



THE HOST WITH THE MOST

James Corden takes the driver's seat as host of the 70th annual Tony Awards

By Michael Gioia

"IT'S AS STRAIGHTFORWARD AS THIS:

If I can do this, anyone can," explains James Corden, who returns to New York City's Beacon Theatre tonight to host the 70th annual Tony Awards, celebrating the best in Broadway theatre.



ART STREIBER/CBS

However, Corden—who took home the Best Actor in a Play Tony Award at the 2012 ceremony at the Beacon—still holds true to what he said in his acceptance speech. “There is no such thing as best,” he reiterates, “definitely not when it comes to acting. It just doesn’t exist, so I don’t, for one second, think, ‘I was the Best Actor on Broadway this year.’ I’m just very proud to have been recognized in some way.”

Now he’s paying it forward by taking the reins to recognize all of the artists who have graced the Great White Way this season.

“I consider the people who create the Tony Awards show the most talented people in the world,” he says. “It’s the best awards show on television. It’s not just a succession of people receiving trophies. You’re really going to see a proper show. There is real entertainment there, and to just be in the middle of it... It’s not lost on me what a privilege it is to do such a thing.”

Entertainment comes easy to Corden, who—since winning the Tony, Outer Critics Circle and

Drama Desk awards for his comedic performance in *One Man, Two Guvnors*—has skyrocketed to celebrity status while keeping to his theatrical roots. He played the Baker in the smash-hit film adaptation of *Into the Woods* before succeeding Craig Ferguson as the host of CBS’s *The Late Late Show* and continues to keep America laughing alongside all of the stars he invites to his carpool karaoke, a bit that has become a viral phenomenon on social media.

But, the trajectory of his career in the theatre wasn’t always a fairy tale, and once upon a time, Corden felt lost in the woods, fighting to get noticed.

“It was during *The History Boys*, which sounds odd because the show was so successful,” Corden recalls. He made his Broadway debut in Alan Bennett’s Tony Award-winning Best Play of 2006. “We were in New York, and everyone under the sun was coming to see the show. A lot of the boys started getting real interest in movies. Dominic Cooper was coming in with reams of film scripts under his arm, and I would get two pages of a



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script for the guy who drops off a TV to Hugh Grant. Or I'd get asked to play a news agent, and that was only based on the way I looked. It felt like people were saying, 'You're good; we just don't think you're ever going to be the main event.' That's when I decided to start writing a sitcom for the BBC. *Gavin & Stacey* changed my life, really."

Risk-taking has paved the road to Corden's success, and he admires the chances being taken this season.

"It's about going with your gut," he says. Recalling *The History Boys*: "If you said, 'We're going to do a play about eight boys in the '80s being prepped and groomed to get into Oxford and Cambridge, and their teacher molests them on a bike, but he's in no way a villain,' you would go, 'Right, yeah... this doesn't sound like a Broadway hit to me,' and yet there it is winning six Tonys, selling out every night. The truth is that the very best theatre comes from a place of, 'Well, we think this will be good.'"

The Tony host is currently based in Los Angeles, where *The Late Late Show* films, but he's made a point to travel back and forth to see as many shows as possible before Broadway's big night. The decision to take the gig hosting on CBS came at a crossroad of multiple projects.

"I was going to write a television show for HBO, and I was going to do a musical on Broadway," he says, referring to a planned revival of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. "Then this late-night show came up pretty much out of the blue, and I thought, 'Well, this is something that [won't] come around again,' and I would rather regret doing something than *not* doing something. But I would be very, very disappointed in myself if I didn't do another play or a musical or just work in the theatre in some capacity again in my career."

Corden says that if the possibility of *Forum* presented itself again, he would jump at the chance. ("It was a dream of

mine to play that part," he says.) For now, though, he's excited to stand before the millions who tune in tonight.

"I love the thought of a kid in their room who dreams of being in a musical the same [way] I did, the same way Lin-Manuel Miranda did, the same way the whole cast of *The Phantom of the Opera* did—that this is a dream and something that you can't shake and you won't shake and is something that you say, 'I don't know what it is in me, but I have to do this,'" he says. "I hope that there's a kid somewhere who one day is talking to you on the cusp of winning his first Tony Award and says, 'I can remember sitting in my room in Nebraska and watching James Corden host the 70th Annual Tony Awards and thinking, 'Oh, I'm going to do this one day.' That's the point. That's what it's all about.'"

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