

'Princess Jasmine was a huge role model'

Actors of Indian descent proud to lead Broadway's 'Aladdin'

NEW YORK, Oct. 16, (AP) — As kids growing up in different states, Shoba Narayan and Michael Maliakel shared a love of one favorite film — "Aladdin." Both are of Indian descent, and in the animated movie, they saw people who looked like them.

That shared love has gone full-circle this month as Narayan and Maliakel lead the Broadway company of the musical "Aladdin" out of the pandemic, playing Princess Jasmine and the hero from the title, respectively.

"Growing up, there was such little South Asian and Middle Eastern representation in the American media, and Princess Jasmine was really all I had. She was a huge role model to me as someone who was intelligent and strong and independent and beautifully curious, and that's who I wanted to be," says Narayan, who grew up in Pennsylvania.

The pair arrived at "Aladdin" in very different ways. Maliakel is making his Broadway debut, but Narayan is a musical theater veteran, having made her Broadway debut in "Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812" and touring with "Hamilton" as Eliza Hamilton.

She was in "Wicked" as Nessarose when the pandemic shut down Broadway in March 2020. Her agent called in April with the prospect of auditioning for Jasmine. She sang "A Whole New World" over Zoom on gallery mode, pretending to be on a magic carpet. "It was a very unique experience," she says, laughing.

Disney producers flew her to New York to meet face-to-face and go through the material again. Narayan was asked to read with different Aladdin potential actors. She got the gig: "I went from a wicked witch to a Disney princess. Can't complain."

Maliakel, a native of New Jersey, came from the world of opera, a baritone who studied at Johns Hopkins University and the 2014 winner at the National Musical Theatre Competition. He trained his voice to be flexible, waiting for the right window to open.

"I didn't really see a lot of people doing what I wanted to do in the world," he says. "There just wasn't a whole lot of representation. So it's really hard to imagine yourself in those scenarios when you have no one to look up to as a role model or an example of how it could be done."

He played Porter and understudied Raoul in a national tour of "The Phantom of the Opera," which ended its run in Toronto just before the pandemic hit.

Adaptation

"I always dreamed that Broadway might happen someday," he says, laughing. "I'm just kind of dipping my toes into the waters in one of the biggest male roles in the business right now, and it's kind of surreal."

Broadway's "Aladdin" is a musical adaptation of the 1992 movie starring Robin Williams. The musical's story by Chad Beguelin hews close to the film: A street urchin finds a genie in a lamp and hopes to woo a princess while staying true to his values and away from palace intrigue.

Key Alan Menken songs from the film — including "Friend Like Me," "Prince Ali" and "A Whole New World" — are used. The lyricists are the late Howard Ashman, Tim Rice and Beguelin.

The show — and its two new leads — had a few performances

to celebrate Broadway's return from the pandemic this fall before it was forced to close for several days when breakthrough COVID-19 cases were detected. The actors say the safety of the cast, crew and audience are paramount and closing was the smart move.

"This is how we keep theater going in the pandemic," Maliakel says. "The other option is to just not do it at all. And that's not an option. A week's worth of lost performances, when we look back on things in a year or so, I think will just be a little blip on the radar."

They both look back with heart-thumping appreciation at the early performances when they welcomed back theater-starved audiences, who gave the company 3-minute standing ovations just for singing "A Whole New World."

"It is every brown girl's dream to be singing that song on an actual flying carpet," says Narayan. "And the fact that I got to do it on Broadway in the full costume with the lights and the 32-piece orchestra beneath me — oh, my gosh, I really had to hold it together. It was emotional overload for me."

Maliakel recalls that he and his brothers wore out their VHS cassette version of "Aladdin." He remembers having lunchboxes, pajamas and bed sheets with the film's theme. Aladdin was "every little brown kid's prince." Now he is that prince.

"Now, finally, to get to get paid to do it on the world's largest stage — it's not lost on me how crazy that is," he says. "The responsibility of my position right now feels really great. This moment sort of feels bigger than me in some ways, and I don't take that lightly. I think it's a really exciting time."

Variety



This image released by IFC Films shows Vicky Krieps in 'Bergman Island,' a film directed by Mia Hansen-Løve. (AP)

Film

'It's the story of a woman accepting her way'

For Krieps, life & art blend on 'Bergman Island'

By Lindsey Bahr

Vicky Krieps was not Mia Hansen-Løve's first choice to star in "Bergman Island." She wasn't the second, third or 12th choice either because the role of Chris, a filmmaker who goes on a writing retreat to Fårö with her filmmaker husband, already belonged to Greta Gerwig.

But just a few months before filming, Gerwig was told if she wanted to direct "Little Women" it had to happen then. That's where Krieps enters the picture.

Like the rest of the world, Hansen-Løve had fallen for her in "Phantom Thread." And she liked that the actor would add a European flair to the character. Krieps wanted it, too, although it would be complicated — everything is with two children involved.

"The minute I read the email, I knew, 'I'm going to make this movie, but now I'm going to have to tell everyone else and they're not going to be OK with it.' And they weren't," Krieps, 38, said. "I had just planned my year, and it's never easy to negotiate when I can work. For a woman to work, it's always negotiation."

And there was a big catch: The actor who was playing Chris' husband, Tony, had also left and they had yet to find a replacement. So Krieps was going to have to uproot her family and go to an island in the Baltic Sea with very little notice to film a project that is at least partially about a marriage without knowing who her husband is.

"It's not so easy to find a man to play just the husband," she said. "It sounds crazy, but it's true."

Eventually Tim Roth joined as Tony.

It's not the kind of story that's usually told when people are talking about how films get made, when everyone insists that so-and-so was the first and only choice and that everything went according to plan. And yet it's the truth, and however messy and complicated it might be, it also produced something

transcendent that feels like it was always meant to be.

Despite all the reasons not to do it, the pull to "Bergman Island" was strong. And it had very little to do with Ingmar Bergman or his films. In Chris, Krieps saw herself — a woman who was a mother, an artist and a lover, but didn't know what order those identities should take, especially in contrast to a more successful husband.

"It's really a question of, 'Who am I as a woman in my life?'" Krieps said. "It's the story of a woman accepting her way and accepting, that, 'Well, I don't have a technique.'"

Over the course of the film, which opened in theaters Friday, realities start to blur and the audience is transported into Chris's imagination as she tells Tony about an idea for a film: A woman (Mia Wasikowska) who goes to a wedding on Bergman Island and reconnects with an ex (Anders Danielsen Lie).

Similarities

Like all Hansen-Løve films, the story shares some similarities with the director's personal life. She had a relationship and a child with French filmmaker Olivier Assayas.

"(Mia) said, 'as you might know, my movies are always kind of autobiographical, but not really. It's drawn from my life, but it's not really my life. If you want to know, you can ask,'" Krieps said. "But I don't feel the need to know, so I didn't ask. I always knew it was kind of being her in a way. But we never talked about it."

They just trusted one another. Krieps felt like there was an invisible connection that they shared, both knowing how difficult it is to remain creative and productive while also caring for children.

"Sometimes you hear interviews by actors, like 'then I prepared for this role, you know, and I lost so many pounds for one year.' Yeah, well, if I had someone looking after my kids, I would love to pre-

pare like that. I can never prepare like that because it's always on and off," she said in a hushed voice so as not to awaken her kids sleeping a wall away. "But I think that gives us women a different kind of strength which can lead us into different realms or different imaginations."

Krieps has not settled on an answer of what aspect of her life should be the dominating force, by the way, but she's OK with that. Chris helped her get there.

"The most daring and courageous thing is to let go and to leap into the unknown. Like I did in this movie without knowing who my husband is, without knowing who my other lead actor is," she said. "Even in my private life, I have found that this is the only way. Every morning, it's a leap into the unknown. And I do think that inside of this great insecurity of not knowing, there's peace to be found in letting go."

And despite her worries, her kids ended up having a terrific time on holiday in Fårö while she worked. The experience also allowed her to take stock of the attention that was thrust upon her after "Phantom Thread."

"I wasn't suddenly picturing myself being this actress in Hollywood. I did much of the opposite. I kind of went away from Hollywood. My life had changed in a way. I wasn't who I was before, but then I wasn't someone new either and I wasn't going to move to L.A. so who was I then? It was a very strange place to be. It took me really two years to process it," she said.

"I think making 'Bergman Island' really helped me because I had this landscape, this place I could come back to. I could meditate on all these questions... I think the images of the movie are so good because it's transcending from a reality to reality, back to your reality. I think that's what happened with 'Phantom Thread.' I had to get lost in some kind of weird space and then get back." (AP)

PHILADELPHIA: A prominent Bill Cosby accuser filed suit against the actor over a 1990 hotel room encounter in Atlantic City, New Jersey, before the state's two-year window to file older sexual assault claims expires.

Los Angeles artist Lili Bernard told The Associated Press she was prompted in part by Cosby's recent release from prison. The 84-year-old Cosby has been free since June, when the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned his 2018 sexual assault conviction in another case on procedural grounds.

He had served more than two years of a potential 10-year sentence.

The 57-year-old Bernard says Cosby drugged and raped her in a hotel room after promising to mentor her on his top-ranked TV show. She was 26 at the time.

New Jersey's two-year window to file sexual assault lawsuits that would otherwise be considered too old to pursue closes next month.

"When Bill Cosby was released, it retraumatized me, it terrified me. I was really horrified for any woman or girl that would come into contact with him," Bernard told the AP. "The Pennsylvania Supreme Court let a predator back on the streets."

The Pennsylvania trial judge had classified Cosby as a sexually violent predator subject to lifetime supervision, but that finding became moot when the conviction was overturned, leaving Cosby free of any reporting requirements.

Cosby's spokesperson said that so-called "look-back" windows like the one passed in New Jersey violate a person's due process rights.

"This is just another attempt to abuse the legal process, by opening up the flood gates for people who never presented an ounce of evidence," spokesperson Andrew Wyatt said, noting that Cosby maintains his innocence and would fight allegations to "the highest court in these United States of America."

Prosecutors in suburban Philadelphia must decide soon whether to appeal the reversal of his conviction in their case to the US Supreme Court.

A jury had convicted Cosby of sexually assaulting Temple University sports administrator Andrea Constand at his home in

January 2004 after incapacitating her with three blue pills. Cosby was arrested in 2015, days before the 12-year statute of limitations expired.

The state Supreme Court said the case should not have gone to trial because Cosby believed he had a binding promise from an earlier prosecutor that he would



Bernard



Cosby

never be charged. (AP)

COPENHAGEN, Denmark:

Danish police have confiscated a high-performance luxury car after its new owner was caught speeding as he drove it home from Germany to Norway, a northern Danish newspaper reported.

The man, an Iraqi citizen resident in Norway who was not identified, was registered as driving at 236 kph (147 mph) in his Lamborghini Huracan on a stretch of highway where the top speed is 130 kph (81 mph).

Under a new Danish law, police can seize the vehicles of reckless drivers and auction them off,

with the money going into Danish coffers. The Nordjyske newspaper said the man had bought the car hours earlier in Germany for 2 million kroner (\$310,000).

Jess Falberg, the on-duty officer with the northern Denmark police, told Nordjyske that the owner was "a little annoyed" when the car was seized. (AP)