

AROUND TOWN

FRIDAY, AUGUST 1, 2008

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In the jungle, the quiet jungle ...



'The Lion King' Broadway extravaganza roars into Taipei Arena for a three-week run beginning tomorrow

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

Everyone knows of *The Lion King* (1994) movie, and who hasn't heard of the stage musical version? Given that publicity for the touring show's Taipei leg has been going on for nearly a decade, it's not too much of a surprise that the cheaper tickets sold out quickly.

Performing at the Taipei Arena starting with a matinee tomorrow at 2:30pm and running until Aug. 24, the cast and crew of *The Lion King* arrived in Taipei last week to set up the massive production, which is most notable for its extensive use of sophisticated puppets and models to bring the animal life of the Pridelands, the mythical African land of the story, to life.

The controversy over the show's similarities to the Japanese anime television show *Kimba the White Lion* is well-known.

The incorporation of puppetry makes *The Lion King* interesting from a purely theatrical point of view, as this brings complex conceptions of how we see and perceive action on stage into a mainstream popular production. It is a wonderful way of introducing children to the potential of ancient art forms such as *bunraku*

(an ancient Japanese art form where performers manipulate life-sized puppets while remaining fully visible themselves), and shadow puppetry, both of which are used extensively in *The Lion King*.

The stage production, with its huge array of props (though the touring production forgoes some of the more sophisticated stage effects of the West End and Broadway productions), is nothing less than spectacular. Musically, too, there is much to interest even those who have seen the film, for many songs were incorporated into the stage production to flesh out the script. In addition to the songs that many people are already familiar with written by that superstar pairing of Elton John and Tim Rice, there is a significant contribution from the Grammy Award-winning composer from Soweto, South Africa, Lebo Morake, whose voice is first heard in the famous chant at the beginning of the movie.

This thoroughly appealing combination of pop music sophistication and the vibrancy of African music, of modern stagecraft and millennia old artistic traditions, has held up well over the years — held up even better than the film, whose animation techniques already look flat compared to the succession of increasingly mind-blowing animated creations from *Toy Story* (1995) to the current spectacular *WALL-E*.

The result created by the stage show is probably best summed up by the song *Hakuna Matata* by Elton John and Tim Rice. The title is Swahili and is commonly translated as "no worries." Kham, which organized the Taipei run, has opted for a long run at one of the capital's biggest venues, and is likely to have "no worries" putting bums on seats. *Hakuna Matata* was one of three songs from *The Lion King* movie to be



Tony and Olivier award-winning Broadway and West End musical *The Lion King* visits Taiwan this month for a series of performances at the Taipei Arena. PHOTOS COURTESY OF KHAM

nominated in the Best Song category for the 1995 Academy Awards, and lost only to *Can You Feel the Love Tonight*, another song from the same movie. You don't really need much more testament to the quality of a musical than that.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: The Lion King
WHEN: Tomorrow at 2:30pm; tomorrow through Aug. 10, Aug. 12 to Aug. 17 and Aug. 19 to Aug. 23 at 7:30pm; Aug. 9, Aug. 10, Aug. 16, Aug. 17 and Aug. 23 at 2:30pm; Aug. 24 at 11am and 6pm
WHERE: Taipei Arena (台北小巨蛋), 2, Nanjing E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市南京東路四段2號)
TICKETS: NT\$800 to NT\$6,600, available at www.kham.com.tw
ON THE NET: www.lionkingtaiwan.com.tw

Canadian artists play that 'junky' music

Scrap Arts Music combines athletic showmanship with instruments made from dishwasher hoses, two-by-fours and other found objects

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

Gregory Kozak's stainless steel artillery shells make a bang — though not the kind you might expect.

Instead of filling canisters with explosives to blow stuff up, he chops them into different lengths and creates a battery of chimes that wouldn't sound out of place in a church.

Another of Kozak's inventions is a tree of cymbals made from scrap metal. He calls it "junk-on-a-stick."

These are just two of the found objects-cum-instruments Scrap Arts Music — a five-person ensemble that makes its Taipei debut on Thursday night — uses to make percussive tunes.

"All the Indian, Asian and African music that I love, the people who play them build instruments out of the crap and debris around them," Kozak said in an interview with *Mirror*, a Montreal weekly. "They can't afford to send away to

Taiwan for their bongos or to Philadelphia for their metal shells. So they get resourceful and creative and these amazing craftsmen come up with instruments that I love, things you can pick up and go, 'Wow, a human being made this,'" he said.

When Kozak was a child he would annoy his parents by banging on pots and pans. Today he channels this energy into inventing things like the "annoyaphone," a wind instrument made from a dishwasher hose, bagpipe reeds and balloons.

The men and women of Scrap Arts Music also bang on the "B-52 drum," a stack of 1950s vintage oil cans; they strum the "mojo," a stringed instrument built using a sailboard mast, steel bowls and piano and bass strings; and they hammer on the "plankophone," a kind of marimba constructed from two-by-fours and wooden planks from condemned buildings that can be played by up to six people at a time.



The men and women of Scrap Arts Music bang on instruments they made themselves from recycled materials in highly physical performances. PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW ASPECT CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

With a program of songs with names like *Bowls and Plates* and *Some Assembly Required*, it isn't difficult to imagine what inspires them.

But there is more to Scrap Arts Music than collecting and beating on recycled wood and aluminum. Every musical beat in its frenetic performances is aligned with a kick, jab or jump.

Underlying the music and showmanship is an environmental consciousness rarely seen in other music acts touring the world. Kozak spends hours scouring junkyards for scraps and welds his own instruments — many of which look like they belong in an art gallery.

Having trained with A-list percussionists including Pandit Pran Nath and Abraham Adzenyah, Kozak builds on the work of avant-garde composers such as Harry Partch and Wendy Mae Chambers.

Kozak founded Scrap Arts Music with Justine Murdy, an architect who helps

him design the instruments, lighting and costumes, and does much of the behind-the-scenes work necessary for a globe-trotting performance troupe.

For their Taipei shows, Murdy and Kozak have gathered a lineup of musicians that runs the gamut of world music. Richard Burrows and Greg Samek are percussionists who perform regularly with North American symphony orchestras. Classically trained musician Christa Mercey studied West African and Japanese taiko drumming, and Simon Thomsen provides a Latin flair with his Brazilian grooves.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Scrap Arts Music
WHERE: National Theater, Taipei City
WHEN: Thursday through Aug. 9 at 7:30pm and Aug. 10 at 2:30pm
TICKETS: NT\$500 to NT\$3,000, available through NTCH ticketing