STUDY GUIDE

OPERA TO GO!

presents

MONKEY & FRANCINE

IN THE CITY OF TIGERS

Music by Kamala Sankaram | Libretto by David Johnston
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<th>SINGERS</th>
<th>CHARACTER DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Priscilla Salisbury, soprano</td>
<td><strong>Francine</strong> - The young princess of the Monkey Kingdom and Monkey’s sister. Francine loves reading books and has a special fondness for poetry. She enjoys bugging her brother and dreams of adventure.</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Costume Sketch" /></td>
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<td>Tahanee Aluwihare, mezzo-soprano</td>
<td><strong>Monkey Queen</strong> - Mother to our two young heros, she wishes her kids weren’t such a handful sometimes.</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Costume Sketch" /></td>
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<td>Taelon Stonecipher, tenor</td>
<td><strong>Monkey Queen</strong> - Mother to our two young heros, she wishes her kids weren’t such a handful sometimes. <strong>Tiger Lord</strong> - This feline ruler has an enormous ego and a constant need for validation. He’s taken all the gold and bananas from the Monkey Kingdom.</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Costume Sketch" /></td>
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<td>Rameen Chaharbaghi, bass</td>
<td><strong>Monkey</strong> - The young prince of the Monkey Kingdom and Francine’s brother. His real name is George but he likes to go by “Monkey” instead. He’s often told that someday he’ll be king which fills him with pride. However, he’d often rather be eating bananas or getting into trouble.</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Costume Sketch" /></td>
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<td><strong>Monkey King</strong> - Father to our two young heros, he loves his family but worries about the kingdom.</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Costume Sketch" /></td>
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<td><strong>Crocodile</strong> - a smooth talker, but ultimately not too bright.</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Costume Sketch" /></td>
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<td><strong>Lady Tiger</strong> - The obsequious wife who constantly praises the Tiger Lord. She also has a flair for choreography.</td>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Costume Sketch" /></td>
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Costume design sketches by Clair Hummel
Praised as “strikingly original” (New York Times), composer Kamala Sankaram has received commissions from Beth Morrison Projects, HERE Arts Center, Opera on Tap, and Anthony Braxton’s Tri-Centric Orchestra, among others. She is the recipient of a Jonathan Larson Award from the American Theater Wing and has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, MAP Fund, Opera America, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Meet the Composer, the Augustine Foundation, the Anna Sosenko Trust, and the Asian Women’s Giving Circle. Residencies and fellowships include the MacDowell Colony, the Watermill Center, the Citizens, HERE Arts Center, CAP21, Con Edison/Exploring the Metropolis, the Hermitage, and American Lyric Theater. As a performer, Sankaram has been hailed as “an impassioned soprano with blazing high notes” (Wall Street Journal). For more information, visit - http://kamalasankaram.com/

David Johnston is an award-winning playwright, librettist, and screenwriter. His plays have been performed and read at The New Group, Moving Arts, The Neighborhood Playhouse, HB Playwrights Foundation, and Ensemble Studio Theatre. New York productions with Blue Coyote Theater Group include Coney; Conversations on Russian Literature; a new adaptation of The Oresteia (Time Out Best of 2007); Busted Jesus Comix (GLAAD nominee 2005, London, Los Angeles, DC Cap Fringe); A Bush Carol, or George Dubya and the Xmas of Evil; and Effie Jean in Tahiti (the latter two with music and lyrics by Stephen Speights). Current projects include the Czech Republic premiere of Busted Jesus Comix in Prague, May 2016; a new film directed by Kevin Newbury with music by Jimmy Lopez, Epiphany V; a new play-in-development, Pelicans; and Monkey & Francine in the City of Tigers. Since 2012, David has been the executive director of Exploring the Metropolis, Inc., the only New York City-based nonprofit focused exclusively on workspace issues for performing artists, organizations, and facilities. For more information, visit - http://davidjohnstonplaywright.com/
According to David Johnston, the characters in this brand new story were inspired by age-old folktales, epic poems, modern comic books, and even Kung Fu movies.

This includes the Ramayana, an ancient Indian epic poem which narrates the struggle of the divine prince Rama to rescue his wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. Hanuman (pictured on right) is the monkey-companion of Rama. He is viewed as the ideal combination of “strength, heroic initiative and assertive excellence” and “loving, emotional devotion.” He symbolizes the human qualities of inner self-control, faith and service to a cause, hidden behind the first impressions of a being who looks like a monkey.

Hanuman is stated by scholars to be the inspiration for the allegory-filled adventures of the monkey hero, Sun Wukong, in the Xiyouji (Journey to the West) – the great Chinese poetic novel (pictured on left). He is a monkey born from a stone who acquires supernatural powers through Taoist practices.

Another source of inspiration were the Amar Chitra Katha comic books, which aim to spread knowledge and create a better awareness about Indian mythology. Here is a sample comic that features an encounter with a tiger:

GO TO PAGE 13 TO CREATE YOUR OWN COMIC BOOK!
Musical Influences

Composer **Kamala Sankaram** combined several musical styles to create this unique, world premiere. She drew from her diverse artistic background which inspired a fresh take on opera.

She sent us some fun YouTube links that highlight her source material:

Bollywood legend **RD Burman** (pictured on left), “Mera Pyaar Shalimar” is a good example of his ability to combine Latin influences with Indian music: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAAFE1u6fuY

Kamala loves this song, “Lekar Hum Deewana Dil”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1rAsrjAeU0

**Mulatu Astatke** (pictured on right), “Mulatu of Ethiopia” - father of Ethiopian jazz: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrjxHiUx1ps

Frances Bebey, “Sanza Nocturne” - mixed traditional sanza (mbira) with psychedelia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7033W-8meI

**Kamala is in a band called Bombay Rickey!**

The music of **Monkey & Francine** also uses Hindustani ragas: Sudh Sarang and Chandranandan. Ragas are found in Hindustani music, a form of classical music from Northern India. Ragas are most similar to Greek modes, like the Dorian and Phrygian scale. Ragas gain their character from the number of notes within a scale, the actual pitches, the order of pitches in ascending versus descending passages, and the relative importance of notes within the scale.

Scales are notated using swara, which is similar to solfege in Western music (made famous in *The Sound of Music* by Rodgers & Hammerstein):
Sa (Do), Ri (Re), Ga (Mi) Ma (Fa), Pa (So), Da (La), Ni (Ti)

Notes may be raised or lowered by a half step. This is usually indicated by case, so in a scale starting on C, an E flat would be written as lowercase “ga.”

Descending (avaroha) passages may use different notes than ascending (aroha) passages, so you’ll usually be given the swara for each.

Ragas used in **Monkey & Francine** include:

- **Sudh Sarang**
  - Aroha - S m R M P N S
  - Avaroha - S N D P M P D P m R S

- **Chandranandan (Raga for the moon)**
  - Aroha - S G m d n S
  - Avaroha - R S n d P m G m g S
Librettist David Johnston said comic books were a big inspiration in the creation of this opera. Simply add more blocks if you need them. Will you write a sequel to this opera or a brand new story? Send us copies of your artwork and we may feature them on Facebook!