

TheSuburban

# magazine

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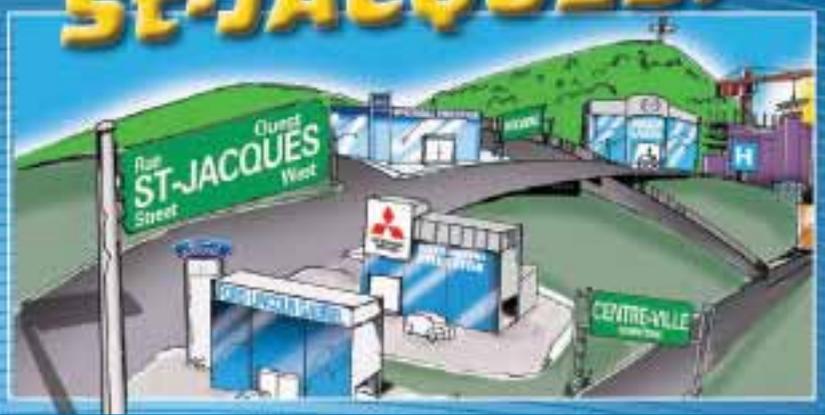


## A cabinet of curiosities

*Cirque du Soleil's Kurios*

PIERRE MANNING AND MARTIN GIRARD PHOTO

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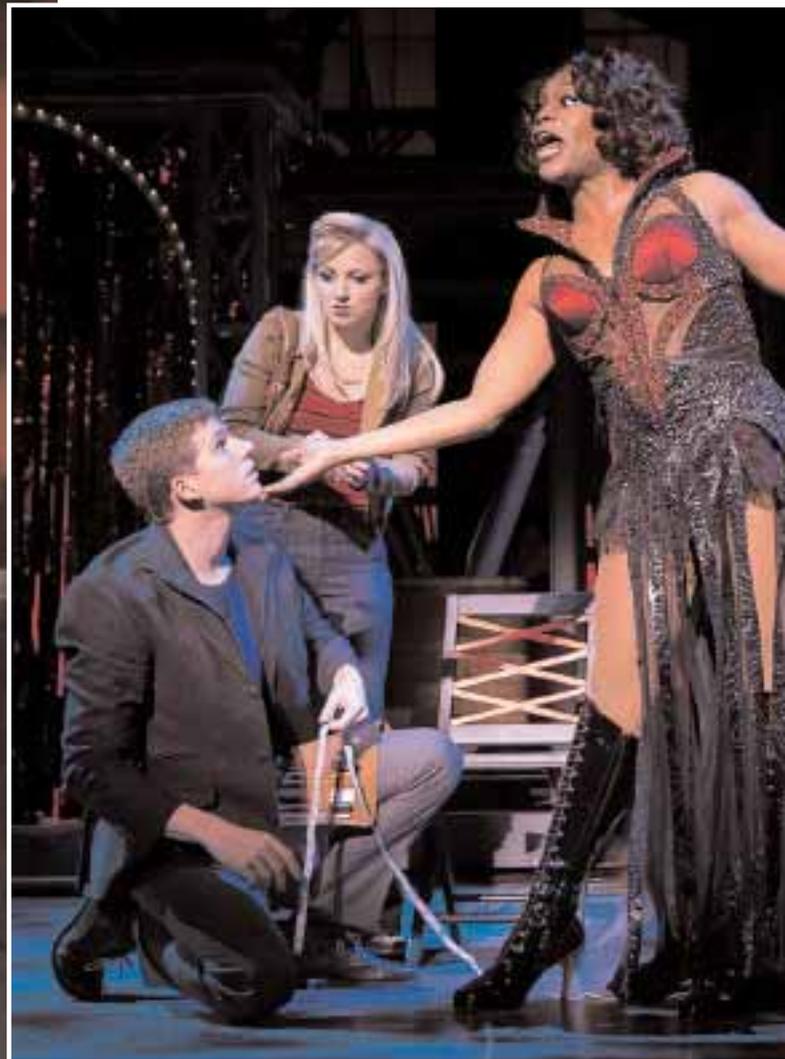
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Kinky Boots on Broadway.

# Tony Award-winning Kinky Boots among Westmounter Adam Blanshay's latest triumphs

By Mike Cohen  
The Suburban

Adam Blanshay has loved musical theatre for most of his life. These days, the 32 year old Westmount native is living out a dream on Broadway and London, England as producer and he already has a Tony Award statuette to his name.

Blanshay is the CEO of JFL Theatricals, launched just over a year ago as a new division of the prestigious Montreal-based Just For Laughs Festival. The Tony Award, in fact six of them, came from the smash Broadway hit *Kinky Boots* ([www.kinkybootsthemusical.com](http://www.kinkybootsthemusical.com)) which nabbed best new musical. It continues to play before capacity crowds at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre. His division is also behind the popular double bill of *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III*. Next on the agenda in New York are *Rocky the Musical* and *Woody Allen's Bullets Over Broadway*. As for London, where Blanshay now spends half the year, JFL Theatricals has invested in over half-dozen shows.

While in New York recently I went to see *Kinky Boots* and I'd see it again a dozen more times. It's got everything one wants in a musical and more: a compelling storyline; great song and dance routines; sensational costumes; and a feel good ending.

Grammy winner Cyndi Lauper made history with *Kinky Boots* as the first solo woman ever to receive the Tony Award for Best Score. The storyline 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). A fabulous entertainer in need of some sturdy stilettos, Lola turns out to be the one person who can help Charlie become the man he's meant to be. As they work to turn the factory around, this unlikely pair finds that they have more in common than they ever dreamed possible... and discovers that when you change your mind about someone, you can change your whole world. The common theme in this show: accept someone for who they are.

"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. He shared with me the fact that a national tour will soon be announced for the fall of 2014 while international productions are also in the mix. Will it be coming to his hometown in Montreal? "I have nothing to confirm right now," he said. "But given our Montreal connection, I hope so."

*Kinky Boots* has been picked by Mirvish Entertainment in Toronto and will hit the stage of the Royal Alexandria Theatre in June 2015.

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 the tony Montreal island suburb of 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 perhaps 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 book for *Kinky Boots* comes from a prominent Broadway personality in

four-time Tony winner Harvey Fierstein. Blanshay still speaks excellent French and in fact it was his appearance on Radio Canada's *Tout le monde en parle* which attracted the attention of JFL boss Gilbert Rozon. From there the two connected and a partnership was born.

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.

The Al Hirschfeld Theatre is located at 302 West 45th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues. There is a wheelchair accessible restroom (unisex) available on the lobby level. lounge level. There are no steps into the theatre from the sidewalk. Wheelchair seating and assisted listening systems are available.



Cindy Lauper