WELCOME TO LIFE OF PI

We are delighted that this Olivier Award-winning adaptation of Yann Martel’s 2001 novel is making its North American debut at the A.R.T. This production brings Pi’s journey to thrilling new life on stage with breathtaking design and awe-inspiring puppetry.

Whether you’re new to this story or a longtime fan (Martel’s novel was also adapted into a film by Ang Lee in 2012), Pi’s tale asks us to reflect deeply on the nature of storytelling. In keeping with the A.R.T.’s core value of Inquiry, our Education & Engagement teams develop programs around each show in conversation with an essential question. For Life of Pi, we ask “How does storytelling help us cope and survive?” We invite you to consider this question as you watch the show, and to read on in this program for additional opportunities to engage with the production.

It has been an immense pleasure to welcome Life of Pi’s creative team to the A.R.T., and to assemble this new company in Boston, where they have been immersed in the creative process of bringing this show to new life at the Loeb Drama Center. I’m thrilled to write that Adaptor Lolita Chakrabarti and Director Max Webster are making their A.R.T. debuts along with Scenic & Costume Designer Tim Hatley, Puppetry & Movement Director/Puppet Designer Finn Caldwell, and Puppet Designer Nick Barnes. Don’t miss the latest edition of the A.R.T. Guide for reflections from this fabulous creative team.

It’s truly a joy to share this powerful tale. Thank you for joining us on this theatrical adventure, and happy holidays!

Diane Paulus
Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director
American Repertory Theater

presents

LIFE OF PI

Creative Team
Based on the novel by Yann Martel
Adapted by Lolita Chakrabarti
Directed by Max Webster
Scenic and Costume Design Tim Hatley
Puppetry and Movement Direction Finn Caldwell
Puppet Design Nick Barnes, Finn Caldwell
Video Design Andrzej Goulding
Lighting Design Tim Lutkin
Sound Design Carolyn Downing
Original Music Andrew T. Mackay
Dramaturg Jack Bradley
Casting by Stewart/Whitley
Associate Director Ashley Brooke Monroe
Associate Puppetry and Movement Director Scarlet Wilderink
Production Stage Manager Sharika Niles*

Produced by arrangement with Simon Friend, Daryl Roth, Hal Luftig, Mark Gordon Pictures, Playing Field, and Sheffield Theatres.

Additional Production Support is provided by Ann and Graham Gund, Janet and Irv Plotkin, and Sid Yog.

This production is supported, in part, by the Robert Brustein Endowment Fund for New Works.

Media Support of Life of Pi is provided by WBUR.


Runtime: Two hours, including one 15-minute intermission.

This performance includes strobe lighting and use of haze, and features depictions of perilous moments, including stylized violence.
Company
(in alphabetical order)
for full company bios, please see the digital program

Cook/Voice of Richard Parker: Brian Thomas Abraham*
Father/Ghost Father: Rajesh Bose*
Puppeteer: Nikki Calonge
Ensemble: Mahnaz Damania
Puppeteer: Fred Davis*
Pi: Adi Dixit
Father Martin/Russian Sailor/Admiral Jackson: Avery Glymph*
Ensemble: Usman Ali Ishaq*
Nurse/Amma/Orange Juice: Mahira Kakkar*
Lulu Chen: Kirstin Louie
Puppeteer: Rowan Magee*
Puppeteer: Jonathan David Martin*
Ensemble: Uma Paranjpe*
Puppeteer: Betsy Rosen*
Puppeteer: Celia Mei Rubin*
Mrs. Biology Kumar/Zaida Khan: Salma Shaw*
Ensemble: David Shih*
Mamaji/Pandit-ji: Sathya Sridharan*
Mr. Okamoto/Captain: Daisuke Tsuji*
Rani/Ghost Rani: Sonya Venugopal*
Puppeteer: Scarlet Wilderink*
Puppeteer: Andrew Wilson*

Puppet Captain: Fred Davis*
Fight Captain: Avery Glymph*
Lift Captain: Andrew Wilson*

Understudies
Pi: Uma Paranjpe*, Sonya Venugopal*
Nurse/Amma/Orange Juice: Salma Shaw*, Mahnaz Damania
Father/Ghost Father: Sathya Sridharan*, Usman Ali Ishaq*
Rani/Ghost Rani: Mahnaz Damania, Uma Paranjpe*
Mr. Okamoto/Captain: David Shih*
Mamaji/Pandit-ji: Usman Ali Ishaq*, Mahnaz Damania
Mrs. Biology Kumar/Zaida Khan: Mahnaz Damania, Uma Paranjpe*
Lulu Chen: David Shih*, Celia Mei Rubin*
Cook/Voice of Richard Parker: David Shih*, Fred Davis*
Father Martin/Admiral Jackson: Usman Ali Ishaq*, David Shih*

Understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement for the appearance is made at the time of the performance.

(*) Member of Actors’ Equity Association (AEA)
Additional Staff
Assistant Stage Manager: Luke Anderson*, Jonathan Castanien*
Assistant Puppet Designer: Caroline Bowman
Associate Scenic Designer: Ross Edwards
Associate Costume Designer (UK): Sabrina Cuniberto
Associate Costume Designer (US): Robin McGee
Wig Designer: Rachel Padula-Shufelt
Costume Research: Mariyah Sharjil
Associate Lighting Designer: Paul Toben
Assistant Lighting Designer: Chris Gilmore
Video Programmer: Dan Trenchard
Video Engineer: Mike Samuel
Assistant A.R.T. Projections Supervisor: Danny Carr
Associate Sound Designer: Rob Bettle & Sam Clarkson for Sound Quiet Time
Fight Direction: Ted Hewlett
Dialect Coach: Erika Bailey
Russian Coach: Julia Smeliansky
Spanish Coach: Joaquín Galván Díaz
Japanese Coach: Sky Araki-Russell
Hinduism Consultant: Swami Tyagananda
Sari Consultant: Mahnaz Damania
Anti-Racism Consultant: Raksha Muthukumar
Production Assistants: Samantha Knox, Makenzie Wright
Production Assistant (Sub): Molly Bercut, Ashley Pitchford
COVID Safety Manager: Meg Hamblen

Access Staff
Director of Artistic Sign Language: Elbert Joseph
ASL Interpreters: Julia Barnes, Whitney Bright
Audio Description Consultant: Amber Pearcy
Audio Describers: Maria Hendricks, Teddy Hendricks

Audio description for this production is adapted from narrations originally written by Veronika Hyks and Emily Pollet for VocalEyes.co.uk

Relaxed Performance Consultants: Spectrum Theatre Ensemble
Occupational Therapy Consultant: Mary Beth Kadlec
Open Captioning provided by c2 Captioning

Casting
STEWART/WHITLEY
Duncan Stewart, CSA & Benton Whitley, CSA
Joey Montenarello, CSA; Micah Johnson-Levy
Darienne Orlansky; Patrick Maravilla
Special Thanks
Foresight Theatrical, Aurora Productions
Brian Lambert
Additional Lighting Equipment provided by Christie Lites.
Additional Sound Equipment provided by Sound Associates, Inc and Jetwave Wireless.
Additional Projections Equipment provided by Sound Associates, Inc.
Costume Alterations provided by Costume Works Inc.
Life of Pi was rehearsed at the Jackie Liebergott Black Box in the Emerson Paramount Center and at Pao Arts Center.
A note from novelist Yann Martel

_Originally published by_ The Sunday Times

It’s a strange business, adapting a novel. I wrote my novel *Life of Pi* while living with roommates, sneaking into McGill University’s Redpath Library to do research pretending I was a student because I couldn’t afford the external reader fees and borrowing books on a friend’s friend’s library card (she was a bona fide student), after having done initial research in India while backpacking. I’d published two books previously, a collection of short stories and a novel, which had garnered good reviews and very modest sales (welcome to the world of literary fiction), so my publisher was not huffing with impatience to see my next effort.

That is to say, I wrote *Life of Pi* in a state of solitude and with not much money. But writing a book costs next to nothing. A computer was my only overhead. After that, it was just words, and words are free. My dollar account was low, but my word account—well, in that department I felt like a billionaire. Such a joy it was, inhabiting a lifeboat, trying to keep myself and my unwieldy companion—a four-hundred-and-fifty-pound Royal Bengal tiger—alive, one word at a time. I spent four and a half years inhabiting the novel. When I finally let it go, I had no idea what fate would await it. Hopefully good reviews and very modest sales.

But the book did far better than I expected. Along came the adaptors. First, Hollywood. Making a movie costs fantastic sums of money and involves hundreds and hundreds of people. That’s strange enough for the hermit-writer. Stranger still is the adaptation process itself. Words, after all, have just that right variable mix of the nebulous and the precise. For example, if I write, “Pi sat at a table”, my intent is precise and you get the picture—but the details are hazy. What does Pi look like? What kind of table? No worries. So long as Pi is sitting at a table, I don’t care what you the reader make him look like or if you choose to make it a table inlaid with mother-of-pearl. When you read, you become the stage designer of the writer’s directions, and the result is a play in your mind, hence the power of words, because you are involved in making them meaningful.

With movies, on the other hand, if Pi sits at a table, you need an incarnated Pi—an actor—and a real table. It’s precise. And whereas words are generally poor at visual description—of a face, for example—words are very strong at making thoughts and ideas crystal clear. But thoughts don’t have a visual component. If Pi is sitting at a table thinking, in the book his thoughts and the table are all of a same piece, verbal, while in a movie we may see Pi and the table, but his thoughts are entirely lost to us except through the device of the voice-over, which can be used only so much. And so the visual adaptation goes, heavy on the visuals, light on the verbal. Some things are gained—it’s amazing seeing the tiger in the lifeboat—and some are lost: the rumination behind why that tiger is in a lifeboat and what it might mean.

The movie was a big travelling circus. I enjoyed it while it was in town. It’s a spectacular visual complement to those who have read the book, while bringing the story in some form to those who have not read it.

When Hollywood was done, the theatrical adaptors came knocking. I passionately believe in the creative risk that artists take, so I was happy to let Simon Friend (the producer) and Max Webster (the director) have a go at it.
In the movie world, the screenwriter is low in the pecking order. After all, if words are cheap and visuals are not, the word-producer will have less say than the image-producer. Not so in the theatre world. I was pleased to discover how much power Lolita Chakrabarti (the scriptwriter) had. Her script ruled the roost. She and I had a good lunch-time conversation early on in the process in which I explained to her what I thought the novel was about. She listened, and then ran with it while I turned to writing my next novel.

Later, I was invited to assist at a week-long workshop in London. With a book, the writer tells the words what to do—when, how—and they do it, right away. With a movie, the director tells everyone what to do—when, how—and they do it, right away. Then there’s theatre. Theatre is Max and a bunch of fine actors sitting around and Max saying, “Why don’t we try this?” and the chairs are moved, the table is spun round, an actor leaps atop, and suddenly we’re at sea just after a shipwreck, with Lolita taking notes. It’s all about collaboration, which, to this hermit-writer, is way too touchy-feely. I’m guessing Max was happy to see me for that week, then even happier to see me go.

I had my place in the process, and it was to stand aside and let the theatre people do their work. I turned to writing my next novel, leaving behind the Pacific Ocean for the Trojan War.

A good thing, because these theatre people have done a corker of a job. I saw the show in Sheffield, pre-Covid, astonished by the ingenuity of the puppetry and set design, transported by the skill of the adaptation and the play of the actors. I laughed when my nephew, age three at the time, said ‘Bananas’ during a moment of silence as the actors were making on-stage bananas float in a sink. I stood with the entire audience in our ovation. What a show it is, with all the simple yet powerful magic of theatre. The words are there—resonant, meaningful, binding—and the visuals are there, their poetry bewitching because it is made right before your eyes. I never imagined that play inside my head, written on those blank pages so many years ago, would make land so beautifully onto a real stage.

And so the journey of that lifeboat across the Pacific continues.

*Yann Martel is a Canadian writer. He is the author of a collection of short stories and four novels, most notably Life of Pi, for which he won the 2002 Man Booker Prize.*

*Originally published by The Sunday Times on November 14, 2021.*

Photo: *Life of Pi* in London’s West End. Johan Persson.

*For more articles about Life of Pi, see the A.R.T.’s digital Guide.*