

# THE MONKEY KING

*Inspired by the ancient Buddhist legend*

By

**ALEX JONES**

**A play for children and family audiences:**

*2004 May     Birmingham Hippodrome, May*

*2010 June     St Paul's Church (The Actors Church)  
Covent Garden, London,  
Winner of the Iris Theatre Prize*

**The Monkey King** is inspired by the classic Buddhist tale. It explores the spiritual and physical relationship between mankind, the environment and the creatures we share the world with. With the use of a poetic text and from the point of view of a tribe of monkeys who are governed by the wise and benevolent king, **Kapi**; we see how **Kapi** is almost supplanted by **Korung**, a jealous rival who wants to be human, and finally by the intrusion of the human world into their idyllic jungle life. But the human **King Brahmadutta** by **Kapi's** brave example learns that nobility is also about caring for the world and those we share it with. Originally performed by the **Shysters** and children from a local primary school, directed by **Richard Hayhow**, the script has been revised and expanded and was later performed in this version at **St Paul's Church** (the actors church) Covent Garden after winning the prestigious **Iris Theatre Prize** for dramatic verse, directed by **Daniel Winder**.

This play touches upon many current issues relevant to young people and the world they live in, including our fragile environment, tolerance and acceptance of people seemingly different and a vision of sharing our planet's resources and natural gifts.

**SYNOPSIS & SAMPLE SCENES  
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## **CHARACTERS**

A CHORUS OF MONKEYS

A CHORUS OF HUMANS

THREE FISHERMEN/WOMEN

KORUNG

THE ROYAL TASTER

KAPI - THE MONKEY KING

BRAHMADUTTA - THE HUMAN KING

The lines of the chorus are split between the cast.  
It is also possible for the two choruses' to change costumes and be either monkeys or humans.

The cast for this play can vary to suit the needs of the numbers of actors available, but it can (if needed) be very large indeed!  
Alternatively there can be a storyteller who reads the story, while children/actors react by acting out the story physically.

## THE MONKEY KING

*A jungle clearing by the river ganges. Music as three monkeys from the chorus enter, pushing their way through the undergrowth.*

1. *There is a great river in India called the River Ganges. Its massive banks are green with trees and the dark, secret jungle lies on each side, stretching away to the horizon.*
2. *Halfway down the river there grows a beautiful mango tree; its branches dipping down to kiss the river, it's long, long roots sip the water that gives it life.*
3. *Long, long ago, the tree was also teeming with life, because the tree was also the home of many, many monkeys...*

## WAKING UP

*MUSIC DEVELOPS AS A CHORUS OF MONKEYS ARE WOKEN BY THE OTHER THREE. THEY EMERGE FROM THE UNDERGROWTH AND FROM NESTS IN TREES AND PLAY OUT THE ACTIONS THEY VOICE. THE CHORUS IS VOICED BY THE VARIOUS CAST OF MONKEYS.*

CHORUS        We're monkeys,  
                  Waking up in the jungle.  
                  Beads of dew  
                  Glisten on our fur  
                  And sparkle in the spreading dawn light.

                  It's morning!  
                  A bright new day is dawning.  
                  Leaves rustle and rattle  
                  As we stir,  
                  Branches crack  
                  As we stretch awake,  
                  Rub sleep from our eyes  
                  And blink at the bright sky above:

                  Blink at the white cotton clouds  
                  Drifting like balloons  
                  Above the jungle canopy.  
                  White clouds, blue sky  
                  And leaves so very green -  
                  It's all so fresh and clean  
                  On a beautiful new day in the jungle.  
                  We're up high,  
                  Nestled in branches;  
                  Monkey nests,  
                  Safe from pests,  
                  Safe from danger,  
                  No one's a stranger  
                  Here.

                  So  
                  We smile a good morning smile  
                  To each other  
                  As we stretch and yawn;  
                  A new day is born.  
                  The world feels brand new -  
                  There's so much to do  
                  In a world so fresh and clear;  
                  Free from fear.

                  We're monkey friends  
                  Ready to work,  
                  Ready to play,  
                  Ready to search for food  
                  In a brand new monkey-jungle day!

## SWEET RAIN

*THE SOUND OF RAIN FALLING THROUGH TREES. THE MONKEYS LOOK UP AND SMILE WITH GRATITUDE.*

### CHORUS

The soft patter of rain begins;  
Dripping through the branches above,  
Gently tapping its liquid tune  
On the leaves  
As it falls through the branches,  
Drips from hanging creepers,  
Runs down the bark of the jungle trees.  
It's coating the landscape  
With its sparkling rich varnish,  
And soaking us through to the skin.

And so we begin  
To wash and shower -  
It'll be gone in an hour,  
But we'll all be clean  
And feel refreshed,  
As we rub the rain through our furry vest.  
Rub each other, too;  
If you wash me, then I'll wash you.  
So we rub each other's backs,  
And smile our good morning smiles again:

A morning massage,  
A morning wash -  
What a wonderful way  
To start the day  
In a banyan tree,  
My friends and me;  
In a banyan tree,  
In a jungle of trees  
That grow by the shore  
Of the great Ganges.

## JUNGLE WALK

*THE RAIN STOPS AND THE JUNGLE BEGINS TO STIR TO LIFE:  
DISTANT CALLS OF BIRDS AND JUNGLE ANIMALS MIXED IN  
WITH THE MUSIC.*

### CHORUS

Now the birds are awake, too;  
Singing and calling,  
Finding food for their brood;  
Pink hungry mouths chirping in their nests.  
Bees are buzzing about the air,  
Sipping at flowers,  
Pollen baskets to be filled  
To be made into honey.  
Everyone's busy –

It's time to climb down to the ground:  
Slip and slide down trees,  
Swing from grassy creepers  
Through the path of bees.  
The jungle is waking,  
Animals stirring,  
Sniffing the air;  
Cold wet noses  
Poking out from their lair.

We hit the ground with a bump,  
We leap and swing,  
We scabble and scramble and jump  
And with a bump, we're there,  
Walking,  
Lolloping,  
Swinging our arms,  
Holding hands,  
Making our plans  
For the new day ahead.

The jungle floor is carpeted with leaves;  
It's layered with crunchy twigs and branches,  
It crumples under our feet  
As we make our way  
Through the green bright promise  
Of a brand new day.

We chatter and shriek our monkey talk  
As we run and skip and walk,  
Tunnel through bushes,  
Burrow through scrub,  
Our long hairy arms reaching up  
To the branches above,  
Pink cold fingers,  
Grabbing fruit and berries  
To munch on our way –

We know where we're going today!  
We know that a certain fruit will be ripe to eat:  
We've been waiting for ages  
And now it's time to pick them,  
To eat their sweet, juicy flesh -  
*Mangoes!*

Hanging from branches,  
Fragrant and heady,  
We can smell them from here -  
They're definitely ready.  
Their aroma is in our heads,  
Our nostrils quiver with the smell  
Of our favourite food we know so well.

*THE CHORUS ARE AT THE RIVER'S EDGE.*

But first we have to cross the river:  
It shines like the sky on earth,  
The clouds drifting in liquid brown,  
The sun shattered in a million shards,  
Its ripples stirring a Heaven to dance.  
The river sings its song:  
A bubbling splash of ringing melody,  
Sifting through pebbles  
And tearing through stone,  
A splash of silver

As fish jump for flies,  
Breaking the fine skin of two worlds.  
And there on the other side  
Are the mango trees -  
Yellow and orange fruit,  
Swaying in the breeze,  
They seem to be saying  
Come and eat me if you please.

*THE CHORUS BEGIN TO CROSS THE RIVER.*

Tiny toes dip in cold water,  
Monkey feet tickled by the river's tug;  
Wading in deeper,  
Past the shallows,  
Through the reeds  
Where the thick weed wallows.  
Now the water's flowing faster –

Have be careful  
Or it will be disaster.  
The river can wash you away downstream,  
There's thunder underneath its surface,  
So let's hold hands as we cross,  
Water splashing,  
We can't help laughing,  
We can't help splashing,

As fish are jumping  
And we're bumping  
And swinging  
And singing our way across  
To the other side.  
But the river is so very wide.  
Someone's scared  
As they fall beneath the silver sheet,

But we pull her up  
And help her cross,  
Grabbing branches,  
Taking our chances,  
Jumping stones,  
Swimming and wading,  
We'll make it somehow..

And then we're there,  
Stepping through the shallows  
Of the opposite shore,  
Looking up at the treasure above -  
There's the fruit that we all love -  
Mangoes, mangoes, mangoes!  
It's time for breakfast, I think!

## GIVING THANKS FOR THE MANGO

*THE CHORUS ARE ON THE FAR BANK AND ARE IN AWE OF THE MANGOES THAT HANG ABOVE THEM. DURING THE FOLLOWING, THE CHORUS ONCE AGAIN OBEY THE TEXT, PICKING THE MANGOES, ETC.*

### CHORUS

And so  
We're here  
In a cool glade of trees,  
Shivering and drying  
In a soft, warm breeze.  
For a moment we stare around  
At the beautiful fruit  
That comes from the ground:

The soil fed the seed  
That flourished and grew -  
First a sapling,  
Then a tree, fresh and new.  
Leaves green and vivid  
Shine in the sun,  
Then come the flowers,  
Then come the fruit -  
Nature's gift for us to pick  
And eat.

Precious fruit,  
Kissed by the sun,  
Blessed by the world we all come from.  
Beautiful mango, heavy and ripe,  
Sweet and juicy,  
Fresh as rain,  
Tastes of happiness,  
Makes us smile  
As we suck its orange sweetness  
Into our mouths;  
Tastes of home  
Of kith and kin,  
The place where we end  
And where we begin.

We make circles of monkeys  
And look up in awe,  
Pull down a mango,  
Pass it around,  
Sniff its beauty,  
Feel its shape,  
Study its shiny skin,  
Pull more to the ground,  
Pile them up and gather around,

Nature is with us,  
Smiling from the sky,  
Glinting light from the river,  
Winking its eye.  
So -  
Lift a mango up to the sun,  
To thank the world  
That gave us such fruit,  
To worship the planet  
That feeds us when we're hungry,  
That gives us shelter  
When we're cold,  
That will feed us still  
When we grow old.

We're kneeling in prayer  
In a paradise of trees,  
A congregation of friends,  
A monkey family,  
Picking mangoes  
Together,  
Sharing our harvest  
Forever...

But that's enough of that -  
Let's get stuck in!!  
Mm - sun in your mouth,  
Rain on your lips,  
The blood of the earth  
On your fingertips...  
We are so lucky,  
So very, very lucky,  
To be born and to live  
In a world where mangoes grow.

## WORK AND PLAY

*THE SOUND OF CICADAS AND JUNGLE INSECTS GROW THROUGHOUT, DRIVING THE MONKEYS TO DISTRACTION. THEY ARE IN TURN BITTEN, GROOM EACH OTHER AND FIND MEDICINAL PLANTS TO HEAL THEMSELVES (AS WELL AS EATING COCONUTS!).*

CHORUS      But life isn't always such fun,  
Sometimes there's work to be done.  
Sometimes  
There's no time to be lazy,  
Because sometimes  
Some things in life can drive you crazy!  
Some things  
Can drive you out of your wits,  
Get under your skin,  
Like fleas and nits!

There are monkeys everywhere  
Scratching and itching;  
Frantically rubbing their backs  
On the bark of trees -  
It's time to help each other  
Pick off fleas!  
They crawl through a forest of fur:  
A tiny army of insect invaders  
Biting your skin,  
Poisoned arrows on their head  
Keep you awake all night,  
Scratching in bed.

So find a friend,  
Take it in turns  
To pick them out.  
Eyes like moonbeams  
Scanning the skin,  
Pink monkey fingers  
Quickly stabbing,  
Sharp monkey claws  
Deftly grabbing  
The wriggling soldier  
Finally captive -  
Now it's time to eat it!

Monkeys eat insects  
As well as fruit;  
There's some over there  
Prising up rocks,  
Poking sticks through holes  
And out they come  
Covered in ants,

Crawling and climbing –  
It's a living lollipop,  
So lick it up!  
They tickle and crunch  
As we swallow them all -  
A jungle snack that's really delicious,  
Full of protein and quite nutritious.  
You should try it sometime -  
Wash them down with mango wine.

Another job that keeps us busy,  
Winds us up,  
Makes us dizzy -  
Is cracking coconuts!  
*Look out below!*  
They fall to the ground  
Like footballs made of stone.  
But inside is a bounty of a feast:  
The snowy white flesh of the coconut meat.  
And coconut milk;  
Sweet and cloudy,  
Soft as silk.

Some stamp on the shell,  
Throw it to the ground,  
Bang it on tree trunks;  
It's a frenzy of shrieking and temper tantrums,  
Of shaking  
And banging  
Of throwing and hurling;  
But what's inside is so enticing,  
Fruit as white as frosty coloured icing.  
Eventually they all crack open -  
Brown, hairy shards of shell explode,  
Monkeys duck and monkeys leap,  
Grab a chunk and then retreat,  
Drink the liquid treat inside –

Though it's a pity  
When you shake them from the tree  
Nature doesn't provide a coconut key!  
Another job to be done  
Is therapeutic, a healing one.  
Because  
Jungle insects are everywhere;  
They fall from the trees,  
Fly through the air,  
They bite and nip and leave us with wounds.

And it's easy to get a scratch or a bruise  
When you're climbing trees  
Or swinging through the air;  
Branches with sharp fingers everywhere,  
Reaching out to grab you,  
Snag you,  
Scratch you,  
Cut you...  
*I tell you, for a monkey -  
It's a jungle out there!*

But nature's natural remedy can help -  
We know where the special leaves grow  
That can heal a cut, a scratch or blow.  
In a pleasant grove by a sparkling stream  
We gather to collect them,  
Their sharp, pungent aroma  
Is all around,  
It fills the air with its clean, fresh smell:  
Nature's green medicine to make us well.  
We pass the leaves around  
And rub them into our skin,  
To heal a bump,  
Stop insects getting in.

The earth's green blood is cool and clean,  
From the artery of the jungle's heart  
To the vein of a living leaf,  
Its magical properties calm us; anoint us,  
Bring relief.

So we rub away,  
Rub each other,  
Friend, relation, sister or brother,  
We're all in this together,  
A tribe of creatures bound forever.  
Generations past  
And generations yet to come  
Will live in peace till our time is done.

## ENTRANCE OF THE KING

*THE SOUNDS OF THE JUNGLE CHANGE AS EVERYTHING BEGINS TO SETTLE DOWN. THE MOON RISES AND THE STARS COME OUT, AND THE MUSIC IS RESTFUL AND MELODIC.*

CHORUS      The jungle shadows grow sharp and dark  
As the day wears away.  
And then  
Dusk descends like a soft mossy blanket  
Over the jungle.  
The stars begin to twinkle overhead,  
And the moon like a balloon,  
Yellow and bright  
Floats silently over us;  
A bright lantern of promise.  
And then from a clearing  
Leaves are stirring,  
Branches bending.

*KAPI, THE MONKEY KING COMES REGALLY THROUGH THE UNDERGROWTH WITH A BIG GRIN ON HIS FACE.*

In a moment we're all cheering -  
It's Kapi - Kapi our Monkey King,  
A grin on his face.  
He's as pleased to see us as we are of him,  
So we jump up and down,  
Make a big din.  
He's so wise and loyal,  
Brave and fearless:  
He leads us to safety when tigers are stalking,  
Calms us when we argue, hot with anger,  
Shouting and squawking.

*THE MONKEYS LAY PALM LEAVES BEFORE THEIR KING.*

So we pull leaves from the trees,  
Lay them on the stony jungle floor;  
A royal green carpet fit for a king,  
Then we follow behind and then make a ring.  
He's there in the middle, proud and glad,  
His family are happy, so nothing is bad.  
He lifts up his arms to call for silence.  
The jungle is still;  
Even the cicadas stop chirping  
As we wait to hear what Kapi will pronounce:  
Words of wisdom, something profound,  
And the clever soul doesn't let us down -

KAPI            You have all worked so hard,  
You have all helped each other,  
Friend, relation, father and mother.  
Here in our jungle home  
We're a great monkey nation,  
So what we must do is celebrate creation -  
Let's party!!  
But not just a party - a fancy dress,  
A chance to act the fool and make a mess.  
We need an idea, come on give us a clue?

CHORUS        I know let's all dress up like human's do!  
What a hoot!  
What a crazy, mad, silly scheme!  
So we all marched to our human theme:  
Washing our hair,  
Then curlers and skirts,  
Preening and pressing our suits and our shirts.  
Here's some lipstick; here's a mirror.  
It's so funny; it's pure bliss -  
Be honest, does my bum look big in this?

*THEY ALL LAUGH.*

Then we all put up decorations,  
Hang them from the trees and vines.  
It's a jungle party grotto  
Full of colourful sights,  
And the bright glowing fireflies  
Will be our fairy lights.  
And now it's time to show our king  
How much we love him,

So we bring  
All the mangoes we picked today -  
A Royal procession of a loyal tribe,  
Bearing our precious fruit  
We walk side-by-side,  
Lay them before him,  
A gift to share -  
The first ripe fruit to show we care.

He's pleased, he's proud,  
He's moved by our love,  
Then with a look of concern  
Beneath the stars above,  
He speaks to us all a warning –

KAPI            These mangoes which we all now will share,  
We must always handle with utmost care.  
Do not let any fall into the river:  
The current is strong, the journey long  
To the sea,  
Its salty, mingled destiny.  
But on its way  
The river passes  
Through the kingdom of Benares  
Where the humans live.

If one should fetch up in a fisherman's net,  
They will surely search for more,  
Find our home on this pleasant shore,  
And as humans sometimes will,  
Take our fruit and even kill.  
But now with this warning in mind  
Let's all show what fun it is to be alive -  
Come on monkeys, let's jump and jive!!

*MUSIC AS THE MONKEYS DANCE AND JIVE AND CELEBRATE  
IN THEIR FANCY DRESS, BENEATH THE BRANCHES OF THE  
TREES THEY HAVE DECORATED.*

## SLEEPY

*IT'S LATE. THE MUSIC IS SLOW - A LULLABY. THE MONKEYS GROW TIRED AND EVENTUALLY SETTLE DOWN IN THEIR NESTS.*

### CHORUS

What a day it's been!  
Working and playing together;  
We wish it could go on forever -  
Dancing and singing  
While the stars above are twinkling,  
And the big yellow moon is beaming.

We're full up with food and fun,  
We're stuffed to the brim  
With coconut and mango,  
We've jived and jumped  
And danced a tango.  
But now it's late,

Even the moon seems tired -  
It's journey done across the sky,  
It casts long shadows as it smiles goodbye.  
So we rub our eyes, yawn and stretch  
And wander back to our monkey nest.

It's time for sleep,  
It's time to dream of mangoes and dancing,  
Of walking through a jungle parting,  
To see the mountains in the distance  
Where the rain is made  
That may fall in the morning;  
Fresh and sweet as a new day is dawning.

## KORUNG PLOTS

*THE MONKEYS ARE ALL ASLEEP. THE MUSIC GROWS DARKER AS KORUNG ENTERS, STEALTHILY, LOOKING AROUND WITH DISDAIN AT HIS SLEEPING TRIBE.*

KORUNG

Monkeys jibber, monkeys jabber,  
But me - I can chatter,  
Ape the human speech,  
Stand upright; walk tall and straight  
Like humans do on two strong feet.  
I've seen the hairless strangers,  
Watched them hunt and kill.

One day I'll be one of them,  
And rule this tribe by force of will.  
Monkeys jibber, monkeys jabber,  
Monkeys screech and scream with delight  
When Kapi their king comes near.  
They pave his way with coconut leaves,  
Build him a royal shelter in the trees;

*(Sardonic)* Because he's wise,  
Because he's kind,  
Because he loves them,  
Because he's so strong and quick...  
I think I'm going to be sick!  
No one seems to notice me,  
Korung - the invisible monkey!

But I'm as wise and strong as him.  
Why should he be king?  
I could govern just as well,  
I could tell them what to do,  
Make them bow and scrape when I come by.  
No one would ever cross me then,  
No one would even dare to try.

One day I'll surprise them all,  
I'll bring about King Kapi's fall,  
Wipe the smile off his handsome face,  
Steal his throne and take his place.  
Then I'll rule this kingdom with a rod of iron,  
Teach those fools the hard way  
When to work and when to play.

Korung the Monkey King!  
*(Smiles)* It definitely has a certain ring.  
Until then I'll bide my time,  
Wait for the moment,  
Seize the throne.

*KORUNG NOTICES SOMETHING - A WONDERFUL MANGO  
HANGING FROM A TREE ABOVE HIM.*

What's this?  
The biggest mango in the jungle!  
Hidden by an ant's nest.  
It's ripe and huge,  
I'll pick it, take it back,  
Won't they be impressed?  
Kapi's never found a mango like this...

*KORUNG MAKES TO GRAB THE MANGO, WHICH  
FALLS INTO THE RIVER BELOW.*

Oh no - I've shook the branch,  
The mango's fallen in the river.  
I'll swing down,  
Grab it before it floats away...  
But wait - let it go,  
Let the river take it in its flow,  
Let it carry it downstream  
To places monkeys have never seen.  
To places where humans live and toil;

Clever people, breeding cattle,  
Burning the jungle to make the soil  
To grow their crops;  
No one stops them,  
They're so very, very clever,  
Building castles that will last forever.  
And if one should taste the mango fruit,  
They're sure to want more and more,  
They'll surely search out the mango grove,  
Come to visit our very shore.  
Then I can meet them;  
Talk and walk with civilised men.

Then our foolish monkey tribe  
That follows callow Kapi,  
Will beg on bended knee  
For me to govern them!  
What will happen?  
Who will find it?  
It could spell danger...  
But let it go -  
It could help me in some way,  
It might,  
You never know.

## DRAMATIC VERSE EVENING

---

9 JUNE

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It was an evening of textual invention and experimentation; a platform for poets, playwrights and slam artists to explore the widest variety of themes. We promenaded the audience around the gardens of St Paul's exploring new verse theatre in a site specific way.

We were presenting works that ask the question; what is modern 'dramatic verse'? Is it defined by William Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Tony Harrison or Sarah Kane? What happens in the space where poetry meets character and story-telling?

We have had over 250 submissions from award winning playwrights and poets from across the country, and further afield, and presented a section of what we felt to be the freshest and most original pieces.

Participants included Luke Wright, Melanie Penycate, Freddie Mills, Ashby McGowan, Kent de Pinto, Annette Brook, Sophie Reynolds, Alex Jones, James Kenward, Duncan Pflaster, Katrina Naomi, Rachael Battistini, Joshua Idehen, Andrew Sherlock, and Nicholas Murray.