

It's all about Broadway today on As It Is. I'm June Simms.

We will hear about some of the longest running shows on Broadway and take a look at some of the big winners at the recent Tony Awards in New York City.

We begin with that report from Christopher Cruise.

"Kinky Boots" Wins Six Tony Awards

The American Theatre Wing's Tony Awards recognize the best musicals, plays and actors on Broadway.

The Broadway musical "Kinky Boots" was by far the biggest winner at the Tony Awards this week. The musical won six awards, including the top award as best musical.

David Cote is the theater editor for Time Out New York magazine. He says "Kinky Boots" was nominated for 13 Tony awards. He thinks each nomination was justified.

"Kinky Boots is a bright, funny, silly but sentimental show about drag queens in a shoe factory in England. It's an underdog story. It's a good show, it's a fun show, it's a crowd-pleaser."

“Kinky Boots” is based on a British film about a struggling shoe factory that reinvents itself by making boots for men who like to wear women’s clothing.

That is “Sex Is In The Heel,” one of the show-stopping songs that earned “Kinky Boots” Tony awards for best musical and best score. Cyndi Lauper wrote the music and lyrics for “Kinky Boots.” It was the first Broadway musical for the 1980s pop music star. She is the first woman to receive a Tony for best score without sharing the award with a man.

Billy Porter won the best actor award for his part in the musical, which also won for best choreography, orchestrations and sound design.

Critics also liked “Matilda The Musical,” a Royal Shakespeare Company production based on a children’s book by Roald Dahl.

The musical won a total of four Tony awards last Sunday. They include best book of a musical for Dennis Kelly and best actor in a musical for Gabriel Ebert.

Playwright Christopher Durang won the award for best play for the comedy “Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike.” Again, David Cote.

“It’s kind of about being middle-aged and sad and feeling like your life hasn’t really ended up where you wanted it – and themes that every average theater critic can relate to.”

“Don't pine for me. That's ridiculous. I'm 57. I have told you for many years I'm not interested in you in that way. I march to a different drummer.”

“Why must you march to a drummer at all? Why couldn't we both walk to the sounds of a piccolo?”

Tracy Letts won the Tony award for best actor in a play for his performance in “Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf.” The play also won the award for best revival of a Broadway show. Cicely Tyson won the award for best actress in a play for her part in “The Trip to Bountiful.” “Pippin” won the Tony for best revival of a musical. Its star Patina Miller was recognized as best leading actress in a musical. I'm Christopher Cruise.

You are listening to As It Is, from VOA Learning English. I'm June Simms.

Keeping Broadway Shows Fresh

“The Phantom of the Opera” recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of its first performance on Broadway. The show now holds the record as the longest running Broadway musical ever. Harold Prince directed “The Phantom of the Opera” in the 1980s. He attended the anniversary celebrations earlier this year.

“I see the show probably at least a dozen times a year, but I rehearse them four times a year and I'm very grateful for it.”

That is Hugh Panaro singing "Music of the Night." He has played the Phantom in more than 1,700 performances. His long relationship with the show began 22 years ago when he played a different part, that of Raoul, the lover of a girl named Christine. He says part of what has kept things fresh for him is performing with so many actresses who play the part of Christine.

"You know, fifteen, easily. And that's not counting understudies. That's counting girls that have held this contract from the time I was Raoul 'til now. I get two Christines a week and no two Christines are alike, which is the beauty of it."

At the Gershwin Theater, production stage manager Marybeth Abel is adding a new actor to the theater's production of "Wicked." "Wicked" will celebrate its 10th anniversary in October.

"I always say my primary job is to make sure that the show goes on every night as scheduled and that we do it successfully and we get a standing ovation at the end of the night."

Marybeth Abel works with actors and a backstage crew - about 120 people. They make sure the show does not have any problems during its eight performances every week.

"Hands down, when you're in a long-run show, the best thing that happens is that there's turnover in cast. That's the best thing that happens because

all those influxes of difference make everybody, like, step up.”

One of the new actors is Willemjin Verkaik. She plays Elphaba, the green girl who becomes the Wicked Witch of the West. Verkaik is from the Netherlands and has played Elphaba in Europe, in both Dutch and German. Now she is doing it on Broadway in English.

Willemjin Verkaik was asked to take the place of Idina Menzel, who won a Tony Award for the part. Yet she says she has found ways to make the part her own.

“You are an actress so you have to play it yourself and you have to make it believable, you have to believe it yourself, so you have to go on that journey yourself.”

Every Broadway production has a resident director who acts as a link between the creators of the show and the current performers. That is the job of John Stefaniuk in “The Lion King,” which recently celebrated its 15th anniversary on Broadway. He travels around the world, supervising as many as eight productions of the show.

“It’s not a factory job. You want to allow these actors to feel like actors and treat them as such, not feel like replicas of somebody else’s show.”

John Stefaniuk has seen “The Lion King” hundreds of times, yet he never grows tired of it.

“I think, after all these years, if it doesn’t still send a shiver up my back, then I’m not doing my job.”

That’s all for As It Is. I’m June Simms. VOA World News is coming up at the top of the hour, Universal Time. Have a great weekend!