

BROADWAY BEAT

MONTREAL PRODUCER PROUD OF HIS KINKY ROOTS

By MIKE COHEN

Adam Blanshay has loved musical theatre for most of his life. These days, the 33-year-old Jewish Montrealer is living out a dream on Broadway and London, England as producer and he already has a Tony Award statuette to his credit.

Blanshay is the CEO of JFL Theatricals, launched just over a year ago as a new division of the Just For Laughs Festival. The Tony Award, in fact six of them, came from the smash Broadway hit *Kinky Boots* (www.kinkyboots.themusical.com), which nabbed best new musical. It continues to play before capacity crowds at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre.

The storyline for *Kinky Boots* revolves around Charlie Price (Andy Kelso) who has suddenly inherited his father's shoe factory, which is on the verge of bankruptcy. Trying to live up to his father's legacy and save his family business, Charlie finds inspiration in the form of drag queen Lola (Tony winner Billy Porter) who inspires him to turn the business around.

"Two years ago I attended workshops for *Kinky Boots* that the lead producer gave," Blanshay explained. "I initially came aboard as an independent producer. When I founded JFL Theatricals this became part of the package. I really

connected with the score of this show and the message of acceptance, which resonated with me profoundly. I was not accepted by my peers growing up."

By signing on as a producer Blanshay had to raise a substantial amount of money from investors. Based on the percentage he brought in, JFL Theatricals owned that portion of the show. He attends meetings with the other producers every few weeks and has seen the actual show more times than he can remember.

Blanshay says he is still pinching himself regarding the Tony Award. "There was no clear sign that night we were going to

win," he said. "So we sat there for four hours and the last award of the night was for best new musical. When our name was announced I jumped out of my chair. It was surreal to say the least. The show is a huge success. I hope it runs forever. We have no closing date."

Blanshay grew up in Westmount, attending two prominent private schools - Selwyn House and St. George's. He left the former after not being accepted as a gay teenager. However, upon a recent return visit, he was pleased to see how things have changed and that the school now had a gay-straight alliance. His Broadway dreams were per-

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haps jump started via Montreal's legendary Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre. He enrolled in theatre at McGill University and helmed a production of Evita. Years later, when he moved to New York, he co-produced a Broadway version with pop icon Ricky Martin. One of his confidantes in New York today remains a lady named Anita Waxman, who has been a fixture on Broadway for decades. She took him under her wing early on and today he considers her a Jewish surrogate mother.

The State of Israel is close to Blanshay's heart. His mom Roni is from Ramat Gan and as such he has spent countless summers there. His younger brother is presently studying at The Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) in Herzliya

You can see Kinky Boots on Broadway Tuesday through Sundays, with two shows each on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The running time is two hours and 20 minutes, which includes one 15-minute intermission. It is appropriate for ages 10 and up. Children under the age of four are not permitted in the theatre. Tickets can be purchased online or by calling Telecharge at 212-239-6200.



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