

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Kinky Boots

Book by Harvey Fierstein, music and lyrics by Cyndi Lauper, based on the film written by Geoff Deane and Tim Firth

ROYO and Curve

Leeds Grand Theatre

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Based on a charming—if slightly forgettable—2005 film, *Kinky Boots* has become one of the most beloved musicals of the past two decades. With six Tony Awards to its name, including Best Musical, and over 2,500 performances on Broadway, its global appeal is undeniable. Furthermore, judging by the packed house on the night I attended, its popularity in the UK hasn't waned.

Inspired by true events, the story follows Charlie Price (Dan Partridge), who inherits a struggling shoe factory in Northampton from his late father. Desperate to save the business from bankruptcy, Charlie finds an unlikely saviour in Lola (Johannes Radebe), a six-foot drag queen with a flair for fabulous footwear. Together, they shift the factory's focus from drab men's shoes to daring high-heeled boots for cross-dressing clientele.

As you might expect from Harvey Fierstein—the creative force behind *La Cage aux Folles*—the musical champions diversity and friendship. Lola's arrival initially ruffles feathers among the factory workers, particularly the macho Don (Joe Caffrey). But as the show progresses, Lola challenges their biases with warmth and wit, ultimately winning them over and underscoring the show's message: accept people as they are.

Six years have passed since [I last reviewed \*Kinky Boots\*](#), and I'll admit my enthusiasm has cooled somewhat. On second viewing, the romance between Charlie and his employee Lauren (Courtney Bowman) feels underdeveloped. Their eventual coupling is predictable and lacks emotional payoff, making the resolution feel rushed and unearned.

Charlie's conflict with Lola also feels more contrived this time around. His abrupt shift from ally to antagonist in the second half—before their inevitable reconciliation—feels inconsistent with his earlier warmth, diminishing the emotional impact of their journey.

That said, *Kinky Boots* still delivers a highly entertaining night out, and much of that is thanks to Lola. Equal parts grit and glamour, Lola remains one of contemporary musical theatre's most captivating characters. *Strictly* dancer Johannes Radebe makes a bold acting debut in the role—and for the most part, he delivers. His movement is predictably flawless, exuding confidence and sensuality—but it's his portrayal of Lola's vulnerability that gives the performance its heart.

Dan Partridge, a familiar face from *Grease* and *Hairspray*, brings charm and sincerity to Charlie, though he's occasionally hampered by the script's contrivances in the second act. Courtney Bowman injects real fizz into the role of Lauren, with her rendition of "The History of Wrong Guys" standing out as a comic highlight. Meanwhile, Scott Paige steals several scenes as George, a seemingly buttoned-up factory man who discovers his inner diva under Lola's influence.

Cyndi Lauper's infectious score is brought to life with verve by choreographer Leah Hill and lighting designer Ben Cracknell. Show-stopping numbers like "Sex is in the Heel" and "Everybody Say Yeah" are staged with exuberance and flair, lifting the energy every time the plot threatens to sag.

Reservations aside, *Kinky Boots* remains a pleasure to watch. Its message of acceptance, vibrant characters and irresistible energy continue to strike a chord—even if some of its emotional beats don't land as smoothly the second time around.

**Reviewer:** [James Ballands](#)