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Smash hit musical takes Keith-Albee stage as part of Marshall Artists Series on Oct. 26

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The Herald-Dispatch
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The U.S. National Touring Company of "Kinky Boots," brings the huge-hearted, high-heeled musical to the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center in Huntington 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 26.

Courtesy of Matthew Murphy

It is not easy as you think for rock stars to command the Broadway stage — let alone create for it.

For every Elton John's "The Lion King," there are three or four efforts like "Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark," in which Bono and The Edge proved their best work is not on the Great White Way.

But five years ago Cyndi Lauper proved that girls (and guys in drag) do just want to have fun, and they did, and they still are in a major league way.

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Lauper's smash-hit musical "Kinky Boots," which she wrote with Harvey Fierstein ("Hairspray") received 13 Tony nominations in 2013 and took home six 2013 Tony Awards, the most of any show in the season, including Best Musical, Best Score (Cyndi Lauper), Best Choreography (Jerry Mitchell), Best Orchestrations (Stephen Oremus) and Best Sound Design (John Shivers). The show also received the Drama League, Outer Critics Circle and Broadway.com Awards for Best

IF YOU GO

WHAT: "Kinky Boots" is a high-heeled Broadway hit thanks to a wealth of songs by Grammy- and Tony Award-winning pop icon Cyndi Lauper. Inspired by true events, "Kinky Boots" takes a rollicking path from a gentlemen's shoe factory in Northampton to the glamorous catwalks of Milan.

WHERE: The Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center, 925 4th Ave., Huntington

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 26

TICKETS: Tickets range from \$64.04 to \$97.87 and can be ordered by calling 304-696-6656, online at Ticketmaster.com or at the Marshall Artists Series box office in the Joan C. Edwards Playhouse on 5th Avenue across from Marshall University's Student Center from noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. For information, call 304-696-3326.

COMING UP: Here's a look at the rest of the shows in the fall semester of the Marshall Artists Series:

- Emmy Award-winning comedian and writer John Mulaney brings his "Kid Gorgeous" tour to Huntington at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 1. Tickets are \$65.13 and \$43.30.
- Veteran singer/songwriters Lyle Lovett and John Hiatt at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 6. Tickets are \$97.87, \$76.04 and \$65.13.
- The Broadway musical "A Night With Janis Joplin" at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 14. The show is a musical journey celebrating Joplin and her biggest musical influences — icons like Aretha Franklin, Etta James, Odetta, Nina Simone and Bessie Smith, who inspired one of rock 'n' roll's greatest legends. Tickets are \$97.87, \$81.50, \$70.58 and \$64.04.
- The animated TV special "A Charlie Brown Christmas" comes to life onstage at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 5. Tickets are \$68.40, \$54.21 and \$43.30.

Musical, and the Grammy Award for Best Musical Album, along with many other accolades.

"Kinky Boots," which is still on Broadway, also plays in London's West End, in Australia, and has its U.S. national tour coming in to strut its stuff as the Marshall Artists Series 2017-2018 conti

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Some tickets still remain for "Kinky Boots," which is set for 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 26. Tickets are \$97.87, \$81.50, \$70.58 and \$64.04 and can be ordered by calling 304-696-6656, online at Ticketmaster.com or at the Marshall Artists Series box office in the Joan C. Edwards Playhouse on 5th Avenue across from Marshall University's Student Center from noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. For information, call 304-696-3326.

Based on a true story, "Kinky Boots" takes you from a gentlemen's shoe factory in Northampton to the glamorous catwalks of Milan. In the musical, Charlie Price is struggling to live up to his father's expectations and continue the family business of Price & Son. With the factory's future hanging in the balance, help arrives in the unlikely but spectacular form of Lola, a fabulous performer in need of some sturdy new stilettos. Their new line of shoes helps save the family-run shoe factory.

It is a story that is refreshingly familiar with the Marshall Artists Series since marketing director Angela Jones, who curates the film festivals, said the series screened the 2005 British indie film "Kinky Boots," from which the Broadway show is based, in 2006. That original film was based on a 1999 BBC2 documentary series, "Trouble at the Top," that followed Steve Pateman, who — to help save his family-run shoe factory — decided to make fetish footwear for men under the brand name "Divine Footwear."

"It was a big hit at the film festival, and I have been such a big fan ever since," Jones said when the season was announced earlier this year. "And as an '80s baby, I can't wait since Cyndi Lauper wrote all of the music. I am thrilled. I can't calm down about it."

Another person that really can't calm down about it is Lola.

Well, Jos N. Banks, the 27-year-old newcomer who went head over heels for the drag queen character since he saw Billy Porter's performance in 2013. Porter won the 2013 Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical for his role as Lola in "Kinky Boots" at the 67th Tony Awards.

Banks, who has been out with the national tour for a month, said Porter's performance literally changed the trajectory of his acting career.

"Lola has been a dream role since I saw the Tony performance in 2013," Banks said. "I am a big Billy Porter fan and so much of a nerd that I entered his biggest fan contest and I won. He originated the role of Lola, and I fell in love with the character after seeing him perform. Ever since I was like, 'I have got to get my hands on this role.' I had been called back several times before, but this time it was the one that stuck, and I couldn't be happier."

And for good reason. He's out with this, the second national tour of "Kinky Boots," that just started about a month ago and rolls through next March.

"It is literally like performing a daily concert of Cyndi Lauper's music," Banks said of "Kinky Boots" for which Lauper was the first woman to win a Best Score Tony alone. "... It is an incredible score and is so much fun to sing. I love my job singing her songs about how people are able to evolve and how you can still find a place for yourself even if people shut a lot of doors. She really saw her space and ran for it. For me it is totally uplifting that message of love and acceptance."

Banks said he knows well that he has big shoes, make that heels, to fill since everyone from Porter to even Wayne Brady from "Let's Make a Deal" has performed the powerful role of the well-grounded drag queen.

"Lola is very different, and it is a very different role for anyone of any typecast but definitely someone like me — a young African American male playing the leading lady of the show," Banks said. "People go to a Broadway show and they expect to be changed, and musicals challenging perceptions goes along with that, but with this drag queen there's some moments throughout the performance where I am questioning how good of a person am I and people realize that we all have a lot more in common than we think — that is a message that is universal and timely."

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Banks, who grew up in Chicago and was a so-so college student as he says, said that since the tour is hitting a lot of college cities, such as Huntington, he likes to share his own journey's message of working hard and following your dreams even if there are obstacles along the way.

"You have to be that one person who believes in yourself. Even if others don't see a place for you in this world, you do have a place in this world," Banks said. "A lot of the campuses we are going to are musical theater schools, and it is kind of a big deal. When I was in school I was not the guy who got cast in all of the leads. That was not my journey. I was the one who they were always highlighting my downfalls and things that were not my strengths. Now I get to go to these schools and universities and get so much love from other artists and students who are studying what I am doing, and that is amazing. I tell them that even if you are having a hard time, never give up on yourself. If I had I would not be where I am."

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