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## Kinky Boots star Amy Lennox: I am not related to Annie Lennox

CURRENTLY kicking up a storm in the hit show Kinky Boots, Amy Lennox is one to watch. Our writer meets her.

By **MARTIN TOWNSEND**

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Blessed with a name that provokes quizzical looks from anyone with half an interest in pop music, Amy Lennox is well used to one particular question...

"At a stage door a few years ago, a woman just assumed I was Annie Lennox's daughter," laughs the 30-year-old actress. "She said,

'I think I know your nanny!' I can understand the confusion because we're both from Aberdeen, but we are definitely not related and I've never met her."

Slim, stylish and fizzing with enthusiasm, Amy is currently wowing audiences in London's West End as Lauren, the lovable, tomboyish lead female character in the hit musical, *Kinky Boots*.

Adapted from the 2005 movie, it tells the story of a struggling Northamptonshire shoe company whose fortunes are restored after its young owner starts making outrageous footwear for a troop of drag queens.

"People that know me say, 'Oh it's really you,'" says Amy, who made her big stage breakthrough in *Legally Blonde*. "They say, 'Oh you're just messing about on stage and being yourself really.' With the part of Lauren, you can't be [puts on a posh voice], 'Oh, do I look pretty?' You have to get stuck into it and not be afraid.

"But it's a real gift of a part and I don't think I, or any of the cast, have ever experienced such an amazing reaction from audiences.

"During rehearsals the director, Jerry Mitchell, kept saying to us, 'I don't think you guys realise what sort of reaction you are going to get,' and we said, 'Oh yeah, whatever.' But then we did a preview in front of 500 people and it was insane. We all had tears in our eyes. I've been doing it for six months now and I keep telling myself, 'Don't get used to this!' It's such a wonderful experience."

Amy, who lives in west London with her boyfriend, actor Tom Hargreaves, is not from a stage family. Her father works in IT for an oil company and her mother is a solicitor. But she showed early promise when she sang at her nursery, aged two and a half.

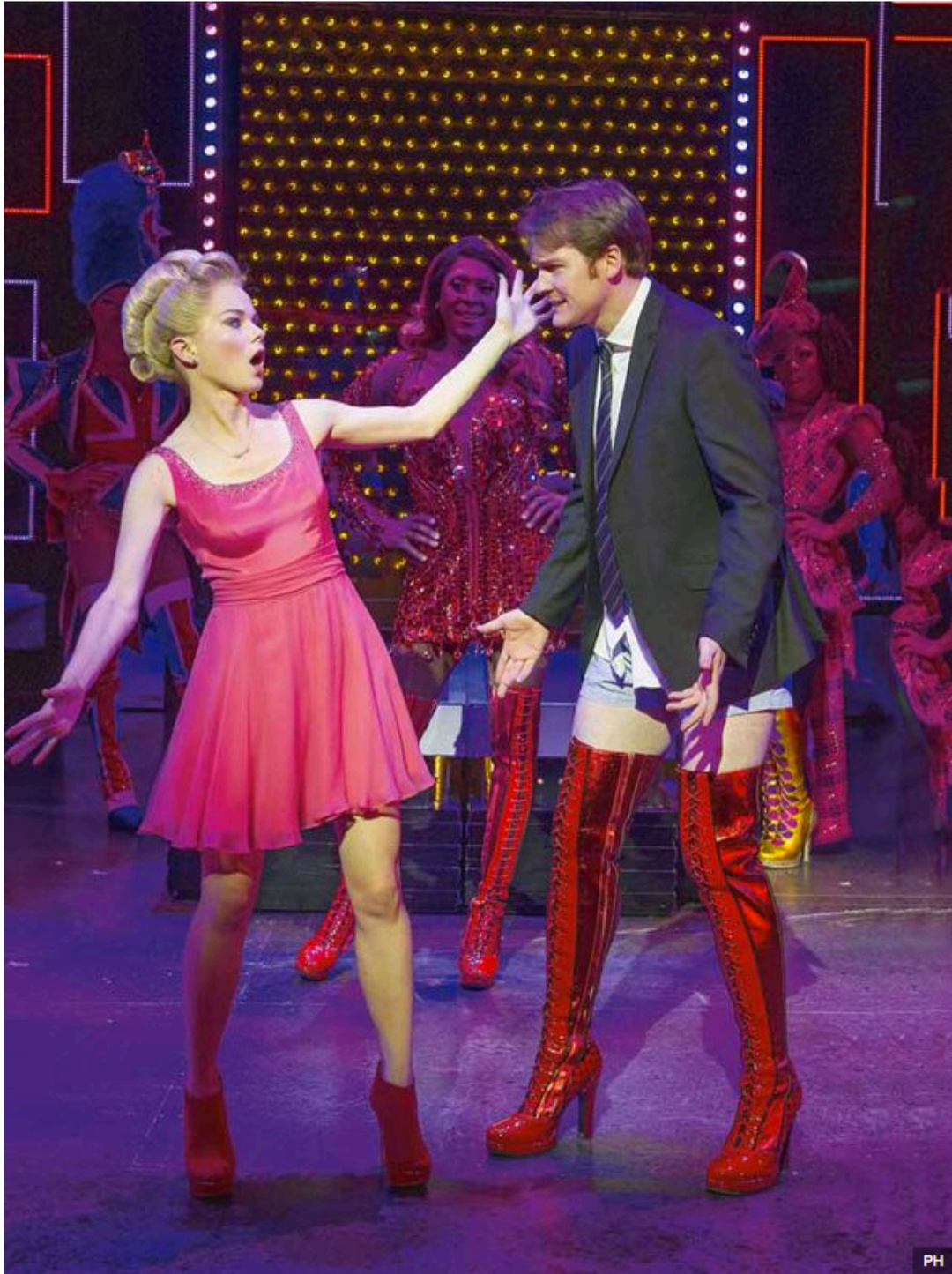
"Apparently my parents said I had perfect pitch and they cried when I sang. And because they went on and on about it, of course I decided, 'Right, I'm not singing!' Then I got to the age of 11 and I was watching a documentary about stage-school girls auditioning for *Annie* and it was like I got smacked in the face with envy. I thought, 'I have to do that.'"

But her attempts at performing were a disaster. She auditioned for *Annie Get Your Gun* and froze.

"It was the first time I had ever performed in public and I was a total wreck. I felt sick and my knees were shaking. I remember going home and crying because I knew I could do it but I just couldn't get it out there."

Her guardian angel was a woman called Annie Inglis who ran a drama group in Aberdeen called Giz Giz.

"She helped me break the fear barrier," reveals Amy. "It was all about confidence. I just needed that little push."



Performing with Killian Donnelly in the hit musical

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Amy won a place at drama school in Guildford and was soon signed up to an agent and ready to work.

"The first thing I said to my agent was, 'I want to do everything,' because it's very easy to get boxed in with musical theatre, especially in Britain," she says.

"My role model is the actress Samantha Spiro. I did a workshop with her a couple of years ago and not only is she wonderful, a really lovely lady, but she's also got this amazing career where she does musicals and plays and TV and all sorts of things. That's my dream."

True to this strategy, Amy has appeared in powerful dramas such as *The Prime Of Miss Jean Brodie* and musicals including *9 To 5* and *The Sound Of Music*. But she also had a small part in the brilliant and disturbing movie *Never Let Me Go*.

"I read the script and just loved it – incredibly depressing and sad but really cool. Once I have finished with *Kinky Boots*, I will definitely try to focus on doing more films." Serious theatre also beckons.



In 2011, Amy appeared in *Decade*, Rupert Goold's ground-breaking play about 9/11. A basement office space was used to recreate the Windows on the World restaurant, 107 floors up in the doomed North Tower of the World Trade Center.

As part of a talented ensemble of 12 actors, Amy played a multitude of roles, including an airport immigration official scanning the audience and their bags as they came in, a waitress at the restaurant and, most movingly, one of three women widowed by the disaster who met every year to remember it.

"Their piece was played out in reverse so that at the beginning they are bereaved and then at the end they meet before the tragedy has happened," she explains.

Dozens of writers were employed on the show, the idea being to piece together different thoughts and ideas about the tragedy.

"It was the most incredible experience," says Amy. "At the beginning, no one really knew how it would be. But we put all the ideas together then whittled them down and in the end it was an extraordinary, thought-provoking piece. I was so proud to be part of it."

She is equally proud of the work she did on *Legally Blonde*, covering for Sheridan Smith in the lead role of Elle Woods.

"That was a great learning curve," she says. "Elle Woods is one of the most demanding lead roles for a female to play and it allowed me to prove to myself what I'm capable of – to get in front of an audience and realise that I've got comic timing. All the theory is fine but you don't know and learn till you're thrown out there. Screw it up and learn from your mistakes is the way forward."

In *Legally Blonde* she was directed by Jerry Mitchell, who remembered how hard she had worked when he began the auditions for *Kinky Boots*.

The songs for the show were written by American 80s pop legend Cyndi Lauper, famous for her hits *Girls Just Want To Have Fun* and *Time After Time*. Did she get to meet her?

"Yes I did and she is so cool," says Amy. "We talked about our dogs and showed each other photographs."

**Cyndi was very hands-on with the production and continues to be so.**

"I was warned that she might be very specific about what she wants stylistically and with the sound," she says. "What she doesn't like, and she was very clear about this, is vibrato, or [puts on American accent] 'vy-bra-do'. It's not her thing at all. She's not a fan of generic musical theatre singing.

"There's lots of musical genres within Kinky Boots – it's not just pop music – and she was very specific with the boys in particular because they've got a lot more to do. She's a vocal coach as well, so she knows about the voice. She did loads of sessions with them and they have Skype lessons with her vocal coach in New York every week."

The big song that Amy performs in Kinky Boots, The History Of Wrong Guys, is also the show's standout number, an extraordinary combination of yelps, asides, spoken lines and full-power vocalising that, together with the dance routines, must really test the actress's stamina.

"I'm doing eight shows over six days a week so I have to look after myself," she says, "but it's not a massively demanding thing.

"I get home at about 10pm and even though everyone says it's bad for you, I always have the biggest meal when I get in. I eat when I'm hungry, I'm afraid! I get to sleep about two, I'm up at about 10 and then I don't need to leave for work until five, so I've turned into a bit of a gym bunny.

"Also, I've got my dog that I share custody of with my ex-boyfriend. We've remained friends and we have our baby doggy who's incredibly demanding. I take him on long walks in Richmond Park."

She met current boyfriend Tom when they acted together in 9 To 5. "He was my onstage husband and we hit it off, so we've been together ever since."

Any chance he might pop the question and be her offstage husband too?

"I don't know," she says. "I think if we ever decided to marry, it would just be a sudden, mutual decision. I'm all about equality and we work as a team. I'm the kind of person who's more likely to say, 'Oh hold on a minute, if you've just bought me a big diamond ring, shouldn't I get you something? Maybe a nice watch?'

"When I was at school I thought, 'When I'm 30, I want to be doing this and this and this.' Now I'm 30, I think, 'Absolutely not: I'm not ready for anything settled.' I'm career-minded and I just want to keep going and allow that to be a priority."