

Proctors Theatre, Schenectady, NY

Life of Pi, based on the best-selling novel of the same name by Yann Martel adapted for the stage by Lolita Chakrabarti; directed by Max Webster.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“I went to three churches...”



Photo provided by the company

Good theater is great story-telling. Pi, the protagonist of this story tells his own stories about his life and his survival of a shipwreck in the Pacific Ocean. He tells three versions of his story, and it is up to the listeners (onstage and in the audience) to decide on which to believe and hopefully to understand the other versions. Pi is a teenager whose family, for political reasons, are forced from their homeland along with many of the zoo animals they own. Traveling to America their ship is scuttled and everyone except Pi drowns. He survives more than 127 days in a lifeboat with no food or water. Interviewed in a hospital he tells his stories. Each in its own way is remarkable.

Belief, and the ability to believe, is at the core of this show. If we can't buy his story we can't buy this show. His recent religious experiences in Islam, Cristian, and Hindu religions have left him confused. His stories of survival are influenced by these creeds give us his three tales of survival, solo time, time with a crazed ship's cook, time with an adult male Bengal tiger. The last version takes precedence in this play.

The company of more than twenty players are choreographed throughout the play so that we always feel that sense of being lost at sea is inescapable. Whether in the hospital, lost at sea or island-bound, Pi is in constant motion, unceasingly active for over two

hours. The actor's melodrama leaves him no options. Combined with the superb puppetry of the tiger, the show is mesmerizing and this is abetted by the set and lighting. It is impossible to ignore the complex relationships in the story and on the stage that make this show unique. It is almost like being absorbed in a difficult dream, one you remember, don't understand and can't easily shake.

Is Life of Pi for everyone? No. It isn't a children's show, though it is recommended for those over the age of 8. Is it for adults suffering issues with reality? I don't think so. Is it a good show? Absolutely. It's a special show.

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Life of Pi plays at Proctors Theater in Schenectady, NY through February 23. Contact the theater for tickets at proctorscollaborative.org;