

***The Jungle Book* is director Logan Ellis' second production at Marin Theatre Company; last season, he delighted audiences with a rendition of *The Little Mermaid*. MTC literary manager Laura Brueckner caught up with this rising San Francisco artist and asked him to tell us about his process for this wild new show.**

**So - Mowgli is a girl in your production! How did you arrive at that idea?**

I knew through our casting work on the play that I wanted to work with Sango Tajima in the role of Mowgli, and after noting that Greg [Banks, *Jungle Book* playwright]'s adaptation has already defined some of the characters outside of their traditional gender identities, I was interested to see if we could extend that same treatment to Mowgli. Classic works like *The Jungle Book* are constantly being reinvented, updated, and claimed by new voices, and I hope that this experiment welcomes a fresh audience to find themselves inside Mowgli's story.

**What has been most exciting for you about shaping this classic story with this new vision?**

It's an exciting challenge to honor the source material and its legacy while finding new ways to make the experience both contemporary and specifically theatrical. Thankfully, Greg has done a lot of that work for us in the writing, so I've been focused on making the physical presentation something imaginative, interactive, and memorable.

Of course, the popular film adaptations will be in the minds of many audience members, and I've been eager to see how that plays out when we get into performances. Photography and film have allowed our kids to be able to see a vision of the jungle far more specific than what Kipling's original readers would have experienced when they only had the words. I'm interested in that old effect though, and wanted to lead a design that worked as a jumping-off point for imagining further into the world without having to see it in a literal way.

**Which other characters are receiving a similarly fresh treatment in your production, and why?**

Greg has built all the characters of his story into just five actors, with several left out or completely rebuilt from Kipling's original writing. In addition to their gender identities, characters have new personalities, speaking patterns, and performed actions. The actors and I have thus approached each character based foremost on the evidence provided in Greg's language and plot. So, I like to think that all of them have been given a fresh coat of paint!

**The scenic design and actor physicality are both incredibly striking. What challenges did you and your team face in developing the show's visual world?**

The design world is a mash-up between a jungle landscape and a playground for kids. I recall the mighty jungle gyms of childhood, and how they worked not only as a place to run around and express energy, but also as a canvas for playing out stories.

Yusuke [Soi]'s scenic design is simple and beautiful. As a geodesic dome peaking at nine feet in the air, it's also pretty deadly. The actors have spent the entirety of the last week working their bodies into a place where the climbing, swinging, jumping, and general shenanigans of the staging can be safe and confident on our dome of a set. The result is an intense spectacle that proves how close the experiences of fun and danger can be. Ultimately, I hope that audiences walk into the theatre and want to leap onto the stage and participate...but then realize that they might need some more gymnastics training first!