

THE STORY OF MAHAJANAKA

by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej

dramatized by Shaun MacLoughlin

CAST:

Indra
Mani Mekhala
King Bad Fruit
Prince Poor Fruit
Poison Fruit – the evil courtier
Mahajanaka as boy
Mahajanaka as adult
His mother
The Brahma
AND EXTRAS AS COMPANIES ALLOW

Author's Notes:

- 1. Playmaking is a collaborative venture. I hope therefore that my partners will forgive this Englishman's ignorance of Thai culture and of the wisdom of Buddhism and will help him to learn.*
- 2. The Production will be fluid and flexible. The dancers and / or extras can change costume and masks on stage, manipulate material and move props, and play such different parts as peasants, concubines, soldiers, shipwrecked sailors, mango pickers, monsters from the deep, etc, etc.*
- 3. The production can also be modified to accommodate the number of cast, time for rehearsal, and number and creativity of props.*

The play opens with the Celestial beings Indra (the King of the Gods) and Mani Mekhala (the Goddess) up stage left and right on rostra or platforms or towers observing the action of the play.

Downstage left or right there is a small orchestra: wind, strings and percussion, playing something soothing, a simple melody that we shall later recognise as the music to Mani Mekhala's and Mahajanaka's song. The orchestra may enter the action when required.

Stage hands/dancers/extras bring on long strands of dark blue, black and grey silk (or silk like material). (Later this will be turned over to represent bright green mango tress with yellow fruit). The extras gently wave the silk to simulate the motion of the sea.

INDRA: I am Indra, King of the Gods
MANI: And I am the Goddess, Mani Mekhala.
INDRA: We look down in love
MANI: On this crazy world.
INDRA: Your salvation comes from Knowledge
MANI: And your knowledge comes from within
INDRA: But we can guide you
MANI: Through the telling of stories
INDRA: Thailand is rich in stories

*Between the strips of silk sea the silhouette of a sailing ship appears. We can see the mast, the poop and the bows. (Having these separate will help when the ship breaks up in the storm)
Behind the ship, as if he is on it, is the enlightened being The MAHAJANAKA, a magnificent figure of a man.*

MANI: Tonight we shall tell you the story of Mahajanaka, the great being, the enlightened one
INDRA: So that you too may become enlightened.
MANI: Don't laugh.

She wags her finger at some of the audience, hopefully making some of them laugh

MANI: It is possible - even for you.
INDRA: The Mahajanaka was the rightful heir to the Kingdom of Mithila in India.
MANI: Long long ago
INDRA: So long ago not even the most powerful computer could measure the time
MANI: He was sailing to Suvarnabhumi.
INDRA: That's present day Thailand
MANI: To make his fortune to buy back his kingdom

From here the music changes, becomes faster and more dramatic, the dancers begin to manipulate the silk sea violently into a storm. It gets darker. There is thunder and lightning.

INDRA: Off the coast of Burma there was a violent storm.
MANI: The ship was swamped by a great wave.
INDRA: A Tsunami.
MANI: This was created by the Great Crab, who lives in the depths of the ocean
INDRA: Who plays with the sea
MANI: And who makes the tides.
INDRA: But today the great crab was disturbed by so many people's evil deeds.

The silhouette of the ship rocks and other characters appear screaming and praying and begging God and Buddha and Mahomet. As well as other characters, cloth dolls, representing desperate and frightened people, are thrown into the sea. They have Thai and English notices on them, such as "greed", "anger", "lust", etc. They are devoured by fishes and sea monsters that are also hand puppets or papier maché or hinged cardboard cut-outs jaws, manipulated by the dancers or by dancers dressed as fishes and sea monsters. We also see the great claws of the great crab. As these rise above the sea, between the strips of material, a deep woodwind sounds an appropriate note.

DROWNING MEN: Save me!
Help!!!
Buddha help!
Jesus save me!
Allah!

Poison Fruit has a mask and/or face paint that makes him look like a snake

POISON FRUIT: Help me! Help me!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

But they disappear beneath the waves or are devoured by sea monsters. Some of the sea becomes red with blood (red strips of material).

INDRA: Only the Enlightened One was calm. He took action to survive. He filled his belly with butter mixed with sugar for energy and rubbed oil into his skin to protect himself from the cold.

We shall need to rehearse a way in which he will appear to dive into the sea. He will dive into clear blue water away from the blood. It could be that he climbs onto a mast held by extras, where he eats and rubs oil in before diving onto a sheet that is a part of the bluer sea held by other extras.

INDRA: Then he dived into the sea. And swam strongly.
MANI He swam for seven days and seven nights. He swam without hope of reward.
INDRA: He simply persevered. And as he swam he meditated on the Buddhist perfections.

Some heavenly female musicians join Mani and begin to strum the main theme that will develop into the song. Another of her ladies in waiting is painting Mani's finger nails and another arranging her hair, so that Mani's face is turned away from Mahajanaka.

MANI At this time I was having too much fun in the gardens of paradise. I was not attending to my duty of looking after those who care for their mothers. I should always protect them from drowning. But my spirit communed with him on another level and we sang to each other across the waters.

The music segues into the song 1 (Patience). Note: We progress through 8 of the 10 Buddhist perfections as Mahajanaka swims

MANI: (SINGS) Lonely man,
Why don't you sink?
MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) Because I don't beg,
I prefer to think.
MANI (SINGS) Why are you swimming
Alone in the sea.
MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) Let me tell you
My history.

The music ends. Mahajanaka swims to the down stage left or right to observe the action. The dancers peel back the sea and the set becomes the throne room of Mithila.

INDRA: King Bad Fruit was Mahajanaka's father and Prince Poor Fruit, the viceroy and commander of the army, was his uncle.
MANI: Poison Fruit was a jealous courtier whose venomous words did much damage.

King Bad Fruit *is carried on his throne and so is the Queen, the mother of Mahajanaka seated on hers. She is a creature of exquisite beauty. She is very still during this opening passage of the play. On King Bad Fruit's right is his brother, the commander of the army, Prince Poor Fruit. Poison Fruit, whom we have already seen shipwrecked, is whispering in the ears of concubines, who then whisper in each others' ears. Poison Fruit approaches the King.*

POISON FRUIT: Your Majesty, may I have a word?
BAD FRUIT: Yes?
POISON FRUIT: I feel it is my duty
BAD FRUIT: Go on
POISON FRUIT: I don't want to speak evil
BAD FRUIT: Come to the point

Poison Fruit *looks furtively at Poor Fruit*

POISON FRUIT: It's about your brother
BAD FRUIT: My brother?
POISON FRUIT: I don't know how to say this
BAD FRUIT: Go on
POISON FRUIT: You need to be on your guard
BAD FRUIT: Okay?
POISON FRUIT: He's plotting to kill you. He wants your throne
BAD FRUIT: My brother!?
POISON FRUIT: A Kingdom cannot be divided against itself. Brother against brother.
Look at him. You can see he is plotting against you.

Poison Fruit sidles away. The concubines whisper in the king's ear. The Queen ignores them. During this at the side of the stage Mahajanaka is still swimming. He sings up to Mani and she down to him.

Music Song 2 (venomous words are the opposite of Loving Kindness):

MANI:	(SINGS)	Scandal is a terrible thing
MAHAJANAKA:	(SINGS)	It poisons us We can hardly sing,
MANI	(SINGS)	It's ugly and It breaks our heart
MAHAJANAKA:	(SINGS)	And those who love It drives apart.

Suddenly the King shouts:

BAD FRUIT: *(He is clearly frightened)* I've heard enough. Traitor you have plotted against me – to kill me! *(to the guards)* Arrest him!

POOR FRUIT: Brother I am innocent

BAD FRUIT: *(He puts his fingers in his ears and calls to the guards)* Gag him! *(to his brother)* Brother, I beg you. Don't add lies to your other sins.

The Guards do so and they chain him hand and foot and take him off to prison. The Prison walls are created by brown material or even cardboard that can later be torn or fall apart. However the guards take off his gag in prison. It is obvious that they have great respect for him.

They leave.

POOR FRUIT: If I am innocent of high treason let these chains fall from me and let the doors open

There is thunder and flashing light, the chains fall away and the Prince escapes. During the following song soldiers flock to him with arms and banners. And at the side of the stage Mahajanaka continues to swim between singing. Music and Song 3 (Truth)

MANI	(SINGS)	Truth gives power Truth gives strength
MAHAJANAKA:	(SINGS)	Thus can I swim To any length
MANI:	(SINGS)	Truth is mightier Than the sword
MAHAJANAKA:	(SINGS)	We keep our heart If we keep our word

Bad Fruit and Poor Fruit meet at the head of soldiers with weapons and banners, each signifying their armies.

INDRA: The people respected Poor Fruit. They flocked to him in great numbers.
He challenged Bad Fruit:

POOR FRUIT: I was not your enemy. But you have made me so. Either give me your kingdom or come out and fight.

BAD FRUIT: Wait!

He turns towards his Queen who is being born towards him on a litter. She is now pregnant.

BAD FRUIT: My love, no one knows who will win this war. If I meet my death, take good care of our unborn seed.

QUEEN: I will my Lord

She is born away again. Bad Fruit turns and confronts Poor Fruit.

BAD FRUIT: I accept your challenge. Do your worst.

A martial arts dance ensues in which Bad Fruit's army is vanquished and in which Bad Fruit is slain. This can be conveyed in a similar manner to the shipwreck with music, puppets, cardboard cut outs, etc, being manipulated. The music arrives at a dying fall. There are corpses and broken armaments strewn across the stage. Poor Fruits army marches off triumphantly. Bad Fruit's body is carried off and as the other bodies and broken armaments and discarded banners are removed, The Queen appears in dirty old clothes, carrying a basket with rice.

INDRA: As soon as the Queen knew her royal consort was no more, she collected gold in her basket and covered it with rice. She disguised herself in dirty old clothes to make her escape.

One of Poor Fruit's soldiers is checking passers by. Will he recognize the Queen? He doesn't and he lets her past.

Music and Song 4 (Duty):

MANI:	(SINGS)	Always we Should do our duty
MAHAJANAKA:	(SINGS)	That is truly A thing of beauty

INDRA: The being in the royal womb was not an ordinary being, but was destined for enlightenment.

The Queen peers in several directions undecided where to go.

INDRA: But where was she to go? It was time for me, the King of the Gods, to disguise myself and to lend a hand.

As he climbs down from his tower he puts on a white false beard, powders his hair white and dons a mortal's clothes. He approaches the Queen

INDRA: Will you do me the honour of staying in my humble abode with my wife and I ?

THE QUEEN: Thank you before I can rest I have to leave Mithila

INDRA: My daughter, you are a hundred leagues from Mithila.

THE QUEEN: How is that?

INDRA: Your sense of duty has lent you wings. Now you must rest. You must nurture the great life within you.

While the queen retires inside a tent to give birth, we return to the sea and to the music and the song 5 (Wisdom) .

MANI: (SINGS) Soon You were born
On a glorious morn

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) Life is a prison
And death makes us free

MANI: (SINGS) Our journey between
A mystery

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) To persevere
We give our word

MANI (SINGS) That alone
Is our reward

He continues to swim. Meanwhile the baby in swaddling clothes is brought out of the tent. The Brahmin played by a different actor from the actor playing Indra enters. The action is as described by Indra, who also appears as himself

INDRA: Eleven days after his birth the jatakarma ceremony welcomes the baby into the world. The Brahmin places a small amount of ghee and honey on the baby's tongue and whispers the name of God in his ear. The Brahmin and the Queen celebrate the name-giving ceremony (namakarana) by dressing the baby in new clothes, and naming him Mahajanaka.

Mahajanaka rises from the sea swim and crosses the stage to join his mother.

INDRA: Now the young Mahajanaka enters our story. At sixteen he has become a fine young man and he demands that his mother tells him, who is his father.

QUEEN: Your father was King Bad fruit of Mithila. He was slain by your uncle, Prince Poo rfruit, who stole the throne.

MAHAJANAKA: Do you have any of the wealth that belonged to my father?

QUEEN: Of course! When I made my escape disguised as a poor woman, I hid three kinds of valuables under the rice in my basket. They were rubies, pearls and diamonds. Each one is enough to buy back your throne.

MAHAJANAKA: Give me half the assets. I shall sail to the land of Suvarnabhumi and bring back an enormous wealth. Then I shall win back the throne that belonged to my father.

He crosses to the sea and continues to swim.

INDRA: Eleven days after his birth the jatakarma ceremony welcomes the baby into the world. The Brahmin places a small amount of ghee and honey on the baby's tongue and whispers the name of God in his ear. The Brahmin and the Queen celebrate the name-giving ceremony (namakarana) by dressing the baby in new clothes, and naming him Mahajanaka.

MAHAJANAKA: As I swam I remembered what had brought me to this pass. I reflected with the Goddess Mani on the ten Buddhist perfections. Particularly on the strength and energy needed for my marathon swim.

We return to the sea and to the music and the song 6 (Resolve) .

MANI: (SINGS) As strong as
The lion

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) As brave as
His mate

MANI: (SINGS) Our hearts
Lift us up

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) To a
Heavenly State.

MANI: (SINGS) Our energy carries us
Over the sea.

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) To realise
Our destiny.

He swims off stage. The silhouette of the sailing ship that we saw at the beginning re-appears. Sailors are loading it with provisions and merchants are directing them.

INDRA: He took leave of his mother and went to embark. On that very day, there happened an illness in the body of King Poor Fruit. He retired and could not get up again anymore.

Meanwhile about seven hundred merchants boarded the ship.

The ship sailed seven hundred leagues in seven days..

We now see King Poor Fruit lying on his death bed surrounded by his courtiers

INDRA: The Great Crab that caused the tsunami and the ship wreck, now responds to Mahajanaka's courage and enlightenment. He desires to make amends. He bears up Mahajanaka. The Great Crab represents knowledge and wisdom, one of the ten perfections of the Buddha. It is as if Mahajanaka in this time of trial is supported by his insight.

We return to the sea and to the music and the song 7 (Renunciation) .

MANI: (SINGS) From worldly values

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) We take our flight

MANI:: (SINGS) This is the way

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) We gain insight.

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INDRA: Meanwhile King Poor Fruit was lying on his death bed. He had no son, only one daughter, Sivali Devi a beautiful and astute girl.

COURTIER: Your Majesty, after your death, to whom should we entrust the throne?

KING POOR To the one who can please our daughter, and who can pass FRUIT:
these tests:
1. Who can tell which is the head of the four sided throne?
2. Who can string the bow that requires the strength of a
thousand men?
3. who can discover the sixteen great treasures?

INDRA: Then King Poor Fruit passed away to heaven.

The courtiers gave the first challenge to the Chief Minister but
neither he nor any other was able to pass these three tests.

Mani lifts Mahajanaka out of the sea and carries him to Mithila. This effect will be achieved by her and her handmaidens throwing sparkling confetti that will blow around them like a heavenly storm, through which she leads him.

INDRA: Mani Mekhala was inspired by this challenge.

She was moved by generosity, the first of the ten perfections. She picked up the Great Being, as lightly as one would pick a bunch of flowers. She cradled him to her breast, as a loving mother would cradle her child; and she carried him to Mithila.

We return to the sea and to the music and the song 8 (Loving Kindness)

MANI: (SINGS) Give to the people

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) Nothing will lack

MANI: (SINGS) Giving is having

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) Hold nothing back.

INDRA: Mani lays Mahajanaka down.

In Mithila she laid him down in a mango grove. This is created by her handmaidens, peasants, possibly Hanuman type monkeys, etc, draping green and yellow strips over the towers to portray mango trees. Mahajanaka goes to sleep. Soon a silhouette of the chariot arrives and the courtiers arrive, carrying a large white umbrella, and examine Mahajanaka's feet.

INDRA: Mahajanaka is exhausted by seven days of swimming, so he soon falls asleep. Meanwhile the courtiers send a royal chariot to look everywhere for an ideal groom. Finally, they locate Mahajanaka sleeping under a tree. The courtiers examine his feet, whereby they recognize the signs of royalty.

Musicians sound trumpets and Mahajanaka awakes.

They see that he is not only a future king, but also destined to be emperor of four continents. They command musicians to sound their instruments. At the noise, Mahajanaka awakes. Seeing all the people around him, he recognizes that the white umbrella of kingship has come to him. He asks where the king might be. When told that he has died, he agrees to accept the kingdom.

The Marriage ceremony between Mahajanaka and Sivali Deva takes place.

INDRA: Further, he solves all the challenges to impress the princess and is able to marry her. Thus he becomes the ruler of Mithila, and Sivali bears him a son. During his seven thousand year reign he and Mani Mekhala continued to sing of the Buddhist perfections.

Mani and he sing among the mango trees.

MANI: (SINGS) Gentle as a fountain.

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) Yet lasting as a mountain

MANI:: (SINGS) The king who resolves

MAHAJANAKA: (SINGS) Will always evolve

Mahajanaka sits down and the gardener brings him fruit and flowers.

INDRA: One day the royal gardener brought wonderful flowers and fruit. The King liked them so much that he wanted to see the garden. There he saw two beautiful mango trees. One was full of perfectly ripe mangos, while the other was completely without fruit. He took one of the fruits and enjoyed its delicious sweet taste. When the people saw that the king had eaten the first fruit, they knew it was all right for them to eat. The peasants, greedy people, concubines and monkeys devoured the mangoes, ripped off the branches and uprooted it. They ignore the tree that does not fruit.

The King returned and explained how he would tend and propagate the other mango tree.

From then on he decided to lead the life of a humble monk and to rule his kingdom from the simple beauty of nature and among a community of self sufficient peasants.

The play ends with everybody who has participated taking a curtain call.