

PARADISE

OR THE IMPERMANENCE OF ICE CREAM

EDUCATION PACK



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About the Play

Characters

(all played by one actor)

Kutisar – a salesman at Harvey Norman

Young Kutisar – a chai cart owner

Mehra – a Kulfi shop owner

Farooq – a Parsi lawyer

Dr Rao – a Parsi doctor

The Moneylender – a loan shark

Vibhu Prakash – a scientist specialising in vultures

The Vulture – a vulture (played by a Puppeteer)

Setting

The play is set in two time periods - the present and thirty years earlier.

The story in the present takes place in Limbo or the Bardo. It is a place where the dead go where their fate in the afterlife is decided.

The story in the past takes place in Mumbai, India, in the 1990s, in a number of locations:

- Outside Club Sutra
- Inside Club Sutra
- The lookout on Malabar Hill
- The Towers of Silence
- Paradise Kulfi shop
- Dr Rao's apartment
- A Cattle Dump
- Outside the Fire Temple
- On the roof terrace of the Paradise Kulfi Shop
- Across the road from the Paradise Kulfi Shop

Mumbai

Mumbai, often referred to as the “City of Dreams,” is a bustling metropolis on the western coast of India. It's a place where history, culture, and modernity come together. With its towering skyscrapers and bustling streets, it's the financial capital of India, where businesses thrive and opportunities abound.

Mumbai is also the heart of India's entertainment industry, where Bollywood movies and stars shine brightly. But beyond the glamour, it's a city that embraces diversity, celebrating festivals from Diwali to Eid with great fervour.



Its mouth-watering street food, historical landmarks like the Gateway of India, and a vibrant arts and culture scene make it a city of endless exploration. However, Mumbai also confronts stark contrasts, as its home to Asia's largest slums alongside luxurious neighbourhoods. It's a city that never sleeps, where the fast-paced urban life meets the traditions of India in a unique and exciting way.



Bardo / Limbo

Bardo is a concept from Tibetan Buddhism that refers to a transitional state between death and rebirth. It's believed that when a person dies, their consciousness goes through different stages or bardos before being reborn. These stages are opportunities for spiritual growth and can influence the nature of the next life. The idea of bardo teaches us that life is a series of transitions, and how we navigate these moments can shape our future experiences. This concept encourages mindfulness and understanding of impermanence, helping individuals to live more meaningfully.



In Catholic theology, Limbo is the afterlife condition of those who die in original sin without being assigned to the Hell of the Damned. The concept of Limbo comes from the idea that, good people were not able to achieve heaven just because they were born before the birth of Jesus Christ.

Synopsis

A body falls from the sky and lands on a small mound with a thump. A vulture swoops in, lands on the body and pecks at it. The body stirs and the vulture takes off unseen. Kutisar, a man in his 50s, wakes to discover himself dressed in the clothes of his youth and confined to a strange island surrounded by a hostile darkness.



Everytime he tries to step off the island he is assaulted by terrifying sounds and visions. He tries to assure himself that it's all a dream and calls out to the abyss. The echo that starts as his own voice turns into that of a Bouncer outside a Mumbai nightclub.

Kutisar is flipped back 30 years. He's young again! It's Young Kutisar's 23rd birthday, he's dressed in his best disco clothes and desperate to get into the club but the Bouncer is not having it. Just when all seems lost, Meera, a young Parsi woman, comes to Young Kutisar's aide and sneaks him into the club. They have a whirlwind night of dancing, being chased by the Bouncer and making their escape on Meera's motorbike.

Breathless and flushed with excitement Kutisar is led by Meera to her favourite spot - Malabar Hill, with a spectacular view of Mumbai at night. Kutisar tries to impress Meera. He has his own business: a mobile chai cart. But any thought of romance is extinguished when Kuitsar discovers Meera's real goal – to break into the forbidden Towers of Silence, where the Parsis lay their dead.

It's dark. They can't see anything until the moon shines on the lined up naked corpses. Kutisar is horrified to learn the Parsi death rituals involve feeding their dead to vultures. Meera's grandfather died three days ago and she's here because she's noticed that there are no vultures in the sky above the Towers. Meera spies her grandfather's body but something's wrong. Instead of bones stripped clean by vultures the flesh is rotting and being devoured by rats. Meera is distraught. How will her Baba's (Grandfather) soul get to paradise without the birds? Where have the vultures gone?

Kutisar is old again and back on his mysterious island with the sudden realisation that he's not dreaming and the terrifying discovery that he's not alone. A vulture stalks him ominously. Kutisar pleads for mercy. He tries desperately to make sense of his situation. Is he mad or is he unconscious? And then it hits him – he's dead. The vulture wants to eat him. He tries to fight the vulture and the awful truth only to be flipped back to the past.

Meera gives Young Kutisar a tour of her grandfather's Kulfi ice cream shop which is full of memories of her Baba. Young Kutisar is in awe of his new

friend's inheritance, but Meera confides her frustrated dreams. She always wanted to go to University and study science not run an ice cream shop. Young Kutisar falls asleep and dreams of the vulture dancing to Baba's favorite song.

Young Kutisar wakes to find a stranger standing over him. It's Meera's cousin, Farooq. He is a devout member of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat (Council) and horrified at the idea of his cousin mixing with a pajaat (outsider). Meera dismisses Farooq's concerns and sends Kutisar out to help serve in the busy shop. Alone with Farooq, she confides about the vultures but, by his reaction, is stunned to discover he already knows. Meera demands that Farooq tell the community that their loved ones are being left to rot. Farooq reveals to Meera that her grandfather knew – and he still wanted to go to the Tower. He impresses on her the importance of honouring Baba and of the danger of careless words. Farooq leaves Meera confused and disturbed. Her mood isn't helped by Kutisar who relays an invitation to tea from an eccentric family friend, Dr Rao. Meera insists that Kutisar accompany her.

An enthusiastic Dr Rao welcomes Meera and Kutisar to her Mumbai apartment. As a widow without children, Dr Rao, is delighted that Meera has a "boyfriend" and gushes with approval. Suddenly disturbing bangs and screeches come from a nearby room. Dr Rao, makes feeble excuses until Meera finally demands to know what the old woman is hiding. Dr Rao finally unlocks a door. A large vulture is lurching about knocking things to the floor. The doctor's solution to the vulture problem is to breed them but she's only got one bird and it's gotten out of hand. Dr Rao asks Meera if the bird can stay in the aviary on her grandfather's rooftop terrace. Meera eventually agrees when swayed by the memory of her grandfather's love of the birds. Kutisar, all bravado, offers to re-cage the bird but, when faced with the terrifying creature, locks himself in the cage instead.

Back to the present and old Kutisar realises that he's suspended between life and death, an in-between place, the bardo. He pleads for the door not to shut on his life. He cajoles, he bargains and begs for another chance but is flung back to the past.



Young Kutisar pleads with a resistant Meera to allow him to stay in the kulfi shop. Meera, burdened with looking after the vulture and running the place on her own, finally relents. Kutisar can sleep on the roof terrace and keep the bird company. Meera confesses to her friend that she's struggling with the kulfi shop. Business is bad. She's weighed down by expectations. Young Kutisar is full of

suggestions. Then it hits Meera -the answer is standing right there. Young Kutisar can help with the shop. He's reluctant at first, he's behind on payments on his chai stand but when Meera offers him a partnership in the business he's helpless to resist. Meera's thoughts go back to the vulture. She's researched much about the bird and is enthralled by an article by Dr Vibhu Prakash – a vulture expert here in Bombay.

Back in the bardo, Kutisar rails at the injustice of his own life to the vulture and likens it to living in a cage. But his lament is met with no sympathy, and he is flung back to the kulfi shop where interest on his chai cart has been compounding and his quietly terrifying money lender has come to collect.

The money lender drags Young Kutisar to the cattle dump. He points to the mountain of rotting flesh and makes it clear to the terrified chai wallah the consequences of not paying his debts. As wild dogs fight amongst the cow carcasses the money lender calmly philosophises about the value of money in the face of death. He laughs as a vulture lands nearby as if to underline his point. With a knife to Young Kutisar's throat the money lender demands his money by the end of the week and leaves. Young Kutisar's eyes land on the vulture and he see's his salvation. Dr Rao will pay him good money for this bird. His debt will be paid, his life saved. But jubilation turns to despair as the vulture keels over dead.

In the bardo, Kutisar appeals to a higher power to save him but flashes of light propel him to the past. Young Kutisar hovers beside Vibhu Prakash as the scientist dissects the dead vulture. Meera eagerly assists. Young Kutisar is hoping for money but the gory post-mortem is too much and he faints.

Vibhu discovers the cause of the vulture's death. Kidney failure. But he has no idea of the cause and he has no resources to run tests. He'll present the findings at an international conference in Pakistan. Meera impresses Vibhu with her scientific reasoning and he encourages her to present a paper at the conference. He's surprised to find that she's not a University student but urges her find the money and come to Pakistan anyway. Meera tells Young Kutisar to wait for her outside the Parsi Fire Temple. She's going in to enlist the Parsi elite to put their resources behind Vibhu. She's sure that once they hear the truth they'll want to help.

Young Kutisar is frantic as Meera disappears into the temple. He needs help too but, instead, the money lender appears. Kutisar's time is nearly up and he needs to get his affairs in order. Meera returns from the Fire Temple distraught. She revealed the truth about the vultures to her community and their



response was deafening silence - they didn't want to know. Dr Rao appears and tries to console Meera. She has invested in building a giant aviary over the Towers of Silence and is sure it will galvanise the community. Meera hints that she's keen to go to Pakistan but Dr Rao dismisses the notion and insists Meera belongs here, carrying on her grandfather's legacy. The doctor guides a numb Meera back to the shop. Young Kutisar rails at his misfortune which is compounded when an enraged Farooq informs him Meera's violation of the Towers of Silence has made her unclean. Until she has undergone purification, no Parsi will enter the kulfi shop.

Young Kutisar, desperate for money, convinces Farooq that he has more information about Meera that he's willing to sell. Young Kutisar returns to the kulfi shop to find Meera cleaning after a morning rush of customers. It seems that some of Kutisar's ideas are bearing fruit. Young Kutisar is elated and extolls the virtues of the business. Meera bursts into tears. In that moment, Young Kutisar sees how trapped Meera feels. Without thinking he makes up a lie about selling his chai cart and gives her the money he got from Farooq – it's her ticket to Pakistan. Meera offers excuses not to go. She's not bright enough. She didn't get scholarships. She didn't go to University but her friend won't hear it. Young Kutisar convinces her to follow her dream.

In the bardo, Kutisar pleads his case to go to heaven but the balance of his crimes tip him reeling back to the past.

Sleep deprived and desperate, Young Kutisar prepares to kill the vulture but he's interrupted by Dr Rao. As he tries to hustle her away, Farooq appears. The doctor and Farooq argue until Young Kutisar, at his wits end, pulls a knife on them and makes clear his intentions to kill the bird and sell its organs to a witch doctor. At that moment, Meera appears. Young Kutisar tries to explain but Dr Rao and Farooq shout him down. Meera silences everyone. She knows what's killing the vultures. The scientists in Pakistan figured it out. Diclofenac. A drug used on people and cattle. The tiniest trace causes irreversible kidney failure in the vultures. Dr Rao and Farooq are sceptical. Meera's insistence on backing the science pushes Farooq to question her refusal of all the science scholarships that were offered her. Meera is stunned. What scholarships? The



penny drops. Baba had refused the scholarships without telling her. He lied to her to keep her from leaving him. Dr Rao tries to defend him but Meera is enraged. Farooq pitches in his condemnation of Dr Rao and the argument flares. Meera calmly opens the door to the aviary and releases the vulture. It soars into the air. It's wondrous and stops them all in their tracks as it circles higher and higher until it vanishes. Amidst

protests, Meera dismisses everyone. The vulture is better off alone and so is she.

Kutisar finds himself in the bardo. The vulture's not there. He calls to the emptiness. He'll go wherever it wants. He just doesn't want to be alone. His call unanswered, he steps off the island and finds himself in a black abyss. The sound of flames propels him to the past.



The kulfi shop is on fire. Young Kutisar realises the money lender has come to collect. Meera!

Young Kutisar pushes through the door as the fire rages. He desperately searches for Meera. She's not there. Relief turns to panic as debris crashes to the floor blocking Young Kutisar's way out. He tries the back door. It won't budge. His chai cart is blocking the exit! He hammers at the door. There's a pounding on it from the outside. Meera is calling to him. She moves the chai cart and the door flies open.

Together they run from the burning building. Young Kutisar begs for forgiveness. It's his fault. He's so sorry. Meera's not. That's why she set fire to it. Young Kutisar is stunned and seeks an explanation but Meera tells him to shut up. She just wants to watch it burn.

In the morning Young Kutisar points to a vulture circling high overhead. Meera wonders if it's their vulture and hopes it's taking Baba to paradise. There's a fragility between the two friends as they look to the future. Meera talks about the people in Pakistan and starting a rescue programme in the jungle. She invites Kuitsar to come with her. Young Kutisar talks about his burnt chai cart and needing the city. He says he'll join her later. She confronts him and Kutisar admits he won't follow her. This is goodbye. He has to figure out where to go from here.

In the bardo, Kutisar ponders his life as the vulture approaches. He wonders if Meera sent it. Kutisar lies back. The vulture flaps up and lands on his chest. The vulture hisses and Kutisar exhales his last breath. The vulture ascends to the heavens.



A phone rings. Kutisar's answer machine kicks in. Brian, his boss from Harvey Norman leaves a message. He's gently concerned. Is Kutisar coming in to work today? He hopes he's not sick. He hopes he's on his way.

Theatrical Treatment

The use of voice in performance and switching between characters.

Places to find inspiration for original theatre writing.

Shows dealing with topics such as conservation, extinction, love and death in theatre.

The writers' purpose in writing the play.

Themes

The idea of mortality and how that affects our decision making.

How have humans (both knowingly and unknowingly) contributed to extinction and loss of wildlife?

How have our attitudes towards conservation changed over time?

The role friendships play in our development as people.

The role that regret plays when we review our past decisions.

What the ice cream shop represents for different characters

For Mehra it represents the feeling of being trapped and having to continue her grandfather's legacy

For Kutisar it represents an opportunity to become successful and rich

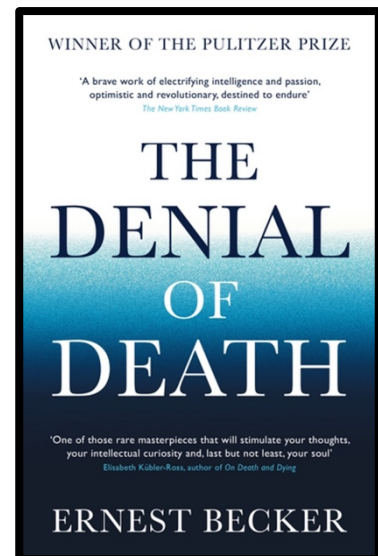


The Denial of Death

Ernest Becker (1973)

The Denial of Death is a 1973 book by cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker. The book was awarded a Pulitzer Prize posthumously.

The Denial of Death by Ernest Becker is a thought-provoking book that explains why humans often avoid thinking about their own mortality. Becker argues that our awareness of death creates anxiety, so we develop ways to deny or ignore it. He suggests that much of human behaviour like pursuing success, seeking approval, or following cultural norms, is driven by subconscious fear of death. Becker believes that understanding our fear of death can help us better understand human motivation and the choices we make in life. In essence the book invites us to reflect on how our fear of death shapes our lives and the societies we create.



Ernest Becker drew on works from philosophers such as Sigmund Freud to discuss the psychological and philosophical implications of how people and culture have reacted to the concept of death. It is suggested that culture serves as a way for individuals to transcend their finite existence and gain a sense of significance and immortality. People adopt cultural worldviews, religions and societal roles as a means to deny or mitigate the anxiety that comes with the awareness of death. The book encourages the examination of how culture shapes our beliefs, behaviours and how it provides a framework for us to find meaning and purpose in a world where our mortality is an undeniable reality. In essence, it prompts us to question the role of culture in addressing our deep-seated fear of death and its impact on our lives.

Becker suggests that individuals often construct what he calls a 'hero system' to cope with the fear of mortality. This hero system consists of societal values, ideals and roles that provide individuals with a sense of purpose and the opportunity to transcend their own mortality. These hero systems can vary widely across cultures and individuals but typically involve the pursuit of achievements, recognition, and a desire to leave a lasting legacy. These roles and aspirations become a way for people to feel like they are participating in something greater than themselves and in doing so, mitigate their existential anxieties. The Denial of Death encourages us to reflect on how we construct our own hero systems and how these systems influence our actions, aspirations, and our sense of meaning in life.

"The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else: it is a mainspring of human activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man."

Vultures

The Indian vulture or long-billed vulture (*Gyps indicus*) is a bird of prey native to the Indian subcontinent. It is a bird of prey that scavengers, feeding mostly from carcasses of dead animals. It is a medium sized vulture with small semi-bald head with little feathers, long bill and wide dark coloured wings. It breeds mainly on small cliffs and hilly crags in central and peninsular India.

By removing all carrion, vultures had helped decrease pollution, spread of diseases, and suppressed undesirable mammalian scavengers. The sudden collapse of the natural animal disposal system in India has had multiple consequences negatively impacting public health. Without vultures, a large number of animal carcasses were left to rot posing a serious risk to human health by providing a potential breeding ground for infectious germs and proliferation of pests such as rats.



Vulture Crisis

Nine species of vulture can be found living in India, but most are now in danger of extinction after a rapid and major population collapse in recent decades. With a loss of over 99% of all population of vultures, the Indian vulture crisis represents the sharpest decline of any animal in the given period.

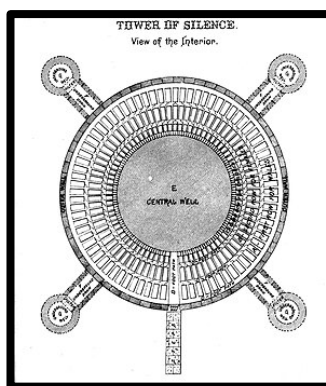
In the 1990's, a decrease in the number of vultures was noted by Vibhu Prakash of the Bombay Natural History Society, who had monitored vulture populations at Keoladeo National Park. Parris in Mumbai started to notice in the early 1990's that there were fewer birds at the Tower of Silence in Mumbai.



They have been listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List since 2002, as the population has severely declined over the past few decades. Indian vultures die of kidney failure caused by diclofenac poisoning. Diclofenac was a common anti-inflammatory drug used in cattle which was passed on to the vultures when they scavenge the dead carcasses. This drug was banned in 2006 and the vulture numbers have started to steadily bounce back.

Towers of Silence

The Tower of Silence in Mumbai is a significant site for the Zoroastrian community, used for their traditional funerary practice known as 'dakhma'. It is a circular, raised structure built for excarnation (the exposure of human corpses to the elements for decomposition), in order to avoid contamination of the soil and other natural elements by the decomposing dead bodies. Carrion birds, usually vultures and other scavengers, consume the flesh. Skeletal remains are gathered into a central pit where further weathering and continued breakdown occurs.

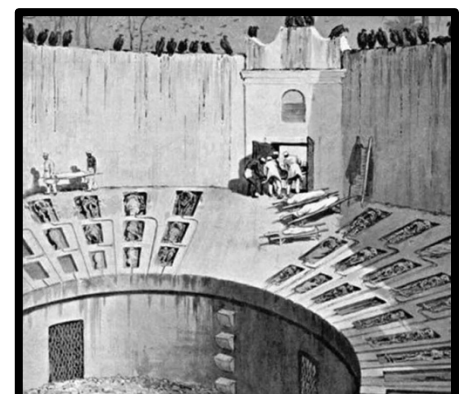


This practice is rooted in Zoroastrian belief in the purity of the earth, fire, and water, and the idea that a dead body would contaminate these elements if buried or cremated. By exposing the bodies to natural elements and birds, they believe they are not polluting the earth or other sacred elements. In Parsi Zoroastrian tradition, exposure of the dead is also considered to be an individual's final act of charity, providing the birds with what would otherwise be destroyed.

This site is typically off-limits to non-Zoroastrians, maintaining a sense of reverence and privacy for the community. It's an integral part of the Zoroastrian religion, reflecting their ancient customs and environmental consciousness.

Modern day towers, are fairly uniform in their construction, have an almost flat roof, with the perimeter being slightly higher than the centre. The roof is divided into three concentric rings: the bodies of men are arranged around the outer ring, women in the second ring, and children in the innermost ring. Once the bones have been bleached by the sun and wind, which can take as long as a year, they are collected in an ossuary pit at the centre of the tower, where – assisted by lime – they gradually disintegrate, and the remaining material, along with rainwater run-off, seeps through multiple coal and sand filters before being eventually washed out to sea.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the decline in the vulture population (97% as of 2008) has posed challenges for this tradition, leading to concerns and discussions within the community about how to adapt their practices while maintaining their religious principles.



Parsis

Parsis or Parsees are an ethnoreligious group of the Indian subcontinent adhering to Zoroastrianism. They are descended from Persians who migrated to Medieval India during and after the Arab conquest of the Persian Empire (part of the early Muslim conquests) in order to preserve their Zoroastrian identity. The Parsis are a small but influential community known for their rich traditions and contributions to society.



Zoroastrian religion, is one of the world's oldest monotheistic faiths, which emphasises the worship of one god and the principles of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Parsis are renowned for their culinary delights, including the iconic dish “Dhansak”, as well as their distinct attire, with men often wearing traditional white robes called “daglis” and women adorning colourful sarees.

Kulfi

Kulfi is a frozen dairy dessert of the Indian subcontinent. It is often described as “traditional Indian ice cream”. Kulfi originated in the 16th century Delhi during the Mughal era.

Kulfi is denser and creamier than regular ice cream. It comes in various flavours, with traditional ones including cream, rose, mango, cardamom, saffron and pistachio. Unlike ice cream, Kulfi is not whipped, which results in a solid, dense dessert similar to frozen custard.

The word *kulfi* comes from the Persian *qulfi* (قلفی) meaning "covered cup". The dessert originated in Delhi during the Mughal Empire in the 16th century. The mixture of dense evaporated milk was already popular in the sweet dishes in the Indian subcontinent. During the Mughal period, this mixture was flavoured with pistachios and saffron, packed into metal cones and immersed in slurry ice, resulting in the invention of kulfi. *Ain-i-Akbari*, a detailed record of the Mughal emperor Akbar's administration, mentions use of saltpeter for refrigeration as well as transportation of Himalayan ice to warmer areas.



KULFI RECIPE

INGREDIENTS



- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon saffron threads
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 teaspoon cardamom powder
- 1/4 cup + 2 tablespoons raw pistachios, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS

DAY 1



1. Into a small saucepan, add 1 cup heavy cream and saffron.
2. Heat over low-medium heat, until it comes to a gentle boil.
3. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature.
4. Transfer cream into a covered container and refrigerate until completely cold (at least 5 hours or up to a day).

DAY 2



5. Into a large bowl, combine saffron soaked heavy cream and remaining 1 cup heavy cream.
6. Beat with handheld electric beater (on high speed) until thick and softly whipped (when soft peaks begin to form), about 1 1/2 minutes.
7. Into the whipped saffron cream, add sweetened condensed milk, cardamom powder and 3 tablespoons chopped pistachios.
8. Whip again for about 30 seconds, until mixed completely.

TO MAKE EASY KULFI MOULDS

- Transfer mixture into popsicle moulds or paper cups.
- Sprinkle remaining chopped pistachios on top, insert popsicle sticks and place in freezer overnight. (If using paper cups – when ready to eat, snip off a bit of the cup and peel off pop)



TO MAKE EASY KULFI ICE CREAM

- Transfer mixture into a freezer safe container, sprinkle remaining chopped pistachios on top.
- Cover and freeze overnight.
- To serve, scoop kulfi into serving bowls.



Q&A with the Creative Team

Director & Co-writer

Justin Lewis

Justin is a founding partner of Indian Ink. He has co-written and directed all of Indian Ink's plays. He is a graduate of the John Bolton Theatre School and the University of Auckland. Justin was one of the founders of Auckland's Q Theatre and received a Kaupapa Oranga Award for his services to theatre.



What are your main intentions and ideas for *Paradise*?

One of the key dramatic ideas for *Paradise* was that our hero is trapped in limbo with nothing but a vulture. The loneliness and terror of this is captured theatrically by restricting the performer to a tiny playing space that they can't leave and keeping the fourth wall up so there is no direct address to the audience. The audience become intimate observers of the hero's fate – drawn into the drama.

What do you want the audience to think, feel and understand?

More than anything I want the audience to love and appreciate vultures. Before embarking on this show I had a very western view of them as loathsome creatures to be feared. But what I discovered was how incredible they are and what a great service they do humanity by cleaning up the environment. They are beautiful despite their initial appearances. It's a terrible tragedy how humans have all but wiped them out but there is hope, we can learn and change. This piece is a mystery – a mystery of what happened to the vultures but also a mystery about how to let and go and move on, about how living with the reality of our mortality can set us free. And like life it is also funny, absurd and magical.

What excites you about this production?

Jacob Rajan does the thing he does better than anyone else which to embody a number of different characters fully and effortlessly. And I love working with puppetry – the vulture puppet Jon Coddington has made and operates is glorious. The set is simple but the hand-painted backdrops which are projected onto screens are works of art in themselves. I find them imaginative and evocative and give a human feel to the high-tech projection. The sound design is very sophisticated and becomes like another performer. People will talk of *Paradise* as a solo show but it's really not – the puppeteer, sound operator, lighting and video operator are as intrinsic to the performance as Jacob.

What are the challenges of having an actor play multiple characters?

You need an actor who has the facility to really change their voices and body and create a physical change for the different characters. This requires time in the rehearsal process to allow them to explore, make mistakes and build up the shape of the various characters. Also, when constructing the play, time needs to be allowed for the actor to make costume changes.

What inspired you to tell this story?

A number of different ingredients combined to inspire this work. We read the Denial of Death and we spent time in Mumbai where we learned of the Parsi sky burials (where bodies are laid out for vultures to pick clean) and the mystery of the vanishing vultures. We also visited a kulfi ice-cream shop that served as a model for the one in this play. We also came across the ancient tale of Gilgamesh – perhaps the first story of a journey to the underworld and a buddy love story. We wanted to make a story that was about a friendship between a man and a woman. Finally, we wanted to make another story with the character Kutisar who first appeared in Guru of Chai. That's a lot of different ingredients but they all coalesce around the vultures – what they represent and the mystery of what happened to them.

How did you discover The Denial of Death? And why did you choose that story?

I was referred to Denial of Death by my Aikido teacher (Aikido is a Japanese martial art that I have been training in for almost 30 years). My wife is a funeral director, so death is part of my day to day reality. I love the idea that accepting my own mortality can be free me to live a richer, happier life.

When writing, what is the relationship like between you and Jake?

We talk a lot. We will spend hours and hours, and days and days talking. It's one of the great things, because writing is often a lonely process, so having someone to collaborate with is good. We're both theatre-makers because we like to collaborate. And we each have our own strengths, Jake's really good on dialogue and character, and my strength is on the architecture, on the more structural sort of stuff. So, we kind of have complementary skills. What also works is that we know how to talk to one another about the work and we can disagree about what the right thing is. And in those discussions about the work we talk about what is right for the story and what's right for the character, rather than arguments about who's right or wrong.



Actor & Co-writer

Jacob Rajan

Jacob is a founding partner of Indian Ink and co-wrote all of Indian Ink's plays as well as performing in many of them. He is a graduate of Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama school, Otago University (B.Sc Microbiology) and Wellington Teacher's College. Jacob is an Arts Foundation Laureate and a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for services to theatre.



What inspired you to tell this story?

We were initially inspired by a trip to Mumbai where we stumbled on the amazing death ritual of the Parsi community there. The role of vultures in the Parsi's death practice and the subsequent discovery of the mystery of India's vanishing vultures got us hooked.

As a Playwright what are your main intentions for *Paradise*?

It's a love letter to Mumbai, it's a love letter to vultures and it's a meditation on what we do with the time we have left.

How did you discover *The Denial of Death*? And why did you choose that story?

I guess when you follow vultures they lead you to death. *Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker is more a textbook than a story. We found Becker's ideas to be incredibly revealing. The way human behaviour is shaped by our uneasy relationship with death. It's a great way to think about characters' motivations and flaws.

How is *the Paradise* different from your other characters?

Paradise is actually a sequel of sorts. Kutisar is the main character from an earlier play of ours, *Guru of Chai*. We loved him so much we brought him into this story at very different time in his life. The difference in this play is that our storyteller is no longer in control of the story he is telling.



How did you create this role?

The original Kutisar in *Guru of Chai* was based on a real life character, Nyoman Sukerta, a masked dancer from Bali. A lovely flawed human being who literally danced into our lives. Having created our fictional hero, Kutisar, we dreamed into what he might be up to 20 years on and the result was *Paradise*.

What inspires you for your performance as Kutisar?

Kutisar is based on a real life person. Neoman Surkurta who introduced us to Balinese mask dance in Bali. He was a mask dancer himself, immersed in this devotional and sacred form yet very much a beautifully flawed human being. Loved to drink, gamble and go fishing at any opportunity. Sadly he died a few years after we met him but Kutisar is very much inspired by our time with Neoman.

How do you create a relationship on stage between multiple characters?

There's an element of procession that happens when you land the character. In a way, the character inhabits you and you look at the world through their eyes. If you can balance that with the craft of knowing where you are on stage then the relationship between characters happens just as it would if there were other performers there with you. You're reacting to what they do and say.

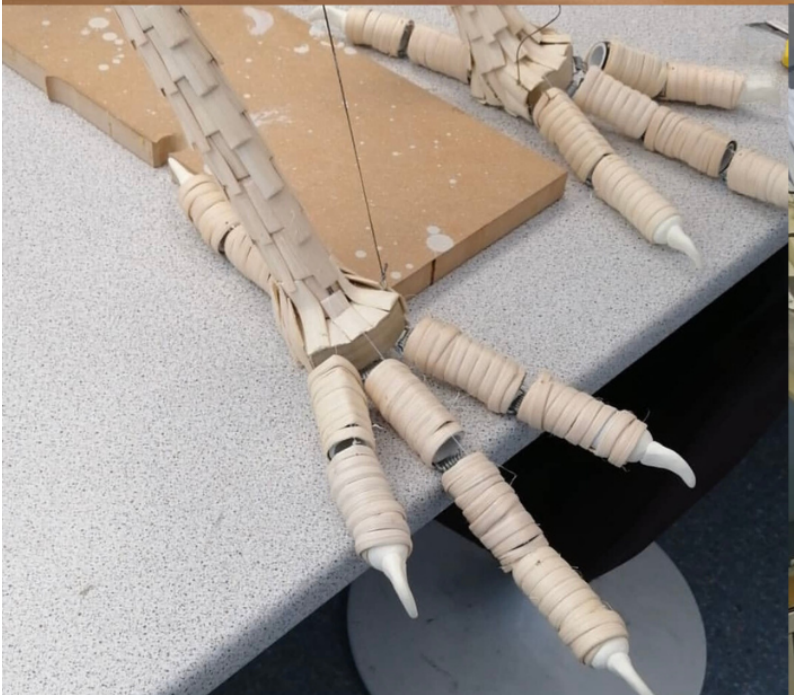
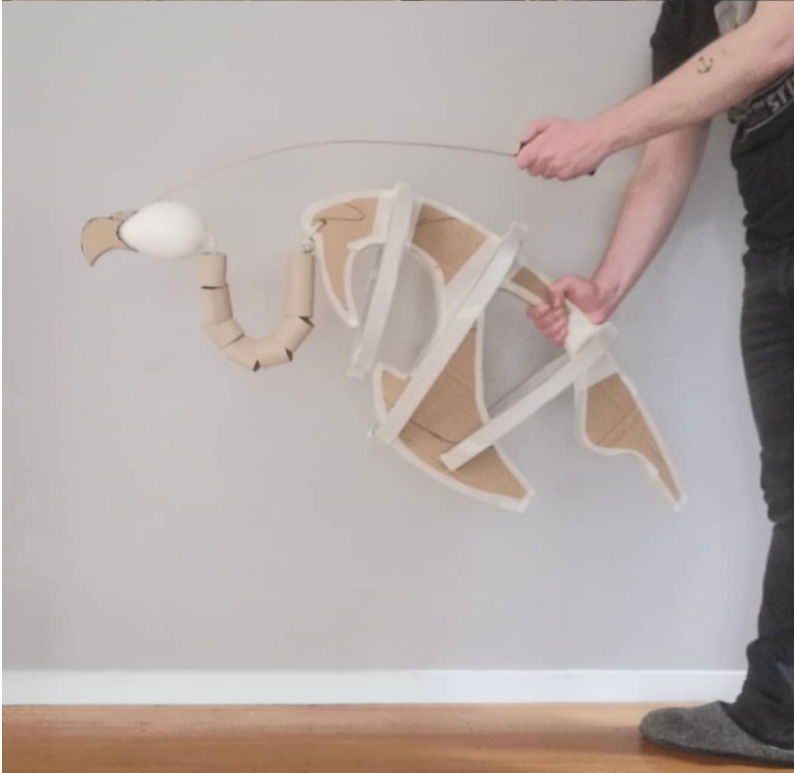
What excites you about this performance?

I love how the audience is seduced into the imaginative world of this play. The stage is very bare and there's really nothing in the way of props yet ,by the end, they will have been taken to multiple locations in Mumbai as well as being suspended between life and death. And, of course, they will fall in love with a vulture.

Do you come up with characters then the storyline, or is it the other way round?

Well, it sounds like a cop out, but they are totally interlinked. You can't have character without having plots. Because what is the plot but the character coming up against a situation where they are tested? I think it's dangerous to just write a story and then throw characters into it. I think that the story design is such that the character is put into extremes so that they make choices. And those choices are what we're interested in, 'why did they go that way?'. And that's to do with their character. To create something that I think is satisfying, you need to see that change. And for that change to happen, you need to have a plot that facilitates that change, and I think that's what we enjoy.





Puppeteer

Jon Coddington

Jon is a theatre designer and collaborator, illustrator, animator and sculptor, but has been primarily working as a puppeteer and puppet maker for the past eight years. Highlights include hit show *Puppet Fiction* (2012-18) selling out everywhere it has performed.



Can you remember the first puppet you ever saw?

I suppose it would be *Sesame Street* and *The Muppets*. I was really big into *The Muppets* when I was a kid. My grandfather loved it and sort of drilled it into me and made me love it too.

But I think it was really *Warhorse*, made by the Handspring Puppet company that changed my whole perception of puppetry. It showed me what I could do and introduced me to the beauty and mechanics of puppetry.

When did you first create your own puppets?

Properly, it would have been when I was doing a 48 hour Film Fest. I was on a team and we weren't quite sure what we were doing but we wanted to do something with puppetry. I hadn't made anything before, but I thought 'what the heck' and they wanted some string puppets so I thought I'd biff something together.

So, I went away, and I made a man, a woman, and an old man, and there was no genre or anything at the time, so I just had them ready. And then we got our genre, and it was twin movie and I thought 'of any genre, this has to be the worst'. So that night I had to go away and duplicate one of the puppets I'd made. It was sort of trial by fire, but I loved it. The making *and* the performing. Because I never saw myself as a performer before that. I'd always preferred being behind it and doing the 'making'.



What would you say is your favourite part of being the puppeteer?

I suppose on one side it frees me from performance anxiety. All the focus is out 'there', and there is a great sort of relief for me in that. But also, it's really the magic of it. And not purely in the theatrical sense, but also being able to do things that humans can't. And that's what I really dig about puppetry. You know, there's got to be a good reason for why a puppet exists in a show. And if it's not doing something extraordinary, then I don't see a reason for it. It's that extraordinary aspect that really vibes with me.

Do you ever worry when you're onstage that people are watching you and not the puppet?

It's gotten easier. Performance is really tricky for me. Making *Puppet Fiction* as a fringe show, and then deciding to do it just because I love the source material so much, I was surprised by that.

Just having that puppet to move through, because I'm enjoying the puppet as much as the audience. I'm not sitting there being precious about it. The beauty of puppetry is you get to see the final product as it's being made. An actor can't watch themselves do it. An artist will have to wait till the end of the painting. But I'm seeing it as it's happening.

When you're making the puppets, do you let your designs grow organically, or do you have a design in mind from the start?

I'm a very iterative designer. I have a basic idea of things. I have images of the original design for the vulture, and it's basically all there. But with puppetry especially, so much dictates everything else. The weight will affect the performance and certain materials won't move the way things need to move. I really like doing material research and just playing until something works, that what I tend to do.

How long does it normally take to make a puppet?

It depends on the puppet. I can bash together a hand and rod monster puppet in two or three days. But something like Gerry would take at least a couple of months. And that just gives enough time for trialling and putting it through different spaces and all that.

What's Gerry made out of?

Plywood, cane, muslin, a bit of Resin, his head is rotocast Resin, his legs are made out of PVC pipe, some bike breaks, a bit of fishing line and I think that's about it.

How do you make the Vulture noises?

(Laughs) They just come out of me.

I didn't intend to do the noises, I thought it would be a track or something, but they asked me to do it and I gave it a crack and I just sort of got it. I've looked at vulture videos for a long time now and maybe I've just been subconsciously practising while building them, who knows.





Set Designer

John Verryt

John has worked on all of Indian Ink's productions to date. With over 30 years' experience he is one of New Zealand's leading performance designers with an extensive portfolio of work including designs for New Zealand Opera, Black Grace Dance Company, Douglas Wright and Auckland Theatre Company.



How did you get into set designing?

When I left school I went into graphics, and it was at the time computers were coming in and I didn't really want to do graphics on the computer, so I left. Quit. Travelled for a while and sort of stumbled into some theatre liked it, and came back and started working. Those were the days when you could do that.

What is it about set design that you fell in love with?

Making an environment that reflects ideas that writers' have written and that accommodates performers. It's not like the statement, but the support for the statement. And the combination of sculpture and architecture... And control, I guess, is part of it too.

What does your process of designing a set look like?

Usually, the producer comes to me, with a script or an idea. I get the script on the table and do what I like with it. It's a combination of making models and the drawing board. I'm pretty old school, most people do it all on the computer now. But I find that less satisfying, for the same reason that I didn't want to do graphics on a computer, I don't want to do set design on a computer either.

I prefer the more physical workstyle of making things and standing at the drawing board. I can put a whole set design on the drawing board and look at it all at once.



At what point do you start thinking about set design? Is it as soon as the idea for the play has been formed and communicated to you, after the script is written, during the workshops, or when rehearsals start?

It varies, quite a lot actually. If there's a finished script to start with, which is probably half my work, that's easy. I start reading the script and start having ideas out of there. If it's a devised work, then the design often comes out of a process of workshopping, discussions and generally working with a cast.

With Indian Ink, it's kind of in the middle, because often there is a script at the start, and there are various meetings and discussions before that script happens. Basically the design process just starts whenever the discussion starts, whatever form they are, whether it's just a talk, or a discussion with the cast or whether it's the finished script.

What do you think is the most important thing to consider when designing sets?

The first thing is trying to work out what it's about. What I really want to do is reflect the themes of the writing in the set design. That's kind of what I do in a nutshell, that's my job. After that it's mainly the practicalities of getting on and off the stage, like having smooth transitions and so on. Actually, transitions is a huge one and being able to do that effectively is extremely important. Moving from scene to scene requires a lot of logistical work, and is something we spend lots and lots of time on.

How much does changing venues affect your set design? For example, how different is it working at TAPAC compared to somewhere like Q Theatre? What about even bigger/smaller venues?

It doesn't really change the design much, I try to keep it quite consistent. I actually design for Q Theatre and have to squeeze into TAPAC, because it's a smaller venue. Often it's quite hard to do the design for a small space, so usually I would pick a 'middle-sized' venue and design the set for that. Then I would either squeeze it in or expand it out depending on where we go. We're looking ahead to theatres that hold 1000's of people so we really have to make it work for all kinds of venues.



Costume Designer

Elizabeth Whiting

Elizabeth has designed costumes for New Zealand Opera, Auckland Theatre Company, NZ Festival and Auckland Festival, Silo, Court Theatre, Red Leap and Okareka Dance, Black Grace, Douglas Wright Dance, Michael Parmenter, Atimira, NZ Dance Company and the Royal New Zealand Ballet. She designed costumes for Pop-Up Theatre London for Edinburgh Festival.



How did you get involved in theatre?

I had a bit of theatrical background, having done speech and drama as a kid. Then I was at university and my husband's parents were working at Mercury Theatre. I helped out there and I really loved it. Such amazing energy—much better than what I was doing at university at the time, which was law!

How did you learn your craft?

I did a lot of training with a designer named Eve Schloop, who had run her own business and she taught me pattern making. It was a one-on-one tuition situation, I was so amazingly lucky because I could sit next to her in a production week and she would say what worked and why and what didn't work and why.

Then I did a course in Production Management at AUT University and started working as a wardrobe supervisor, then I moved more into the design.

Why transition to designing?

When you start doing the research and start reading the script, ideas pop into your mind all the time. And you don't see your ideas on stage unless you design!

What inspired you with your costume ideas?

The costumes are always inspired primarily by the script. The director's vision and casting affect the realisation of my initial response.



What's something else you love about costume design?

I love the research, and I love the fact that every project that you're working on presents different problems and makes you look outside your normal life. And also, you meet such extraordinary people.

Also, it helps a performer develop a character. It's not just fashion, where you make a garment, hang it on a rack and somebody comes along and chooses it. It's much deeper.

How did you get involved with Indian Ink?

Through John Verryt. I've been peripherally involved for a long time, and increasingly I'm designing for them. It's [Indian Ink] got a family feel, and I enjoy the process.

What does the process look like?

I get a script and I'll read it through for my pleasure, just relaxed reading to get images. And then I read it really carefully, going through and breaking down time frames, characters and work out where my research needs to sit.

At the production meeting, where everybody creatively discusses the images, colour and lighting, I take a paper sheet that has ideas of the colours I want to use, and the ideas of the type of character. It's not precious, it's a working document.

How does the performer influence the design?

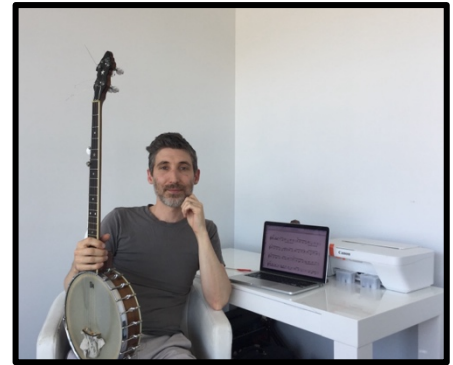
I analyse the character that I'm dressing and I go down a path, but then I talk to the performer because they're doing the same process independently and may have come to a completely different conclusion to where that character goes, and we have to mesh.



Composer

David Ward

A Jazz Graduate from the Wellington Conservatorium of Music, David has twice won “Most Outstanding Composer” at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards for his work on *Guru of Chai* and *Kiss the Fish*.



How do you feel the live music works with the sound effects?

The music in the show and the sound effects are both crucial in supporting and amplifying the world we create in the moment with the audience. The incidental music amplifies the emotional heart of the story and helps establish shifts in time and place. The SFX are a key part of the way we enable the audience to suspend their disbelief and fully invest in the magic trick of 2 performers on a simple stage creating an entire world/worlds. They forget they are watching a single actor on a minimalist stage, and really “see” a cash register, a mogul prince, money changing hands, a crying baby, customers coming and going. In reality it is their imaginations that create the world and everything the musician is doing behind the scenes plays a big part in this.

The shows often have return seasons. How does the music change?

It evolves over time. That happens over all the shows, particularly in the early seasons. It's a matter of taking the thing we've imagined and how seamlessly we can weave all the music into the show and create the atmosphere and the world with the audience.

That's the moment when it feels like your job is done—when it's fully woven into the fabric of the show. In a sense, the audience won't notice a lot of the incidental music. Some of the songs pop up as moments of focus, but the rest of it is to serve the story.

How do you keep it alive in the moment?

It's often about the subtlety of timing and phrasing so that when you're doing the music underneath the action, there's a little dance. You're trying to dance with what's happening visually on the stage and what the actor is saying, not trying to push them in a certain direction but not being passive either; it's this two-way seamless dance.



Dramaturge

Murray Edmond

Murray has been involved on all of Indian Ink's productions. A poet and founder of Town and Country players (NZ), Murray has recently retired from his role as Professor of Drama at Auckland University where he headed the Drama course.

What is a dramaturge? And where did the term come from?

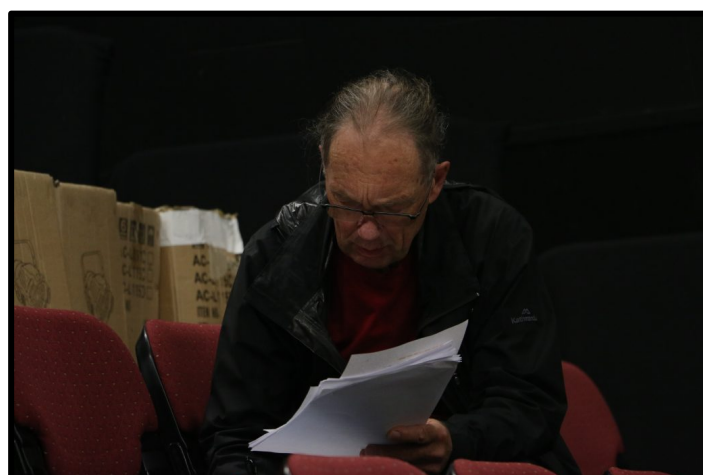
Well, it's a funny term, and it was originally from European Theatre. It meant 'the literary director of the theatre'. So basically, we have the stage director, who was the person who would direct the work on stage itself, but the person who chose the plays that were going to be done for the year, and who did all the reading around and created the programme, that was the dramaturge. That role isn't really what came to us in New Zealand, but that's where the word was originally used. It's not sort of an English word, it's a kind of German word. And now dramaturgy is to do with the way in which drama is constructed and put together.



The dramaturge was defined then as an advocate for the playwright. Because often when a playwright came out with a new play, they would show it to really well-known actors, well known directors, critics, their designers etc. And they would all tell the playwright what was wrong with the play, and the playwright would go away crying and never write another play. So the dramaturge would help with that. But the role itself varies, depending on who's doing it, where and why.

One of the first rules of dramaturgy: If you're going to write a tragedy, find the comedy in it for God's sake. Or you'll bore people to tears. Same with writing a comedy, you've got to find what's serious.

So I think the kind of theatre, plus the performer plus the subject matter did catch something.



What is useful about working with a Dramaturge?

I think one of the really important things is we have a common language around masks and around improvisation. We might not agree exactly but we've had similar training and we understand some common things about theatre and about creativity. So I think there's a shared thing at quite a deep level, which isn't any particular play. We all have our tendencies and we've recognized those.

I think particularly that I may be useful because Justin's a director, and therefore he's always looking forward to how the theatrical elements will be brought into play in relation to the drama. And I feel I'm always just pulling back a bit. I often tell him: "don't worry about that yet." and "see what the situation and the problem is first".

And Jake, because he's an actor, he's always thinking, "but how can I get the scene to work?" And I'm always telling him "just wait a bit, don't worry, even if it's a bit too long, let's write a scene which kind of makes sense, and then we can do that." So yeah, I do think I have a function in the triangle because of their particular roles.

What is the most difficult part of your job?

I think it's trying to respect the idea that the other person has, and not take it over or dismiss it. You can easily say, "well, this is rubbish." Because usually in the beginning, you can dismiss an idea if you want to, because it's not fully formed. And the same way you can say, "this is not really my thing, I don't understand this."

But you've actually got to *make* yourself understand it.

I think getting into that position of respect and then also finding a way that you can feed in because people have a certain protectiveness, understandably. And they've seen something in the beginning, which they want at all costs.





Theatre Etiquette

**We believe in the magic of theatre,
and that that magic is for everyone.**

**So we have put together some general tips
to share for your upcoming trip
to the theatre.**

Use the bathroom before the show.
(Nothing worse than having to run out half way through)

No phones, photos or recording.
(The actors like to have the spotlight)

No talking during the performance.
(Save those questions for the Q&A)

Be considerate of those around you.
(Hold the standing ovation until the end)

Feel free to applaud, yell and cheer at the end of the show.
(Everyone on and off stage loves to see your support)

Have a great time!
Theatre is a great experience that we love sharing with you.

Indian Ink Theatre Company

History

Indian Ink Theatre Company is one of New Zealand's most successful theatre companies specialising in the creation and touring of original New Zealand work. Since Indian Ink was founded in 1997, over 500,000 people throughout New Zealand and the world have seen our plays.

The company is the result of the extraordinary partnership of Justin Lewis and Jacob Rajan. Alongside a team of multi-talented collaborators, they have mined the collision of East and West, creating spirited, fresh and vibrant theatre that combines artful storytelling, mischievous wit and theatrical magic to unearth the simple truths of life.

Our plays have won awards nationally and internationally for their quality and innovation. Indian Ink tours regularly to Australia, Singapore, and the USA, and has a growing international reputation for world-class theatre.



Indian Ink Shows

DIRTY WORK (premiered in 2023):

The computers are down and the big boss in India wants the impossible. The hapless staff are making a mess of things. Which isn't good news for the cleaner.

PARADISE OR THE IMPERMANENCE OF ICE CREAM (premiered in 2021):

A man trying desperately to avoid death is flung between limbo and his past where a rebellious young woman holds the key that may guide him to paradise.

WELCOME TO THE MURDER HOUSE (premiered 2018):

The convicts of Auburn Prison have been set free for one night to perform a play of their own devising. Be entertained by this true tale of ambition, heroes and villains, set at the dawning of the new electric age.

MRS. KRISHNAN'S PARTY (premiered 2018):

Mrs Krishnan's boarder, overzealous wannabe DJ James, has invited a few friends into the back room of the dairy as a special surprise to celebrate Onam and the return home of her son. But when around 100 strangers turn up and settle in, Mrs K has no choice but to throw the party of her life!

THE ELEPHANT THIEF (premiered 2015):

When Leela Devi leaves her tribal home to see the world, she doesn't expect her father's elephant to follow her. As she battles corrupt officials, hungry poachers, fanatical leaders and supreme beings, an unlikely love story unfolds and a quiet revolution ferments.

KISS THE FISH (premiered 2013):

The winds of change are sweeping the sleepy island of Karukam. A new resort promises a brighter future for all until fate puts the hopes of the community in the hands of Sidu - the village idiot!

GURU OF CHAI (premiered 2010):

The contradictions of modern India with its iPhones and ancient gods come alive in this outrageously funny and heartbreakingly beautiful production. A poor chai-wallah has his life changed forever when a young girl is abandoned at a busy railway station and brings the place to a standstill with the beauty of her singing.

THE DENTIST'S CHAIR (premiered 2008):

A comedy with bite: a dentist is haunted by the ghost of the first man executed in the electric chair.

THE PICKLE KING (premiered 2002):

A comedy about what's worth preserving and finding the courage to love.

THE CANDLESTICKMAKER (premiered 2000):

Black Holes and the formula for happiness collide when a New Zealand Indian student visits his ancestral home for the first time.

KRISHNAN'S DIARY (premiered 1997):

A shopkeeper and his wife reveal a love as great as the Taj Mahal.

What we do

Layer for the Intellect

Our shows challenge traditional thinking and ask our audiences to consider things from a different point of view. We write beautiful, funny, sad and true stories, taking you into the minds of characters, allowing you to walk in their shoes – so you can make your own interpretations.

Transcending Cultural Barriers

Our shows are for Indians and non-Indians. That's because while different cultures may appear poles apart at first glance, we always find that there is much more that we have in common. We tell stories that celebrate cultural differences but connect us through our shared humanity, building empathy and understanding across cultures.

Nourishing Entertainment

We are entertainers at heart and we're here to take you on a journey that's rich in culture, full of humour and brimming with emotion – so you leave the theatre feeling nourished and content.

Original Storytellers

At Indian Ink, we have developed a unique style of theatrical storytelling which draws on tradition and culture, utilising different theatrical crafts from around the world. All of this comes together to create narratives that will capture the audiences' imagination and keep them enthralled.



How we do it

SERIOUS LAUGHTER

The Serious Laugh

We like having a laugh; it's part of what makes us human. We'll open your mouth and mind through laughter and slip in something serious at the same time. Because when you start to think about the lighter side of life, you start seeing things in a different light.

Artful Cleverness

Having been writing, producing and performing since 1996, we have developed diverse, compelling stories. To tell our tales, we tap into different storytelling styles that present intriguing ideas in unexpected ways.

Saris and Fries

Saris and Fries is the collision that occurs when our Indian heritage and culture meets the Western world and ideals that we live with every day. It's the lens through which we tell our stories – a hint of Bollywood with a serious twist.

Resourceful Narrators

In our performances we paint vivid pictures using strong characters, rather than through casts of thousands or elaborate sets. We prefer you to use your imagination to fill in some of those details – to get right into the experience intellectually and emotionally.



Who we are



Enlightening Experiences

At Indian Ink we transport you to vibrant worlds by weaving compelling stories through delightful characters that will leave your heart uplifted, your mind inspired, and your soul nourished.

Writers – Justin Lewis & Jacob Rajan

Director – Justin Lewis

Actor – Jacob Rajan

Puppeteer / Puppet Design & Build – Jon Coddington

Production & Tour Manager/LX & SX Operator – Sam Mence

Sound Operator – Adam Ogle

Dramaturge – Murray Edmond

Set Designer – John Verryt

Costume Designer – Elizabeth Whiting

Lighting Designer – Andrew Potvin

Composer – David Ward

Projected Imagery, Photographer / Editor – Bala Murali Shingade

General Manager – Jude Froude

Producer – Pene Lister

Administration & Development Manager – Naomi Campion

Digital Marketer – Olivia Brinkmann

Next Gen Programme Leader – Te Huamanuka Luiten-Apirana

For more information visit
www.indianink.co.nz

