

LET'S GET THEATRICAL
Tony winner Billy Porter will
share songs from his new
album at his one-man show
at the Colony Theatre later
this month.

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THEATER

SPEAKING HIS MIND

BROADWAY DARLING BILLY PORTER PLANS
TO TELL IT LIKE IT IS WHEN HE HITS THE
COLONY THEATRE STAGE THIS MONTH.

By Nila Do Simon

If Billy Porter is anything, he's fierce. With a versatile voice that bellows from the depths of his belly (and, some would say, his soul), the performer has become a hot Broadway ticket since winning the 2013 Tony Award for best actor in a musical for his incarnation of Lola, a larger-than-life drag queen in *Kinky Boots*. Porter has lit up playbills since his Tony win, penning the off-Broadway play *While I Yet Live*, as well as directing *Ham*, a musical featuring Tony Award nominee Sam Harris, all while still playing Lola eight shows a week.

But life wasn't always this grand for the 45-year-old stage veteran. The outspoken Porter grew up in a traditional, religious African-American enclave in Pittsburgh, at a time when the only commendable profession was becoming a minister. The blue-collar community had little concept of theatrical performances. Even more, the place wasn't very tolerant of homosexuals like Porter, who was out from an early age.

"My community would rather me be a serial killer than a faggot," he says. "That's the energy I grew up around."

But after watching the 1982 Tony Awards from his home and seeing Jennifer Holliday perform signature songs from *Dreamgirls*, Porter came to the realization that there was a different life awaiting him. Nine years later, he went on to graduate from Carnegie Mellon University with a fine arts degree and was crowned the male champion in *Star Search* just a year later in 1992. Broadway soon came calling with roles in everything from *Miss Saigon* to *Grease*. Then, at what may be the peak of some Broadway performers' careers, Porter suddenly stepped away from the spotlight. In his own words, "I was disenfranchised, so I took the time off to discover what I wanted my voice to be." For the next 13 years, he stayed connected to the performance industry by creating the Las Vegas musical revue *Signed, Sealed, Delivered: The Music of Stevie*

Wonder and playing Little Richard in the CBS miniseries *Shake, Rattle & Roll*. It wasn't until he was cast in the revival of *Angels in America* that his desire to return to Broadway became too overwhelming to ignore. And it was Porter's fearless portrayal of his character Belize, a nurse and former drag queen, that got him noticed and eventually cast in *Kinky Boots*, a role that encompassed everything he loves about performing.

"I had always missed the Broadway stage," says Porter. "It was just a matter of what kind of material, what kind of energy I was putting out in the world that I needed to be selective about. I've gotten past the phase of 'I'm happy to just be onstage.' It now needs to mean something."

All that insightful introspection and his famed pipes will be on full display for Miami when he headlines this month's much-anticipated *South Beach Broadway Series* at the Colony Theatre to perform songs from his recent album, *Billy's Back on Broadway*, which highlights

classic standards and contemporary Broadway tunes—all with his signature style and flair. "I'm excited to show Miami audiences how I've reinterpreted these songs," he says. "Most of the performances in my career have been in the Northeast and out west, so it'll be a nice change of pace to be in front of a different crowd." The song Porter admits looking forward to performing is "Take the Moment," a little-known Stephen Sondheim and Richard Rodgers ditty featuring the lyrics: "Take the moment; let it happen; make it last"—a statement that wholly surmises Porter's recent success and current frame of mind. "The theme for the evening is being in power," he says, "and, more importantly, following your dreams."

We can't think of a better person to deliver that message. *March 20-21, 8PM, \$50-\$125, Colony Theatre, 1040 Lincoln Road, Miami Beach, 305.674.1040, colonytheatremiami.com*

BILLY PORTER: PHOTO BY DANIELLE LEVIT/AGOUT