

## ‘Two Strangers (Carry A Cake Across New York)’ Reflects The Joy Of Human Connection

Broadway's buzzy new show boasts two star-making performances and has won praise from Jonathan Bailey and Lin-Manuel Miranda, among other celebs.

By Curtis M. Wong

Actors Christiani Pitts and Sam Tutty hope their performances in the new Broadway musical “Two Strangers (Carry a Cake Across New York)” will encourage theatergoers to rediscover the power of human connection, even if that requires looking up from their phones more often.

“Doing this show has reminded me just how much I’m on my phone,” Pitts said. “We’re so busy in our phones, disconnected ... it really closes you off. You could be sitting right next to somebody who could change your life, and not even know it.”



In a season dominated by lavish revivals and stage adaptations of hit films, “Two Strangers” is a sweet treat of a romantic comedy, with Pitts and Tutty making up its entire cast. The show, featuring an anthemic pop score by Jim Barne and Kit Buchan, follows Dougal Todd (Tutty), a young British man who arrives in New York to attend the wedding of his estranged father to the sister of an American woman, Robin Rainey (Pitts).

A sassy, if hard-boiled, barista, Robin is dismissive of Dougal’s wide-eyed naïveté and puppyish enthusiasm for New York’s tourist traps. When she’s tasked with picking up her sister’s wedding cake, however, Dougal tags along, and the two form an unexpected bond that leads to a woozy, cross-borough night on the town and, later, a shared understanding of each other’s vulnerabilities.

The show’s many highlights include Pitts and Tutty’s cheeky Act I duet, “On The App,” which could be the first musical theater song about Tinder. And

while the story evokes “Before Sunrise” and classic rom-coms, its bittersweet conclusion allows the audience to interpret the outcome for themselves.

As Dougal, Tutty delivers the show’s best-known song, “New York,” with aplomb. For U.S. audiences, it’s a breakout moment for the 28-year-old, who is reprising his role from the London production. In England, he’s an established theater star, having won an Olivier Award for his portrayal of the title role in “Dear Evan Hansen” in 2020.

Tutty was fresh off “Dear Evan Hansen” when he was cast in the premiere 2023 iteration of “Two Strangers,” which was slated to run for four weeks in the U.K. before being extended and, later, moving to London’s West End, the British capital’s equivalent of Broadway. Sticking with the show on this side of the Atlantic, he said, has widened the scope of his performance.

“There were so many lines that I didn’t realize were meant to be funny. In the U.K., everyone was with Dougal, because he’s a Brit,” he explained. He also credits director Tim Jackson for helping him and Pitts maintain their focus with just one another to rely on: “The scale of this show on a sort of production level maybe feels small compared to other shows out there, but because our focus is so small and so local ... when it gets big, it feels huge.”



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“There are so many moments where we have this sort of out-of-body experience where we recognize, ‘Oh, nobody else is coming onstage right now,’” he added. “We’re talking about all these other people, and then we’ve got some great friends backstage who are picking us up and pushing us back out there with love and adoration, but there is nobody who is going to add to the dynamic of this scene.”

Pitts, whose résumé includes the musicals “King Kong” and “A Bronx Tale,” joined the “Two Strangers” cast during its pre-Broadway tryout in Boston. The 33-year-old found it easy to build chemistry with Tutty, while the character of Robin felt like a friend, she said.

The show has also helped Pitts navigate her off-stage duties as the mother to her 3-year-old daughter, Zora Makena. “My character wasn’t raised by her mom, and I think there are a lot of different things she experiences that might have been different if she was,” she said. “I’ll go home and have these moments with my own daughter and I’ll be reminded of just how important my role is in her life. Also ... Zora’s got aunts and uncles that do not play about her. She’s got this British ginger uncle. I’m so blessed to be playing this role at this moment in my life, and then having to go home and carry it home with me.”

“Two Strangers” opened in November to critical acclaim, and has since garnered praise from Jonathan Bailey and Lin-Manuel Miranda, among other celebs. As this year’s Tony Awards loom, its cast and creative team are hopeful it will be a rare success story at a time when the theater industry faces challenging headwinds. A recent New York Times article pointed to a surge in the number of Broadway productions that have yet to recoup their investments as New York’s tourism numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels.

“We talk about the industry a lot on the walks home,” Pitts acknowledged. “We’re constantly aware that this is a gift and we’re honored that we get to be the people to share it with the world. People are so desperate to just feel good right now, and to watch somebody in real time be brought to tears in real time ... I’m like, ‘I understand. You don’t even have to explain what you’re thinking.’”

Added Tutty: “Every sort of installment of this has felt so fresh and so new. It’s never felt like, ‘OK, I’ve got to make three years of this fun.’ It’s never been daunting or overwhelming ... this show just keeps impressing the right people, and now, here we are.”

