

# LOOK OUT, MY PRETTIES!

FRIENDS OF DOROTHY, PREPARE TO HIT THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD BACK TO OZ.

**THE CLASSIC** story of farm girl, Dorothy, swept away by a tornado to the magical land of Oz where she meets colourful characters such as Scarecrow, Tin Man and a cowardly Lion, is an all-time family favourite and regarded as a gay cultural icon.

It was the 1939 MGM movie, starring Judy Garland, that resonated so strongly with gay audiences. Queer interpretations recognised Dorothy as a kindred spirit – trapped in a dull, stultifying world, dreaming of a better life “over the rainbow”. The tornado of the film literally transports Dorothy from black-and-white farm life to vivid Technicolor in Oz on The Yellow Brick Road. Along the way, she gets to dance and sing with her three unusual friends and, despite their challenges (a wicked witch) and disappointments (the Wizard himself), they all learn valuable lessons about self-acceptance.

The extended metaphor was clear to a generation of oppressed post-war homosexuals. It was still valued by the Gay Liberation generation that followed and who rioted at Stonewall Inn in 1969 on the occasion of Judy Garland’s death and one-too-many raids by the New York police. Many gay men related to Garland’s personal struggles, the term “friends of Dorothy” became code for “gay people” and the transformative rainbow became the symbol of Gay Pride.

There are many books in the *Oz* series by L Frank Baum and in one Dorothy meets a new character named Polychrome who points out her “queer friends” to which Dorothy replies that “the queerness doesn’t matter, so long as they’re friends”. Her further adventures in Oz were diverse, with some plots involving same-sex attractions and even trans characters.

*The Wizard Of Oz* stage musical was most recently revived in a London Palladium production. While the film’s original music by Harold Arlen remained, the production was given the Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice treatment, adding some contemporary shine.

Now *The Wizard Of Oz* is touring Aus, opening in Brisbane this month. In some clever casting, the

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**FRIENDS OF DOROTHY**  
(TOP) THE LONDON PALLADIUM REVIVAL OF *THE WIZARD OF OZ*. (ABOVE) ALEX RATHGEBER WILL PLAY THE TIN MAN IN THE AUSTRALIAN PRODUCTION.

new production stars Lucy Durack as Glinda and Jemma Rix as Elphaba, reprising their witch roles from the Australian production of *Wicked*.

Samantha Dodemaide is Dorothy, Eli Cooper (*Matilda*) takes on the Scarecrow, Alex Rathgeber (*The Phantom Of The Opera*) is Tin Man and John Xintavelonis, who made his name in *The Lion King*, plays the cowardly Lion. The Wizard will be played by “living national treasure” and theatre drawcard, Anthony Warlow. The production is directed by Lisa Green.

Tin Man actor, Alex Rathgeber says the gay connection to the text is well appreciated by this production. “It’s about a bunch of isolated individuals who band together, accept their differences and forge ahead as a team – looking for a better Technicolor life,” he says.

“I think the LGBTI community connect to that idea of being different, wanting a key to their own freedom of expression, and there’s a huge sense of celebration and love. It comes from the ultimate togetherness of an unconventional family, where our strengths lie in the things that make us unique.”

“In general, people relate to the way all the characters in this story have a desire for their life to be different, and for a perceived void to be filled,” adds Alex.

For some, the idea of an *Oz* stage revival may seem tiresome but considerable creative effort has gone into bringing this new production up to *Wicked* heights. The *London Sunday Telegraph* called it a ten-star production and the *Evening Standard* noted its gorgeous sense of spectacle. However, the *Daily Mail* said it was not much better than a decent pantomime.

Spectacular or pantomime, the first Broadway production of *The Wizard Of Oz* was back in 1902. Obviously there’s something special enough about this story to still fill seats over a century later. Where will The Yellow Brick Road take us this time?

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