

Theatre Review (1000 words)
and
Presentation (3 min)

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KINKY BOOTS

Donald Gordon Theatre, Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff.

A musical comedy based on a book by Harvey Fierstein, directed by Nikolai Foster. Blending elements of dance and drama, this musical is a joyous and uplifting production that delves into themes of acceptance, finding one's place, and uncovering the unexpected. These themes were expressed effectively through engaging and poignant scenes. (Leeds Heritage Theatre, 2025) It narrates the true story of Charlie Price – a young man who takes over a shoe factory in Northampton. However, the business is struggling, and if he does not act quickly, his entire workforce will be left without jobs. One fateful evening, Charlie encounters Lola – a cabaret artist who needs some very sturdy stilettos. With Lola's assistance, Charlie develops a new line of shoes for a specific clientele, and their lives are transformed forever (Davies, 2018)

"The auditorium features sweeping lines crafted from Welsh hardwoods and iron columns, designed by local architect Percy Thomas" (Sage Journal, 2006). This "intimate" space, which can hold up to 1,896 guests, was overflowing with patrons (Theatres Trust, 2017). Viewing is good, though some box and upper circle seats have restricted views (Wales Millennium Centre.). Elevated seating ensures that attendees are always slightly above the row in front of them (Victoria, 2018). "Loops are positioned at various levels to guarantee that most seating areas receive induction loop coverage," ensuring excellent sound for those who are hard of hearing (Ampetronic, no date). Acoustic adaptability is also needed to support the wide range of musical performances held within the theatre (Ampetronic, no

date). The acoustics during Kinky Boots were tolerable, although at times they were excessively loud, particularly at the beginning of the show.

The set design was distinctive, with each part repurposed in numerous ways as actors manoeuvred platforms and equipment to unveil scenes in pubs and drag clubs (Rockwell Group, 2013). Kinky Boots transcends being just a musical focused on drag queens and footwear. It illustrates a journey familiar to many, the struggle of not meeting the hopes set by parents, family, friends, or loved ones. This narrative encompasses themes of friendship, acceptance, empathy, dignity, regrets, understanding, and embracing one's true self (Keaton, 2023). One key feature of the set that caught my eye was when a light appeared to reveal Newton Matthews in a toilet cubical, this was a creative idea as it was then repurposed for a different part of the set.

The lighting design in Kinky Boots is energetic and vivid, aligning perfectly with the show's bold spirit. Lively, colourful lights accentuate the difference between the factory setting and the drag scene, boosting emotional highlights and dramatic changes. Spotlights underscore the development of characters, while the spectacular lighting in the finale commemorates joy, pride, and transformation.

The music and sounds of Kinky Boots are lively, colourful, and brimming with emotion. Cyndi Lauper's score blends elements of pop, rock, and soul to craft anthems centred on self-acceptance and expression. The energetic songs invigorate the stage, while the softer moments provide emotional richness, ensuring the show is both impactful and memorable. "Cyndi Lauper did an incredible job melting both popular culture and the Broadway structure" (Annaleigh Ashford, 2014)

A moment that resonated deeply with me was when Newton Matthews and Dan Partridge delivered their rendition of "I'm Not My Father's Son." The performance was full of emotion, impactful, and profoundly powerful. This scene represented a pivotal shift in the show, where both Lola and Charlie start to view each other not as opposites, but as individuals burdened by expectations and disillusionment.

As Naylor (2020) writes, "The song cements the relationship of drag queen Lola with footwear factory owner Charlie Price, finding common ground in the need to assert their own identity, stepping out from the shadows cast by their fathers".

Both characters found themselves in a profoundly sensitive state as they sang, and you could sense the burden of their collective sorrow. The scene was especially touching due to

the subtle connection between them; they weren't merely performing a song; they were genuinely attuned to one another for the very first time.

A significant element of the play that captured my interest was the costumes of the factory workers. Throughout the musical, they consistently wear the same dull outfits, which could signify the monotony of their daily lives and potentially serve as foreshadowing. This stood out to me because Lola's angels are always seen in new costumes for various days and different song and dance performances. There is a distinct contrast between the factory workers and Lola's angels. While the factory workers are conventional and concentrated on their routines, Lola's angels represent flamboyance, creative expression, and the celebration of their individuality. At the end of the musical, the set and lighting transition from a shoe factory in Northampton to a spectacular runway show in Milan. "Colour-changing LEDs reveal multicoloured shoe silhouettes" (Rockwell Group, 2013). This change in the set introduced an exciting new vibe to the musical as we witness the final version of Lola's Kinky Boots.

Kinky Boots is more than a musical, it is a wake-up call wrapped in glitter and heart. From the opening number to the final bow, the audience was completely engaged. We laughed loudly at Lola's wit, gasped at the bold fashion, and many even wiped away tears during the more emotional moments. I remember looking around during "Not My Father's Son" and seeing people visibly moved, strangers connected through shared emotion. For me, it was deeply personal. Lola's strength and Charlie's growth made me reflect on how I show up in the world and how I treat others. The show didn't just entertain, it challenged and inspired. It reminded me that there's real power in kindness, vulnerability, and authenticity. When the final number hit, the entire audience stood, not just out of habit, but because we all felt something real. Kinky Boots didn't just touch me. It transformed the room.

To conclude, the musical offers an exciting journey that highlights the importance of self-acceptance and the pursuit of one's dreams. The vibrant performances from the leading cast, infuse the stage with an infectious energy that grips the audience from beginning to end. With its captivating score and breathtaking visuals, the show not only provides entertainment but also leaves a profound impression, encouraging us all to celebrate our individuality and uplift one another. Kinky Boots is a theatrical masterpiece that will have you moving in your seat and contemplating the beauty of diversity long after the final curtain descends, it is a vibrant and meaningful addition to the canon of contemporary musical theatre that invites reflection and joy.

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Digital era presentation link:

<https://youtu.be/UvQeQDlCxZU?feature=shared>