an hour in every rehearsal we would train in sword fighting. And this was before learning the choreography. They wanted us to be comfortable because we are dealing with real, heavy, metal blades. In the theatre world sword fighting is like a tap dance and you have to hit the beats. To do that

you have to actually hit quite hard. It all comes together with everyone actually fighting. I feel like I'm defending myself, but everyone is safe. We have a fight-call before the show. It's exciting and one of my favourite parts because it's real. It is, what it is – boys with swords!

**In 2013 you were part of Dean Bryant's *Gaybies* at the Melbourne Theatre Company.**

Yes, I was in the first production. It was my third gig out of school so it was special to have that experience early on in my career. *Gaybies* was the kind of show where you could teach people about things, especially my own family who aren't theatre people. They're keen supporters but they weren't really into it all until I brought them to the show. They discovered that theatre isn't always about glitz and glamour.

**You also had a role in last year's long-awaited film version of  *Holding The Man*.**

Yes, I got my mug in there for about two seconds. I was in the funeral scene and it was so real. That was another project it felt great to be part of. I'd known about  *Holding The Man* before but being part of it gave me greater reason to research it. That in itself was quite full-on as I discovered how naïve I'd been. So it was nice to be part of [director] Neil Armfield's experience.

**When you entered the arts and entertainment industry, did you experience a bit of culture shock working with so many gay people?**

I grew up studying classical ballet from the age of four and moved into real ballet from around 14. At the time I was going to a private school in Geelong so it was a very different world for me. I didn't quite know what I wanted to be until I went to the Victorian College Of The Arts (VCA) in Melbourne where I met a lot of people who shared the same passion. I was introduced to the gay community as well. To be honest, in a private school upbringing, there were a lot of young kids who were suppressed and didn't feel comfortable or safe. It was amazing to come to the VCA and be in a different culture where I made new friends and felt safe because there were moments growing up as a "ballet boy" where I did not feel safe. We didn't have a dance class at school so I was packing my tights into a bag and jumping across to the all-girls school for ballet classes. I was prime meat for victimisation! I got the bullying but I was fortunate because I was also playing electric guitar and that broke some boundaries for me.

**Were you mistaken as gay during that time, or hit on by guys?**

Of course... and I say that so confidently!



**WHO IS YOUR MAN CRUSH?**

"My biggest crush is Kit Harington. I saw him early on in his career in London doing  *War Horse*. I had a bit of an "I like him" moment and then next thing he's Jon Snow on  *Game Of Thrones*. But, yeah, I had a magnet toward him and he's definitely an idol of mine."

[Laughing] My favourite memory on that is when I went to a gay bar in LA called The Abbey with my brothers. This beautiful man in his forties came on to me and my friends were like, "Hey, he's straight," and he said, "Okay, but I want you to know that if you weren't, you'd be the belle of the ball!" We had so much fun that night and that's such a beautiful memory.



**Every time we get dressed the boys see my little monkey.**

**Now... about Orlando Bloom.**

Oh my god! Are you going to say that I look like him?

**Yes, because you do! I've heard other people say it, too!**

I do get that. People are like "take the compliment" so I should ride that wave. Maybe one day I can be his stunt double.

**What is the campest song or artist that you listen to?**

When I used to gig, my favourite song to play was  *Dancing Queen* and I'd always get a kick out of dancing to that. I'm a massive ABBA fan.

**Have you ever had a wardrobe malfunction?**

I've had a very bad prop malfunction when I was understudying for  *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum*. I went on for Hugh Sheridan, and I was on stage with Geoffrey Rush and there was one moment where I had to give him one of the key plot point props, which was the wedding contract scroll. That was pretty much



where the show was building up to. So I was on stage, the adrenaline killing me, and I'd forgotten the prop! All of a sudden Geoffrey is feeling my sleeve, feeling my side, feeling everywhere and I'm thinking, "What's he doing? I don't remember this in the script." Then he says, "Ah! I've got the contract. It's very small and you can't see it." The audience burst into laughter while my heart melted and I thought I'd never work in this town again! But he loved it and said it was nice to have a fresh laugh in the show.

**What do you do to keep fit?**

I do Pilates and yoga, but I can't get too big for my role in  *Aladdin* so I can't go to the gym as much as I'd like to. It's really a stamina show so we have to keep fit and maintain our physiques. There's a great line in the show when the Genie says: "Everybody here in Agrabah has zero percent body fat!" In fact,  *High Adventure*, the sword fighting number, goes for about ten minutes and we do get quite a workout.

**Now, what's with all those bare chests! Do you have group waxings?**

Well [laughing loudly] in the dressing room we do! We're on 'chest watch'! We get told if we're getting too hairy. But we're also street rats, so we have to maintain some sort of life.

**This is our swimwear issue. Are you a boardies or briefs guy?**

In my private school days I would say budgie smugglers, but now that I'm older it's the boardies, short shorts. I'll be hitting up Bondi this summer to get that experience in.

**What about underwear?**

The boys in the show pay me out because I especially bought some monkey underwear. As you'd know, Abu isn't in the show and we three pals are the closest you get to Abu from the cartoon. So I like to have a little salute to him, and I think the best way is to have him on my crotch. Every time we get dressed the boys see my little monkey! ★

**MORE:**  *Aladdin* is playing at the Capitol Theatre Sydney. Go to [www.aladdinthemusical.com.au](http://www.aladdinthemusical.com.au)