

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Monkey

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by Les Winspear

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EXTRACT

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*Monkey* is a classic tale based on the Chinese mythological novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en, written during the Ming Dynasty and based on traditional Chinese folk tales. It's a gripping tale rife with the magic of the orient – dragons, ghosts, gods and monsters. The young monk Tripitaka joins the irrepressible Monkey, Pigsy and Sandy on a long and dangerous journey to save the world. Together they travel far, battle countless demons and face impossible odds before reaching their sublime goal.

**Cast of characters:** CHENG – The storyteller  
PAGEANT ACTORS  
MONKEY  
XUANZANG/TRIPITAKA – Buddhist monk  
IMPERIAL SOLDIERS x 2  
KUAN YIN – Goddess of Compassion  
EMPEROR TAIZONG  
HSIAO – Emperor's advisor  
LI – Servant to Tripitaka  
PO – Servant to Tripitaka  
ROBBER KINGS x 2  
DRAGON  
TS'AI – Servant of Kao  
KAO – A farmer  
PIGSY  
SANDY  
HUNGRY DEMON  
OLD WOMAN  
WOMAN 2  
GUARDIAN OF THE SPRING  
LESSER DEMONS x 3  
SILVER HORN  
GOLDEN HORN

*MONKEY* was first produced in January 2005 in the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens by Big Monkey Inc.

**Director:** Benjamin Winspear                      **Design:** Kim Scott

**Lighting:** Marianne Taylor

**Actors:** Sara Cooper  
Rebecca Headlam  
Robert Jarman  
Stuart Loone  
Sean Monro  
Laura Purcell  
Jamie Unicomb  
John Xintavelonis

**Musicians:** Rob Rule, Peta Hooper

## MONKEY

A CURTAINED CART ENTERS, SEEMINGLY SELF-PROPELLED. IT MOVES ACROSS THE SPACE AND STOPS. THE HEAD OF CHENG THE STORYTELLER APPEARS THROUGH THE CURTAINS OF THE CART. AS HE SPEAKS THE STORY IS ILLUSTRATED IN PAGEANT FORM BY THE REST OF THE CAST.

CHENG        A long, long time ago, before, before... before the beginning of time, only chaos existed.

Then from the dark, swirling cloud the cosmic giant, Pangu awoke and split the void. He pushed up the sky, trod down the earth then fell back into a deep, deep sleep. His snoring breath became the wind, his arms and legs the mountains of the world, his hair and beard became the stars in the sky and his eyes were the sun and the moon.

THE PAGEANT CONTINUES.

From the womb of the tallest mountain a magic stone egg was formed. For a thousand years it soaked up the truth of heaven and the beauty of earth, it drank in the hot essence of the sun and the cool splendour of the moon, till one day the stone egg cracked open. This was the birth of the Stone Monkey.

MONKEY       Handsome, aren't I? Charming too. And I've a wit that's sharper than my teeth.

CHENG        The stone monkey was strong, brave and clever and became king of all monkeys, but he wanted more.

MONKEY       I want to live forever. I want to learn how to fly. [HE LAUGHS.]

CHENG        And he did, from the sage Subodhi, in the Cave of the Setting Moon.

MONKEY       Teach me more, I can take it.

CHENG        He studied with every great master, drank in knowledge, and as his powers increased, his body transformed.

THE MONKEY ADOPTS FLYING STANCE.

MONKEY       Stand aside, I am Sun Wu Kong, Great Sage Equalling Heaven.

CHENG        He flew to the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea and grabbed the cosmic cudgel that was used to beat the path for the Milky Way. Then he rose to the heavens to wreak havoc amongst the planets and stars.

BATTLE SCENE UPSTAGE.

ACTOR 1 That monkey's eaten the peaches of Immortality.

ACTOR 2 He has stolen Lao Tsi's elixir of life.

ACTOR 3 He's guzzled every drop of wine from the Jade Emperor's banquet.

CHENG Every star and planet in the sky raged against Monkey, till he was finally caught in Lao Tsi's Diamond Jade Noose and dragged kicking and screaming before Lord Buddha of the Western Paradise.

CHENG PLAYS THE PART OF BUDDHA.

BUDDHA So you are the little fellow causing all this commotion.

MONKEY And you're the interfering Buddha who's spoiling all my fun. Put me down.

BUDDHA Too proud to obey the Jade Emperor, eh?

MONKEY That old fart, he's been in heaven far too long, it's time for someone new to take control.

BUDDHA You?

MONKEY Why not? I'll turn this stuffy universe on its head and dance all the way to eternity.

BUDDHA Is that so? All right, you can have the job, the universe will be yours, if you can meet one challenge.

MONKEY Bring it on? What is it?

BUDDHA All you have to do is jump off the palm of my hand.

MONKEY You're kidding? That's too easy.

BUDDHA It might seem that way, but be warned, if you lose, your fate will be in my hands.

MONKEY The next time I see you I'll be the ruler of heaven.

CHENG Then Monkey jumped with all his might. He shot through the air at the speed of light, the universe blurred around him.

HE LANDS.

MONKEY Ha! Not only did I jump off the Buddha's hand but I've made it to the end of the universe. Look at this, the five pillars of stone that mark the limits of existence. Who said I couldn't do it? Better leave my tag so there's no question I made it this far.

HE WRITES ON ONE OF THE UPRIGHT STONES.

MONKEY 'Monkey was 'ere.' Perfect. And for good measure I might just...

HE MIMES TAKING A PISS AGAINST THE BASE OF THE STONE PILLAR.

MONKEY Ah the sweet smell of success! [LAUGHS]

CHENG Then Monkey made a second almighty leap and landed back in the palm of Buddha's hand.

MONKEY Hey, I'm back. Tell the Jade Emperor to pack his things. Heaven is now mine.

BUDDHA Not so fast.

MONKEY I jumped off your hand didn't I? Got to the end of the universe didn't I? What are you – thick or blind?

BUDDHA You've been nowhere, you stinking ape. You were in the palm of my hand the whole time.

MONKEY Impossible! I saw the five pillars, left my mark. Follow me and I'll show you.

BUDDHA No need, look here, on my finger, it's very small but it says, 'Monkey was 'ere,' and... phew! Couldn't you have done that in a more appropriate place?

MONKEY What! But I was... it was... No, no, you tricked me you big... Buddha.

BUDDHA I think you've had your fun. Now it's time for my side of the bargain.

MONKEY No! No! No! No!

CHENG Then Buddha tightened his grip on the monkey and plunged him back down to earth, where his hand became the Mountain of the Five Elements. The ape was trapped beneath a hundred thousand tonnes of unyielding granite. And there he stayed, in a cold prison, paying for his arrogance for a very, very long time.  
Five hundred years passed and China was once again in chaos. Corruption stained the streets, prisons were full to overflowing, so much unhappiness filled the land.

THE GODDESS KUAN-YIN APPEARS ABOVE WATCHING THE SCENE.

CHENG But there was some good amongst it all. The goddess of compassion, Bodhisattva Kuan-yin had a plan to save China from ruin.

THE SCENE FREEZES. XUANZANG IS STRUCK FOR A SECOND BY THE DIRECT COMMUNICATION OF THE GODDESS.

She found one man who was pure of heart and clear of mind.  
Xuanzang, a Buddhist monk.

IT IS A COMPRESSED MOMENT IN WHICH XUANZANG'S MISSION IS COMMUNICATED TO HIM.  
TWO IMPERIAL SOLDIERS ENTER, ONE OF THE SOLDIERS PUSHES XUANZANG TO THE GROUND.  
CHENG BECOMES A TRADER.

TRADER Hey, what are you doing? Leave the monk alone. He's sworn to peace.

SOLDIER 1 Mind your own business.

SOLDIER 2 And we'll mind ours.

TRADER Stop that. You're supposed to serve the people, you're nothing but thugs.

SOLDIER 2 Thugs? Is that what we are?

SOLDIER 1 Maybe we're thieves as well.

THE SOLDIERS TURN TOWARDS THE TRADER'S WARES.

TRADER Get away from there. That's all I have.

SOLDIER 2 All you had. Now, run along, filth, or we'll throw you in prison.

HE TRIES TO STOP THEM AS THEY TURN THINGS OUT OF HIS CART.

TRADER I'm not afraid of you.

SOLDIER 1 You should be.

TRADER Even a mouse will attack when the stakes are high.

A FIGHT ENSUES BUT THE TRADER IS SOON OVERPOWERED. THE SOLDIERS START TO BEAT THE TRADER.

SOLDIER 2 Seems the stakes weren't high enough.

SOLDIER 1 Take a good look at the daylight, it's the last you'll see for a long time.

XUANZANG Why do you treat him like this? He's done nothing wrong.

SOLDIER 1 Shut up, monk.

XUANZANG You should be ashamed. That's no way for soldiers to behave.

SOLDIER 2 You know nothing, now get on your way.

XUANZANG I know the emperor would be appalled by your behaviour.

FANFARE OFF. DRUMS UNDER.

SOLDIER 1 Then why don't you tell him. He's cleaning up this rat-hole today. And that means instant death for vermin like you [TO TRADER].

XUANZANG But he's innocent, you know that.

SOLDIER 1 Enough. Get down on your knees. The Emperor approaches.

SOLDIER 2 Kow-tow. Show your respect.

ALL BOW LOW AS THE EMPEROR, HIS ADVISER HSIAO AND OTHERS OF HIS ENTOURAGE SWEEP IN.

EMPEROR Stand up. What is happening here?

SOLDIER 1 Your Highness, this man assaulted imperial soldiers in the course of their duty.

EMPEROR Then take him away. He shall be executed tomorrow.

XUANZANG STEPS FORWARD AND BOWS.

XUANZANG Forgive me, Your Highness, may I speak?

HSIAO No, monk. This is a matter of state, not religion.

XUANZANG Perhaps it is, but this poor man's only crime was to save me from being attacked by -

HSIAO Enough, he's already dead.

XUANZANG Then I shall pray for Your Majesty's eternal suffering.

EMPEROR What are you saying?

XUANZANG Condemning an innocent man would weigh heavily even on the soul of an emperor.

EMPEROR You dare to question me. Take him away. He can die with his 'innocent' friend.

XUANZANG IS SEIZED BY THE SOLDIERS. THEY START TO DRAG HIM OFF.

XUANZANG Then I'll pray for the mercy and compassion of the Bodhisattva.

HE CALLS OUT AS THEY START TO DRAG HIM AWAY.

XUANZANG Kuan-yin. Kuan-yin. Kuan-yin.

EMPEROR Huh? Kuan-yin? What is this? Wait. Why do you call her name? And why three times?

XUANZANG Because she is the goddess of mercy, compassion and understanding. And because you knew I would.

EMPEROR Liar. What sorcery is this? How can you know my thoughts?

XUANZANG I know the goddess has spoken to you.

HSIAO You insolent monk. That's enough. Take him away.

EMPEROR No, wait, it is true.

HSIAO Your Highness?

EMPEROR Last night, in a dream, the goddess came to me. Told me I had failed my country, that my people were lost and I had forgotten my heart.

HSIAO But, Your Highness, it was just a dream. We all have dreams.

EMPEROR She said today a stranger would speak her name three times as he faced death and that the stranger would become my brother. You are...?

XUANZANG Xuanzang, Your Highness. Your humble servant.

EMPEROR So the Bodhisattva has chosen you to rid my country of pain and suffering?

XUANZANG [NODS]

EMPEROR But how, when my soldiers and armies cannot keep the peace?

XUANZANG I am to journey to the Thunder Monastery on the Vulture Peak, in the far west and bring back the Buddhist scriptures.

HSIAO Scriptures?

XUANZANG The Tripitaka, holy sutras that will heal hearts and save souls.

EMPEROR A worthy quest. My people have lost their way. Lost their hope.

XUANZANG The scriptures will untie the knots of injustice and save the innocent from disaster.

HSIAO But to reach the western heaven will take years. There'll be wild beasts and evil demons along the way. Why can't the goddess just fly by and drop them at our feet? Wouldn't that be easier?

XUANZANG We hold more precious those things that are hard won. The journey is also the lesson.

EMPEROR Such courage is admirable. For this loyal service I will indeed make you my bond brother and give you a name suited to your task. You seek the three baskets of scriptures, the Tripitaka. I think this is the name to see you to your goal and back.

XUANZANG Tripitaka.

EMPEROR So be it. Come, brother, we must prepare you for your most difficult ordeal.

ALL EXIT LEAVING CHENG TO COMMENT.

CHENG So the emperor furnished his new brother Tripitaka with a royal passport, gave him a horse to ride and two loyal servants to walk by his side. The path would be long, the way unknown, but they set out with great hope and stout hearts. The journey to the west had begun.

TRIPITAKA AND THE TWO SERVANTS LI AND PO ENTER. TRIPITAKA RIDES A HORSE AS THE OTHERS WALK IN FRONT.

LI No I didn't.

PO You did.

LI I did not.

PO You did so.

LI Prove it.

PO I've got nothing to prove.

LI I think you have.

PO No I haven't.

LI You have.

PO Haven't.

TRIPITAKA Thank you, Brother Sand, but these are just the outer garments. The Buddha's eyes will see deep into my heart.

SANDY I don't think he'll be disappointed with what he sees.

PIGSY Come on, let's get to the summit. Have you forgotten about the heavenly banquet?

MONKEY Huh, if he isn't ruled by one organ he's ruled by another.

PIGSY Enough of that. It's perfectly natural to be hungry.

TRIPITAKA This way, come on.

CHENG Onward and upward they marched, scaling the steep slopes of the holy mountain with renewed vigour, but there was still one more obstacle blocking their way.

SANDY Another river? Impossible.

TRIPITAKA There's no bridge. Monkey, what will we do?

MONKEY This is no ordinary river, Master.

PIGSY And he's no ordinary boatman.

CHENG CREATES THE IMAGE OF A BOAT – A MODEL, A SUGGESTION.

CHENG This boat of mine has ferried souls since chaos was divided. Climb aboard.

TRIPITAKA I'm not sure, it doesn't look safe.

SANDY AND PIGSY CLIMB ABOARD.

PIGSY It's not bad.

SANDY Pretty stable.

CHENG A smooth and peaceful ride is promised for all who cross the river at the edge of heaven.

MONKEY Come on, Master, in you get.

TRIPITAKA But wait, your boat, it has no bottom.

MONKEY Go with the flow, Master.

HE FALLS THROUGH INTO THE WATER.

TRIPITAKA Help me up, Monkey.

MONKEY You'll be fine.

MONKEY AND THE OTHERS HELP HIM INTO THE BOAT.

SANDY There you go, Master, right as rain.

TRIPITAKA That's strange, my clothes are dry. And what's that floating downstream? It's a body. There's a body in the water. A corpse, a corpse.

MONKEY Don't be frightened, Master, it's you, it's you.

PIGSY It's you, it's you.

SANDY It is, it's you, Master.

THEY ARE ALL LAUGHING.

CHENG The earthly body, cast aside.

MONKEY No need for that any more. You're free now.

SAND/PIG You're free, free.

CHENG All the dust of the past washed away. Your journey almost over.

THEY'RE AT THE OTHER SIDE. THE BOAT DISAPPEARS, A GONG SOUNDS, MUSIC CHANGES.

TRIPITAKA Everything seems so different on this side.

MONKEY It's always been this way, Master, it's you that's different.

PIGSY There's the top, I can't wait.

SANDY Vulture Peak.

TRIPITAKA The end of our journey.

PIGSY Not far to a full and fat stomach now.

THEY CLIMB THE SLOPE WITH A NEW VIGOUR AND AWARENESS.

CHENG The perfume of spring flowers rose to their nostrils as they passed crouching jade tigers and golden dragons suspended in the rarefied mountain air. Up and up they climbed, through coloured mists and clouds of bliss that clung to noble crags, till eventually they reached the

very top of the holy mountain and bowed in awe before the Tathagata Buddha.

CHENG BECOMES THE VOICE OF TATHAGATA BUDDHA.

BUDDHA So you finally made it. Stand up and let me see your faces.  
[TO SANDY] Ah, Brother Sand, or should I say General Wujing. It has been a long time.

SANDY It has, Lord Buddha, but I've changed my ways, I really have.

BUDDHA No more eating people?

SANDY No, nothing like that, no more bad stuff. I serve my Master now. And you, of course.

BUDDHA Of course. [TO PIGSY] Hmm, Marshall Tian Peng, the pig.

PIGSY Part pig. Part pig. But I've changed too, I'm completely reformed.

BUDDHA No more drunken orgies with cute little moon maidens.

PIGSY [REMEMBERING] Oh yes. I mean no. That was another time, another life. I know better now, believe me.

BUDDHA Good. And Sun Wukong, the irrepressible Monkey, also known as 'big trouble'. Heaven's been very quiet since you were brought down to earth.

MONKEY What can I say, it always was a boring place.

BUDDHA CONTROLS HIS RESPONSE.

BUDDHA And the holy monk Tang Xuanzang, Tripitaka, the Golden Cicada. Your journey was long, your suffering great but you held steadfastly to the faith, well done.

TRIPITAKA With all respect, Lord Buddha, my quest will not be over till I return to China with the holy scriptures.

BUDDHA That's true.

HE GESTURES, A GONG SOUNDS AND THREE SERVANTS ENTER CARRYING BASKETS. THEY PLACE THEM ON THE GROUND AND EXIT.

PIGSY This is it, the moment I've been waiting for, the great feast. I can't wait to get my hands on those heavenly treats.

BUDDHA I see you really are passionate about the holy scriptures, Brother Pig.