



## Interview with Idina Menzel

By Michael J. Roberts

Idina Menzel, winner of the 2004 Tony® Award for Best Leading Actress in a Musical for her portrayal of the misunderstood green girl in 'Wicked', and who was in the original ground breaking cast of 'Rent,' has released a fantastic new CD entitled 'I Stand' becoming a certified hit on the Warner Bros label.

Idina is currently touring the country with her band and will be performing at the House of Blues on August 6th performing music from her album as well as other favorites from her career.

ChicagoPride.com's Michael J. Roberts had an opportunity to sit down with Idina for a [ShowBizQ podcast interview](#). The following is an excerpt from the podcast where Idina talks about the creation of her new CD, her thoughts on the closing of 'Rent' on Broadway and her triumph as Elphaba in 'Wicked'.

**MJR:** Thank you so much for taking time out of your schedule to talk with me. How is the tour going?

**IM:** The tour is going great. This is a real dream for me. I have always wanted to be on my own tour bus, with my own band singing my own music, traveling around the country. I am having the greatest time of my life. The crowds have just been incredible and we are having a lot of fun.

**MJR:** Your new CD is doing incredibly well on the charts. How did a Broadway girl like you get involved with a big label like Warner Bros?

**IM:** Well, I have always wanted to do a recording like this, and with some of the success I had in 'Wicked', I had some people come down and listen to some of the songs and check me out. Warner Bros is really cool because they have people like Michael Buble' and Josh Grobin who don't really fit into a particular niche. I was very comfortable with Warner Bros and there was no pressure to be a "crossover" artist. They were very supportive of me, knowing where I come from and letting me break new ground.

**MJR:** In listening to the CD, each song seems to tell a specific story, but they each number is also very introspective as well, especially 'My Own Worst Enemy', which is my favorite cut on the album.

**IM:** Wow, well thank you. It is so funny you say that because it is my favorite as well and when I handed in the album, I got the least response from the record executives about that song but I stuck with it and kept it on the CD. People really do like that song, and I think it is because I was so honest with myself and it is sort of a theme song for me personally.

**MJR:** How do you mean?

**IM:** I have always had a hard time getting out of my own way and sabotaging my own happiness. I have such amazing people in my life who love and support me, but I still have a hard time believing in myself. You have to surround yourself with people that are going to be honest with you and tell you where you are at and love you unconditionally. I am lucky to have that with my husband [Taye Diggs] and my family and friends.

Sometimes you just need to get out of your own head and get out of your own way. It is ridiculous dealing with things sometimes because I have had all this success and I wasn't enjoying it. I still have days where I wrestle with that and I have days where I feel really good about things, like today, knowing I was going to talk to you (blush) and knowing that the tour bus is out waiting for me with the guys having a little jam session and making lunch. I just can't wait to get back with them.

**MJR:** 'I Stand' marks your third solo release. How have you progressed as recording artist?

**IM:** In the past I wanted to make funky, hip albums with dynamic production numbers and cool sounds. I used to let people overshadow my voice with overdone production sounds. Now I have learned that you can still do all that, but bottom line, it is about me as a singer and I have to make sure that my voice showcased in my music. My voice has gotten where I've been and where I am. I worked with Glen Ballard on this album, who has worked a lot with Alanis Morissette and Annie Lennox. Glen was able to find a way to set the music around my voice and gives it a really unique sound.

**MJR:** Let's talk some theatre! You recently just did a concert version of the musical 'Chess' in London with Josh Grobin. Why do you think that show works better as a concert than a fully staged musical?

**IM:** Well that is really hard for me to say because I spent some real quality time with Tim Rice in London. The problem really is the book of the show wasn't as strong as the music and lyrics.

**MJR:** Speaking of Tim Rice, you were offered the role of Eva Peron in the London revival of 'Evita' a few years ago. Why did you turn it down?

**IM:** Well, it is still a show I really want to do someday. It was just a matter of timing really because I ended up doing the London premier of 'Wicked' a few months later. It is all about the right collaboration.

'Funny Girl' and 'Evita' are both shows I want to be in but the right people have to be involved at the right time. Those are my two favorite shows and I want to be safe in those shows so I need to make sure I have the right director. I want to be able to bring something to the role of 'Evita' and not be chastised for it.

**MJR:** Since you were in the original cast as well as the film version, what are your feelings of 'Rent' finally coming to a close after over a decade on Broadway?

**IM:** It is very sad for me. It has always been a bittersweet emotion that goes along with Rent from day one. The one good thing to come out of 'Rent' closing on Broadway is that high schools are going to get to do the show now. I think it is going to be so amazing that high school students are going to come home to their parents saying they are auditioning for 'Rent'. Just think about the discussions that will open up in families. With story lines in 'Rent' about homosexuality, drug use and AIDS, I think the educational aspect of the show is going to reach a whole new generation.

**MJR:** When you opened 'Wicked' in London, did the British audiences react differently compared to the Americans?

**IM:** My whole West End/London experience was simply amazing for me. I went there trying to bring an experience and a confidence with me and just try to enjoy how that feels. Being the only American in the cast and then being the lead on top of it, knowing the power the show has from doing it on Broadway, I just wanted to give that experience to my cast mates and let them feel that excitement. The cast really embraced me and a couple of the people are my best friends to this day. The cast showed me London from the inside and I fell in love with the city and the

people. When I accepted the reprising role of Elphaba in London, I was warned that the British audiences are much more stayed then in the U.S., so we didn't expect to get the kind of response we ended up receiving.

People leapt to their feet, waited outside the stage door and crowds filled the theatre. It was such an international experience as well. People came from Israel, Spain and Japan to see it. It was incredible.

**MJR:** Thank you so much for taking time out of your touring schedule to spend a little time with me and I can't wait to see your concert on August 6th at the House of Blues here in Chicago.

**IM:** Thank you for the interview. This was really fun and I can't wait to see all my fans in Chicago!

[Click Here](#) to listen to the full ShowBizQ podcast with Idina Menzel.

For tickets to Idina Menzel's concert at the House Of Blues on August 6, 2008 , please visit <http://www.hob.com/venues/clubvenues/chicago>