

# MRS KRISHNAN'S PARTY

**You're invited!**

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing glasses and a bindi, blowing into a large blue balloon. Her hands are visible, holding the balloon. The background is a solid yellow color.

**EDUCATION  
PACK**



# MRS KRISHNAN'S PARTY

Step into the back room of Mrs Krishnan's dairy where garlands decorate the ceiling, music flows and Mrs Krishnan is throwing a party like no other. Food simmers on the stove, laughter abounds and strangers become friends in this joyous celebration of life.

Watch the actors juggle cooking, music and guests in an unfolding drama where no two nights are the same. Kalyani Nagarajan and Justin Rogers have reviewers singing their praises and audiences leaping to their feet in appreciation.

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## About the Play

### Setting

Back room of a small Dairy in suburban New Zealand

### Characters

**James** – A university student and Mrs. Krishnan's boarder, 20 years old.

**Zina Krishnan** – A widow and shopkeeper of Krishnan's Dairy, 53 years old



### Synopsis

#### **Act I, scene 1.**

James Joseph, a 20 year old University student dressed in an elaborate Indian costume, welcomes us into the backroom of Krishnan's Dairy which he has decorated to celebrate the South Indian harvest festival of Onam.

James is an enthusiastic host and encourages us to get in the spirit of the occasion. He directs us to garlands and scarves, which we distribute amongst ourselves.

As James begins to explain the significance of Onam he is interrupted by the shop bell and his landlady, Mrs Krishnan calling to him. James hurriedly reveals to us that Mrs Krishnan has no idea about the party. He turns off the lights and eagerly instructs us to yell "Surprise!" when they go back on.

Unfortunately the shop plunged into darkness causes the, as yet, unseen Mrs Krishnan to crash into a box of cordial smashing the contents. Mrs Krishnan, a widowed shopkeeper in her early 50s, finally enters the backroom completely preoccupied with her sticky shoes and oblivious to the crowd waiting in darkness.

Before James can spring the surprise she reveals to him that she's showing the dairy to potential buyers tomorrow. The fact that she's contemplating selling the shop is news to James. Mrs Krishnan finally notices the darkened room. She turns on the lights and we yell "Surprise!

A stunned Mrs Krishnan stares aghast at the 100 strangers packed into her stockroom. She picks her way through the crowd and takes James in tow upstairs, urgently wanting an explanation.



James gushes about his surprise Onam party but Mrs Krishnan doesn't want any part of it. Her son, Apu, is on a plane and arriving within the hour and now she has to prepare the shop for the potential buyers. Mrs Krishnan is determined that we leave. She encourages us to come to the official Onam celebrations, run by the local Indian community, tomorrow. James insists that Onam is today and tries to loosen Mrs Krishnan up with some dance music. Mrs Krishnan is horrified and pulls the plug on the music, demanding that James get us out of here immediately. James uses us to plead his case. The trouble we've gone to look nice, the distance we've travelled, the expectation of connection and good times. Finally Mrs Krishnan relents. She lays out some strict parameters for our behavior and a time limit. We need to gone before her son arrives. James happily agrees as the shop bell rings and Mrs Krishnan hurries off to deal with a customer.

### **Act I, scene 2.**

James assures us that Mrs Krishnan will come around. He takes on a DJ persona and voices his philosophy of personal freedom building to a crescendo of pulsating music and bringing us to our feet.

This loud music and raucous crowd greet Mrs Krishnan as she returns from the shop. Mrs Krishnan screams to be heard above the din. Finally James turns off the music. His landlady is not impressed and lays down the law. Her shop is still open and she doesn't want to yell at her customers. Anymore noise and Onam will be shut down. Mrs Krishnan storms off to clean up the cordial.

James reassures us that he intended to take things down a notch anyway. He explains that Onam is not just music it's about connection. He looks for

connections to India amongst us and tells about his gap year in Kerala, Southern India and his first experience of Onam. James recounts his encounter with the legend of King Mavali, the centre piece of the festival, and the figure who James is costumed as tonight. Zina returns from the shop, overhearing James in full flight, and brings him down by picking at his version of the story. A cell phone interrupts their quarreling. With no one claiming the phone, James finally answers it. It's Aaron. Mrs Krishnan, flustered, recognizes the name and realizes that the call is for her. She snatches her phone from James. Her manner instantly changes and hints at an intimacy with this mystery man on the other end of the line.

When she eventually hangs up James is curious as to Aaron's identity. Mrs Krishnan deflects. She left her scissors at church. James is insistent. Who is Aaron? Cornered, Mrs Krishnan diverts James to the need to feed his guests. The Onam feast is essential to the festival. She desperately suggests rice and dhal in place of the usual 12 dishes. A delighted James trots off to borrow a rice cooker from the takeaway shop next door. Mrs Krishnan suddenly finds herself alone with a roomful of strangers.

### **Act 1, scene 3.**

Mrs Krishnan busies herself with preparing the dhal. She directs us to gather ingredients that are spread around the room. As she instructs, she also confides about James' background. We learn he failed his first year at University when he was staying in a hostel and has been sent to Mrs Krishnan with the hope that he'll knuckle down under her watchful eye. As Mrs Krishnan gets us to help her preparation, she gets to know us and her reserve gradually softens. She shares her pride in her son's achievements, an architect in a good firm but he always makes time to spend Onam with her. Her thoughts drift to selling the shop and going back to India. James catches these words as he returns with a large rice cooker. He wants to know what Apu thinks about Mrs Krishnan selling the shop. Mrs Krishnan clearly hasn't told her son and deflects, urging James to get on with the rice. The shop bell rings and Mrs Krishnan, a little rattled, goes to attend to her customer.



### **Act 1, scene 4.**

James clearly has no clue how to cook the rice. He gets distracted and puts on some ambient music. He dances through room and waxes on about his gift for controlling atmosphere and getting people to connect. It's what he loves about Onam – connection. His thoughts turn to moving out of the dairy and flatting. He asks us what we're paying for rent these

days and is clearly shocked at the response. His rising panic is interrupted by Mrs Krishnan returning from the shop and discovering the rice untouched.

James tries to defend his incompetence and the two tussle over the sack of rice. The sack splits. Most of the contents go in the rice cooker but a good portion spills on the floor. Mrs Krishnan stoically continues preparing the rice as James, ineffectually, tries to help. James brings up the selling of the dairy and questions Mrs Krishnan's decision. Mrs Krishnan is clearly in no mood for this. The shop bell ringing is the final straw and the harassed Mrs Krishnan storms off emphatically reiterating her desire to sell and ordering James to clean up his mess.

James is left frustrated. Mrs Krishnan's phone rings and James answers. It's Aaron. A grumpy James takes a message. Mrs Krishnan returns to find the rice still on the floor. James' defense is that he was on the phone and he delivers the message. Aaron is coming over with Mrs Krishnan's scissors. Mrs Krishnan is thrown into a panic. She spews out a bunch of senseless objections. She demands that James ring Aaron and tell him he can't come. James refuses. They pass the phone back and forth. A text alert buzzes and Mrs Krishnan recoils from the phone. She gets a guest to read the message. It's from Apu. He's stuck at work and won't be able to come to Onam. Mrs Krishnan can't believe it. She rings her son and leaves a succession of messages each more desperate and despairing.

Finally James intervenes and takes the phone from her. The shop bell rings but Mrs Krishnan doesn't move. James alerts her to the customer but she refuses to go, sending a perplexed James in her place.

### **Act 1, scene 5.**

Mrs Krishnan goes to her kitchen bench and angrily chops onions. She rails at her son having to work so hard. She and her husband worked hard so that their son wouldn't have to. So what was the point? She turns on the radio and Aretha Franklin sings "Say a Little Prayer." For Mrs Krishnan, it's a visceral memory of her husband. She flicks the music off and blames her tears on the onions. She distracts herself with the story of King Maveli. She puppeteers the kitchen implements to bring the story to life.

Aditi, Mother of the Gods, complains to Vishhu about King Maveli's growing power and popularity. Vishnu takes the form of a black dwarf to test Maveli. The dwarf appears before the King and finds favour with him. King Maveli



offers the dwarf anything he wants. Mrs Krishnan is reminded of her late husband Gobi's words: "If you work hard you can have anything you want."

James bursts in from the shop, excited that he made a large sale of flowers. Mrs Krishnan recalls that selling flowers was her husband's idea. James is suddenly awkward talking about Mrs Krishnan's dead husband. Mrs Krishnan recounts their dream of working hard, giving their son a good education and saving enough to go back to India to live like a King and Queen. James reminds Mrs Krishnan that she is going back. He enthuses about the success she has made of the dairy. Something her husband would be proud of, something she did without a University education. Mrs Krishnan is reminded of her husband's sacrifice, how he died defending his family from an intruder all those years ago. The struggle she made to maintain his dream. The support of the community around her in raising Apu and the life she made. Mrs Krishnan comes to the realization that she can't sell the dairy. She decides to close the shop early and asks James to lock up and gives him final instructions on preparing the dhal. With that, Mrs Krishnan drifts upstairs.



### **Act 1, scene 6**

James is excited to have his living arrangements back in order and is determined to make Onam perfect. Just as he piles onions into a hot pan, the shop bell rings. He asks two single guests to help fry the onions and stir the dhal while he attends to the customer. James puts on romantic music as he exits. The guests are left to carry out James' instructions.

James returns and checks on the guests' progress. Mrs Krishnan's phone rings. James switches off the music and reads the caller ID. It's Apu. James answers the call. Suddenly sounds of a dance party and muffled voices come through the speakers. James realizes that the phone has somehow connected to his sound system and that Apu has butt dialed. It dawns on him that Apu isn't at work but at a party. Mrs Krishnan pokes her head out from upstairs thinking she heard her phone ringing. James scrambles to cover using a guest's phone as an excuse. Mrs Krishnan enquires about the music. James blames the guest. Mrs Krishnan asks that the music be changed and James obliges with something more soothing. Mrs Krishnan, satisfied, retreats back upstairs.

James swears us all to secrecy about Apu's lie and urges us all to help James get the final touches to the Onam celebrations sorted. He leaves to lock up the shop and we are left to set the table, scatter petals, blow up balloons and finish cooking the dhal.

James returns and admires our efforts. He rummages for salt and white pepper to add to the dhal as per Mrs Krishnan's instructions. He captures a panoramic shot of us throwing balloons in the air and at that moment Mrs Krishnan appears at the top of the stair resplendent in a red sari. She mesmerises us with a burst of classical Indian dancing and then reveals that she is telling the Marveli story taking up where she left off. Having been promised anything he wanted from the King the black dwarf requests as much land as he can cover with 3 paces. King Maveli agrees and, with that, the dwarf takes his true form. He grows and grows and grows. With his first step he covers the earth. James turns off the lights and the fairy lights that decorate the stockroom twinkle like stars. With his second step he covers the heavens. James turns off the fairy lights and the only light is from one candle. King Maveli knew that the final step would destroy the world and tells the dwarf to place the last step on his head. The dwarf stands on Maveli's head, pushing him deep into the underworld. Mrs Krishnan blows out the candle. James can't reconcile how a good king can be punished like this.

Mrs Krishnan is silent, the sacrifice of the good king resonating with the sacrifice of her husband. James tries to cheer her up by turning on the lights and getting us to say "Surprise." Although Mrs Krishnan is confused it sort of works and she expresses gratitude for this surprise Onam. She is seized by a desire to ring Apu. James diverts her attention to the dhal. Mrs Krishnan goes to check on it and discover a familiar tin on the bench. She reverently picks it up. Her husband's ashes. Realising that he has mistaken the ashes for white pepper James listens with horror as Mrs Krishnan reflects on how she had always meant to take the tin back to India but how the time never seemed right and how things change. We realize that she's not sure of her place back home. James desperately tries to stop Mrs Krishnan as she moves to taste the dhal. With each mouthful she thanks James and praises him for all he has done tonight. Finally James confesses. He put Mr Krishnan in the dhal. Mrs Krishnan reels from disbelief to revulsion to anger. James tries to defend himself but when Mrs Krishnan calls him an idiot and compares Apu to him it hits a nerve.



Using a guest, James confronts Mrs Krishnan with the truth of where Apu is tonight. Mrs Krishnan is floored. Her son lied to her. James defends Apu's desire to pursue his own life and urges Mrs Krishnan to wake up to how miserable she is. Mrs Krishnan hurls back James' ideal of happiness as foolishness. James accuses Mrs Krishnan of clinging to ashes. There is a brittle silence. Mrs Krishnan quietly insists that James leave. James moves to go but

Mrs Krishnan calls him back. She means for him to go after his exams. James reveals he can go now. He failed all his papers. He hasn't been going to lectures.

He's been kicked out of University. Mrs Krishnan softens. She sees James enormous sense of failure. His confidence crumbles. He suddenly seems vulnerable and lost. She wants him to tell his parents. He recoils from that, from seeing their disappointment. She says they'll understand. James draws Mrs Krishnan's attention to her "understanding" of Apu's actions. Mrs Krishnan defends that as different. Her son lied. James insists that everyone lies. Mrs Krishnan claims that she doesn't. James brings up Aaron. Mrs Krishnan scrambles to deny her feelings. Her lie is apparent but she won't admit it and James declares the party over and moves to leave. Mrs Krishnan appeals to James not to go. He's Maveli, he needs to make his people happy. James is adamant he can't do that because he's not happy himself.

Mrs Krishnan declares James' whole premise of happiness as nonsense. She strips him of his costume, declaring his whole problem is pretending to be something he is not. She presents him with a gift. A new shirt intended for Apu for Onam. James changes into his new clothes. They stand side by side slightly unsure of what to do next. Mrs Krishnan's phone rings. It's another butt dial from Apu. Mrs Krishnan leaves the phone on. Her son is here for Onam at least. Mrs Krishnan goes to get her scissors to cut off the tag off James' shirt and is suddenly reminded that Aaron is on his way. She appeals to us for advice. She comes to a decision and starts texting on her phone. James appeals to Mrs Krishnan to let Aaron come over. Mrs Krishnan informs us that she's texting him to bring wine and lots of pizza.

Mrs Krishnan climbs on top of the dining table and surveys her kingdom. She tells us the final part of the Maveli story. Lord Vishnu is so pleased with Maveli's sacrifice that he allows him to visit his people once a year when the constellation of Thiru Onam appears in the sky. Thiru Onam. Onam for short. James runs to a switch and turns on the fairy lights. Mrs Krishnan is delighted. She commands James to turn up the music. Mrs Krishnan begins to dance, reverently at first and then with abandon. James joins in. They both feel free in this moment and we share in their joy.



## Theatrical Treatment

Use of costumes and mask-like devices in performance.

Places to find inspiration for original theatre writing

Use of set design in storytelling

Hindu mythology

Creating immersive theatre

Balance of comedy and tragedy

## Themes

The need for change

Duty versus freedom

The celebration of Indian festivals, traditions

Dealing with topics such as loss, change, cultural displacement, identity, and community





## Topics

### New Zealand's Corner Dairy

The term *dairy* came into common usage in New Zealand English to describe small shops by the late 1930s. Perishables such as milk and eggs were formerly delivered to city households from a dairy farm; by the late 1930s, small shops stocked such produce, and the term shifted to describe these shops.

A 1994 study found that 227 of the 269 dairies (84%) in central Auckland were owned by Indians. Dairies are often self-owned by immigrants, who may face difficulties entering the workforce.

There are around 4,000 dairies in New Zealand.



### Hindu mythology

Academic studies of mythology often define mythology as deeply valued stories that explain a society's existence and world order: those narratives of a society's creation, the society's origins and foundations, their god(s), their original heroes, mankind's connections to the "Devin", and their narratives of eschatology (what happens in the "after-life").

Hindu mythology is a body of myths found in Hindu texts such as the Vedic literature epics like *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the Puranas, and regional literature like the Tamil *Periya Puranam* and Naalayira Divya Prabandham, and the *Mangal Kavya* of Bengal. Hindu mythology is also found in widely translated popular texts such as the fables of the *Panchatantra* and the *Hitopadesha*, as well as in Southeast Asian texts.



## King Mahabali

King Mahabali is described in early Hindu texts as a benevolent and generous king. He ruled without discrimination, and his people were honest, healthy, and happy under his rule. Mahabali also temporarily possessed the *amrita* (nectar of eternal life) obtained by the *asuras* (power seeking demons). The *amrita* allowed his subjects to bring him back to life after his death in one of the wars between *suras* (*devas* – *divine being*) and *asuras*. Mahabali was, thus, immune from death.



After many wars, the invincible Bali had conquered heaven and earth. The *suras* (*devas*) approached Vishnu to save them from complete obliteration. Vishnu refused to join the war, or outright kill his own devotee Mahabali. To restore the natural order, he incarnated as the dwarf Brahmin avatar, Vamana. While Mahabali was performing the *ashvamedha* sacrifice to celebrate his victories and giving away gifts to everyone, Vamana approached him and requested "three steps of land".

Mahabali granted him this gift, despite warnings from Shukra, who had realised Vamana's true identity. Vamana then metamorphosed into Vishnu's colossal *trivikrama* form, the first foot encompassing all of heaven in one step and the earth with the second foot. When rhetorically asked where he might take his promised third step, Mahabali accepted his fate and offered his own head.

Some Hindu texts state that Mahabali was banished to *patala* (netherworld), some state he was dragged there by Garuda, in others he entered heaven with the touch of Vishnu, while another version states he became *Chiranjivi* (immortal). Others even have Bali admitted into Vaikunta, which was an even higher place than the realm of the *devas*.

According to Hindu mythology, Vishnu granted Bali a boon whereby he could return back to his homeland once every year.



## Onam Festival

Onam is an annual Hindu festival, which usually falls between August – September, celebrated for 10 days. It is a vibrant and culturally rich festival celebrated predominantly in the southern Indian state of Kerala. It holds great significance for the people of Kerala and is a time of joy, unity, and tradition. Onam typically falls in the Malayalam month of Chingam.



The festival commemorates the return of the legendary King Mahabali, who is believed to visit his subjects during this time. According to Hindu legends, Onam is celebrated in Kerala in remembrance of the good governance under the rule of daitya King Mahabali, a mythical king.



People decorate their homes with colourful flower carpets called 'Pookalam', wear traditional attire, and indulge in a feast known as the 'Onam Sadya'. This grand meal includes a variety of delicious vegetarian dishes served on banana leaves.

## Dhal

Dhal also spelled as 'dal' or 'daal' is a term used to refer to various dried, split pulses or legumes, such as lentils, peas, or beans, that are commonly used in Indian and South Asian cuisine. Dhal is a staple food in many parts of the world due to its nutritional value, affordability, and versatility. It is an excellent source of protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals, making it a crucial part of vegetarian and vegan diets.

Dhal can be prepared in numerous ways, depending on the type of legume used and regional variations. It is often cooked in spices, such as turmeric, cumin and coriander, to enhance flavour. The consistency of dhal can range from thick and stew-like to a more soup-like consistency. It is typically served with rice or bread (like naan or roti) and can be part of a larger meal or a standalone dish. The most common way of preparing dhal is in the form of a soup to which onions, and tomatoes may be added.



Dhal is loved for its delicious taste, nutritional benefits, and its role in providing a comforting and hearty meal in many cultures.

# Mrs Krishnan's Dhal Recipe

## INGREDIENTS

1 cup of red lentils  
2 cups of water  
1/4 tin canned tomatoes (or a chopped tomato)  
1 clove garlic  
1 tbsp vegetable oil  
1 small white onion  
1 tsp turmeric  
1 tsp garam masala  
1 tsp cumin powder  
1 tsp chili flakes  
Salt and pepper (to taste)



## METHOD

Add lentils, tomatoes and garlic to a pot of boiling water. Reduce to a simmer and cook until lentils are soft, about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, fry the onions in vegetable oil until they are almost translucent. Add the garlic, turmeric, garam masala, and cumin and chili flakes and fry for another minute or so.

When the dhal is cooked, add in the onion mix and stir. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Serve the dhal alongside rice or roti, or, if like us you can't wait - eat it straight from the pot.

## Q&A with the Creative Team

### Co-Writer & Director Notes

Justin Lewis

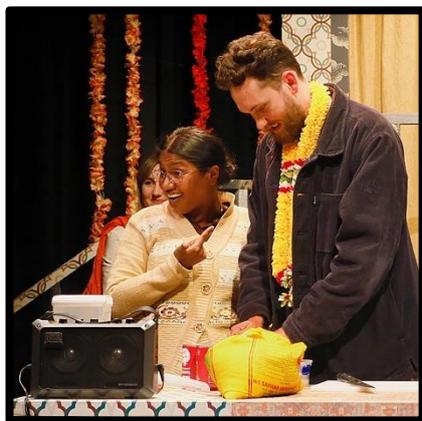
#### What was the inspiration behind Mrs. Krishnan's Party?

We imagined Zina Krishna from our very first play, *Krishnan's Dairy*, twenty-five years on. Her son has grown up and she has achieved many of her dreams. The one big dream that remains she is now not so sure about. Jacob and I are both about the same age as Zina and many of her dilemmas resonate for me. Coming of age stories happen when you are middle-aged as well as when you are a young adult.



#### What are some of the challenges of a two-person cast?

Two is a tricky number on stage because it can be hard to create surprise and change the dynamic of the drama. So we made the show immersive and the audience become guests at the party – suddenly the cast is much bigger than two.



#### How were you able to manage so much audience interaction, were there any surprises?

We invited 'test audiences' along as we were making the show. We tried ideas out and modified them where necessary. The audience interactions are part of the script – we wrote them in, but a degree of improvisation is also required from the performers to respond authentically to what is happening in the room.

One of the big surprises was how much the audience embraced the party and wanted to help Zina. At one point the actors depart the stage leaving the audience to set up for the party – and they do. It is so much fun!

#### How did you come up with the mask design for the show?

Mask is at the heart of Indian Ink's work and takes many forms. The key is that the mask creates some kind of gap or difference between the actor and the character. The actor and the audience can pour their imaginations into this gap which brings life to the performance. We have two kinds of mask in this show:

1. Teeth as worn by the actors. They are comic, a little larger than life
2. Costumes and costuming such as glasses, a scarf, a pair of shoes that give the actor a particular way of moving or seeing the world.

Masks create a gap – they also create a restriction of some sort that requires the actor to move / behave in a certain way. This limitation actually frees up the actor to play and make a bigger physical, vocal, and mental transformation.



### How does the writing process itself actually work?

Well, it's a two-year process, looking for the spark, looking for the thing that we're interested in. You've got to fill up, put stuff in your head and just let that stuff rattle around and find its own way out. If you force it and pressure it, it doesn't work. If you don't put anything in, it doesn't work.

There's actually something about the action of walking that's quite good for ideas kind of coming out. And often we've been working on shows and thought 'let's just go for a walk and try and make sense of this'. So, part of the process is walking, talking, putting things together. And the other part of the process is big, physically.

We get together in a room and write on big bits of paper and post-it notes, which we stick on the walls and then we start to figure out loads of things. Who are the characters in the story? What are the big events that happen in the story? What's the kind of central dramatic thing that happens? We're trying to find the right characters in the right world. We just talk and we write and plot things out.



And then we'll end up in the final draft, using script software as these cards that can move around. And then again together we'll start plotting out the scenes, how they start and end. Then I'll usually write a prose version, which might be four or five or 10 pages, which tells a story from the beginning to the end. Then we get feedback and change it and then Jake will write from that a first and final draft.

## Co-Writer Notes

### Jacob Rajan

#### What inspired you and Justin to write Mrs. Krishnan's Party?

There was a short story by Frank Sargesson called "An Affair of the Heart" that our dramaturge, Murray Edmond, introduced us to. In it, a man returns to a holiday spot from his childhood and witnesses a woman preparing a Christmas homecoming for her grown up son – who never turns up. As we started delving into potential characters and worlds for our own story a familiar voice made herself heard: Zina Krishnan. She'd been working away in the dairy while we were off doing other things and the more we looked at her changed circumstances and her relationships the more interested we got.



#### Where did the inspiration for new characters in the Krishnan's story come from?

My Mum is a widow and lives alone in our family home. For the last few years she's been taking in a succession of boarders and her love-hate relationship with them has been a source of constant amusement to me and inspired the character of James, the boarder, in this play.

#### How is Mrs. Krishnan's Party different from Indian Ink's other plays?

The immersive aspect of the play is its biggest point of difference from our other work. Although many of our shows are familiar with the idea of breaking the fourth wall, in this one, the wall genuinely isn't there. The audience are guests at a party and participate in everything that unfolds. They conspire, they cook, they take messages, they decorate, they dance and gradually morph from being a room full of strangers to a community.

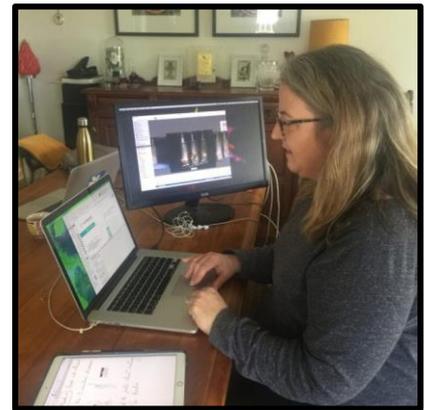


## Lighting Designer Notes

Jane Hakaraia

### What is your process when designing a show?

I read the script and I fill out an excel with things like the time of day, what the actors are doing and the location. It becomes quite a dense document. Then, I have meetings with the director and the document evolves as we do that. We watch rehearsals and start watching the movement.



### The shows you have designed for Indian Ink are worlds apart. How did you approach each design?

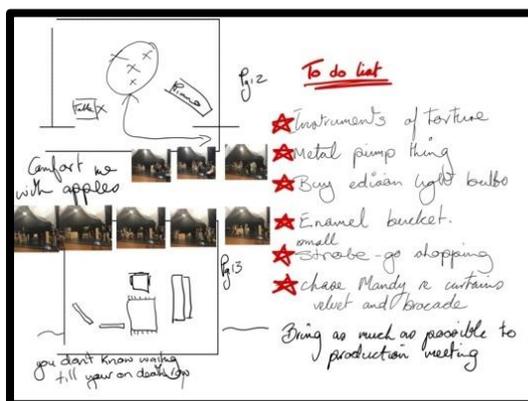
I treat every project as a new thing, as a starting again. There's no carry on from "this show looks like this, so we'll this show look like that." I read the script and talk to Justin (Lewis) and John (Verryt) about what the feel is.

### How did you build the atmosphere for Mrs Krishnan's Party?

It was a party. It had to go from being dim and dark like a backroom of dairy and then it had to be a full-on party at the end. It was building and building until that final moment of everyone partying together.

### It all goes to show the impact lighting can have on your mood?

Yes, there's a lot of psychology because, with colour, it's a subconscious thing but people associate different colours with different emotions, so you play with that. Anything warm and ambery is happy, whereas blues are cold colours and reds are warm or angry or love.



### How do the genres differ in their lighting needs?

Theatre is about telling a story and it's about being able to see the actor's faces. A lot of directors are big on 'eyes are the windows to the soul', so they want to be able to see all of the emotion in their eyes.

Dance is about the body. So you don't need as much front light, and that's quite

magical because you're lighting shapes and motions created by the dancer's bodies.

And then opera and concerts, it's about seeing the form, the person. Opera has got other considerations —it's got an orchestra, musicians need to be able to read their scores. You can't leave them in the dark.

## Set Designer Notes

John Verryt

### What does your process of designing a set look like?

Usually, the producer comes to me, with a script or an idea.

I get the script on the table and do what I like with it. It's a combination of making models and the drawing board. I'm pretty old school, most people do it all on the computer now. But I find that less satisfying, for the same reason that I didn't want to do graphics on a computer, I don't want to do set design on a computer either. I prefer the more physical workstyle of making things and standing at the drawing board. I can put a whole set design on the drawing board and look at it all at once.



### Mrs Krishnan's Party is a show that is interactive, set in the backroom of a dairy and has live cooking. How did you tackle that design?

Well, there were a lot of practicalities that come first—you have to make dinner for the audience which requires a surface to work on. It all comes out of the naturalistic requirements in the action.

The cooking means you have to provide some type of kitchen—surfaces, benches, a cooker so there's heat involved. You have to get that right, to pass health and safety. Then there are knives. You never know who's in the theatre and you have knives lying around. You just have to think about those things. And there was an upstairs and there's a kitchen table. So there's a lot of big lumps that you start with. In that way, it was quite prescribed and simple in a way.



### What inspired you in your set design for this show?

The main inspiration for a set design is the script. This contains all the information required. I also had a sneaky look at the back room of the local Dairy.

### What is your personal process behind set design, from research through to seeing it on stage?

I read the script many times. All the requirements regarding the action that has to occur onstage are contained in the script. It is

the designer's job to accommodate the action. This means the actors must be able to move freely to fulfil the drama. Also it has to be visually satisfying.

**What, if any, were some of your biggest challenges and considerations around set design for Mrs Krishnan's Party?**

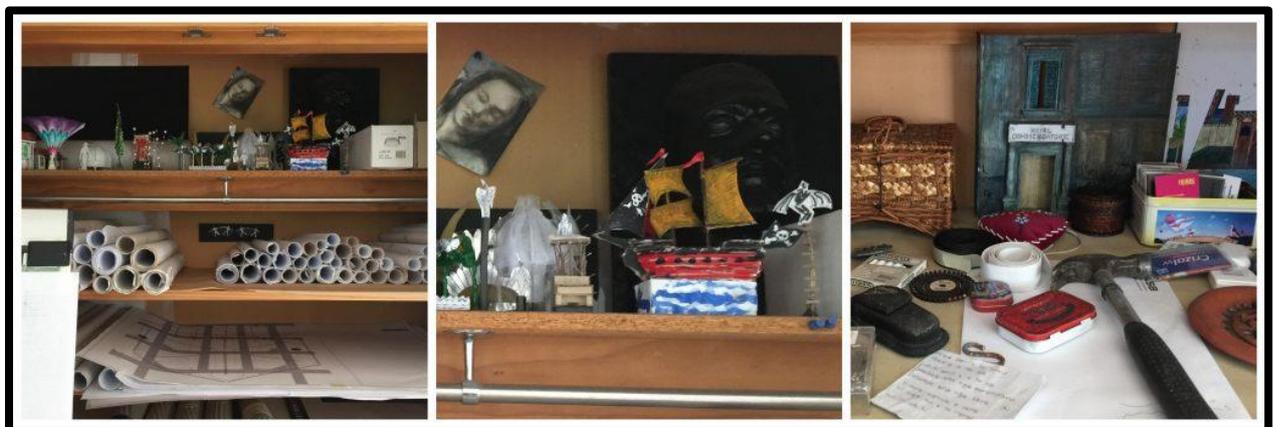
The biggest challenge with Mrs K's Party is the fact that the drama is set in a small back room that would normally be full of stock. How you use the space was challenging, because the audience comes into the room with the actors, into the same space as the actors. It's not like the audience is over *there* and the stage is over *here*. Everybody is in the same space and sharing the space. There's a lot of interaction.

We decided to do the show with the audience in the room alongside the performers rather than on a stage 'over there', so the whole venue becomes the room. This means the room is very large and the challenge then is to create a sense of a small room in the large space. The set also needs to be flexible as it goes to many different sized and shaped venues.

**You get such a sense of intimacy and homeliness in the dairy backroom, how did you achieve that?**

Using the wallpaper was a big one. And nothing is straight on or arranged. It's all kind of random in placement. Things are one an angle, and the centreline of the space is on an angle, not parallel to any walls. Just turning everything off the right angle was a big element of that.

The wallpaper was trying to get a sense of the building that had many layers, over the years. You can peel it back and see the history. It was trying to capture some of that and get a business of a backroom of a dairy, from the little I've seen from in the dairy. It's always full of stuff. I wanted to get a sense of clutter and business.



## Costume Designer Notes

Fiona Nichols

### What inspired you in your costume design for this show?

Through research I became very inspired by the 'colours of India'. The vibrancy of the festivals, the beautiful hand loomed textiles and vast array of floral decorations. But also the world of the dairy itself and the characters that bring it to life.



### What is your personal process behind costume design, from research through to seeing it on stage?

I like to gather as much visual reference as I can. Through conversations with the director and practical considerations the ideas become more defined. I also like to discuss the costumes with actors and see what they think works best for their characters.

### What, if any, were some of your biggest challenges and considerations around costume design for Mrs Krishnan's Party?

It's quite a physical show so the costumes needed to accommodate that. We found it a little bit difficult to source the King Maveli crown but eventually we had one sent out from India with the help of staff contacts.



## Sound Designer Notes

Liam Kelly

### What inspired you in composing the music for this show?

The music itself is made up from sourced music from other artists though some tracks have been mixed and altered by myself.

Justin and I drew from a lot of

contemporary and traditional Indian music as well as Western DJ and dance music to create the soundtrack. We were interested in James' persona as 'DJ Jimmy J' and what sort of music he likes and what sort of Indian music he has been getting into. It always needed to feel like a party and that the music was one of James' greatest tools for creating that atmosphere.



### What is the process of composing music for a show, from research through to seeing it on stage?

The process starts with immersing myself in the play by reading drafts over and over as well as listening to as much music as I can that is relevant to the world. Justin was interested in using modern Indian music such as Bhangra as well as more Western DJ music, so I listened to a lot of both of those things and came to our first workshops with lots of songs that I thought sounded of the world. We played with these with what text we had, and from there began a long process of iteration. Slowly and surely, we would find better pieces which suited each moment better and as the script and performance changed and got closer to completion, the music would adapt to each change and eventually we had the final score for the show.

### What, if any, were some of your biggest challenges around sound design for Mrs Krishnan's Party?

One of the biggest challenges around the sound for Mrs K was creating a sound world that was authentic to James and his DJ persona but that was also not culturally appropriative to not only Mrs K, but also to the Onam festival that is celebrated during the show. James himself is a little ignorant of Indian culture but we didn't want to use this as an excuse to make the music a parody of Indian culture and like generic Indian music. A lot of the solution to this came from many discussions with the actors and also lots of research into which tracks come from Indian artists.

It was really hard integrating recorded music into an audience interactive show because there wasn't as much wiggle room to mess with the music and make it fit to the action as much as is ideal. Having live musicians onstage means there is tangible people playing that music to react and respond to the action onstage so when there aren't those people, you have to find creative ways to make the music alive and give the actors something interesting to respond to every performance.

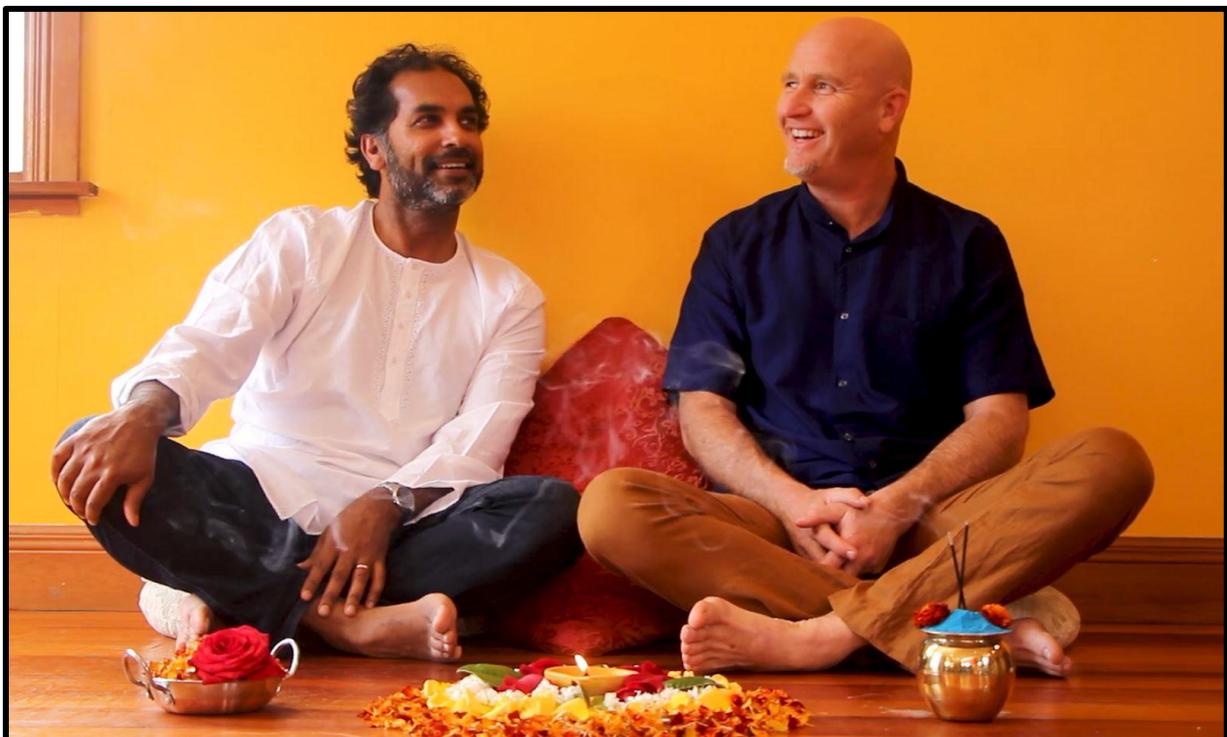
## Indian Ink Theatre Company

### History

Indian Ink Theatre Company is one of New Zealand's most successful theatre companies specialising in the creation and touring of original New Zealand work. Since Indian Ink was founded in 1997, over 500,000 people throughout New Zealand and the world have seen our plays.

The company is the result of the extraordinary partnership of Justin Lewis and Jacob Rajan. Alongside a team of multi-talented collaborators, they have mined the collision of East and West, creating spirited, fresh and vibrant theatre that combines artful storytelling, mischievous wit and theatrical magic to unearth the simple truths of life.

Our plays have won awards nationally and internationally for their quality and innovation. Indian Ink tours regularly to Australia, Singapore, and the USA, and has a growing international reputation for world-class theatre.



# Indian Ink Shows

## **DIRTY WORK (premiered in 2023):**

The computers are down and the big boss in India wants the impossible. The hapless staff are making a mess of things. Which isn't good news for the cleaner.

## **PARADISE OR THE IMPERMANENCE OF ICE CREAM (premiered in 2021):**

A man trying desperately to avoid death is flung between limbo and his past where a rebellious young woman holds the key that may guide him to paradise.

## **WELCOME TO THE MURDER HOUSE (premiered 2018):**

The convicts of Auburn Prison have been set free for one night to perform a play of their own devising. Be entertained by this true tale of ambition, heroes and villains, set at the dawning of the new electric age.

## **MRS. KRISHNAN'S PARTY (premiered 2018):**

Mrs Krishnan's boarder, overzealous wannabe DJ James, has invited a few friends into the back room of the dairy as a special surprise to celebrate Onam and the return home of her son. But when around 100 strangers turn up and settle in, Mrs K has no choice but to throw the party of her life!

## **THE ELEPHANT THIEF (premiered 2015):**

When Leela Devi leaves her tribal home to see the world, she doesn't expect her father's elephant to follow her. As she battles corrupt officials, hungry poachers, fanatical leaders and supreme beings, an unlikely love story unfolds and a quiet revolution ferments.

## **KISS THE FISH (premiered 2013):**

The winds of change are sweeping the sleepy island of Karukam. A new resort promises a brighter future for all until fate puts the hopes of the community in the hands of Sidu - the village idiot!

## **GURU OF CHAI (premiered 2010):**

The contradictions of modern India with its iPhones and ancient gods come alive in this outrageously funny and heartbreakingly beautiful production. A poor chai-wallah has his life changed forever when a young girl is abandoned at a busy railway station and brings the place to a standstill with the beauty of her singing.

## **THE DENTIST'S CHAIR (premiered 2008):**

A comedy with bite: a dentist is haunted by the ghost of the first man executed in the electric chair.

## **THE PICKLE KING (premiered 2002):**

A comedy about what's worth preserving and finding the courage to love.

## **THE CANDLESTICKMAKER (premiered 2000):**

Black Holes and the formula for happiness collide when a New Zealand Indian student visits his ancestral home for the first time.

## **KRISHNAN'S DIARY (premiered 1997):**

A shopkeeper and his wife reveal a love as great as the Taj Mahal.

## What we do

### Layer for the Intellect

Our shows challenge traditional thinking and ask our audiences to consider things from a different point of view. We write beautiful, funny, sad and true stories, taking you into the minds of characters, allowing you to walk in their shoes – so you can make your own interpretations.

### Transcending Cultural Barriers

Our shows are for Indians and non-Indians. That's because while different cultures may appear poles apart at first glance, we always find that there is much more that we have in common. We tell stories that celebrate cultural differences but connect us through our shared humanity, building empathy and understanding across cultures.

### Nourishing Entertainment

We are entertainers at heart and we're here to take you on a journey that's rich in culture, full of humour and brimming with emotion – so you leave the theatre feeling nourished and content.

### Original Storytellers

At Indian Ink, we have developed a unique style of theatrical storytelling which draws on tradition and culture, utilising different theatrical crafts from around the world. All of this comes together to create narratives that will capture the audiences' imagination and keep them enthralled.



## How we do it

# SERIOUS LAUGHTER

### The Serious Laugh

We like having a laugh; it's part of what makes us human. We'll open your mouth and mind through laughter and slip in something serious at the same time. Because when you start to think about the lighter side of life, you start seeing things in a different light.

### Artful Cleverness

Having been writing, producing and performing since 1996, we have developed diverse, compelling stories. To tell our tales, we tap into different storytelling styles that present intriguing ideas in unexpected ways.

### Saris and Fries

Saris and Fries is the collision that occurs when our Indian heritage and culture meets the Western world and ideals that we live with every day. It's the lens through which we tell our stories – a hint of Bollywood with a serious twist.

### Resourceful Narrators

In our performances we paint vivid pictures using strong characters, rather than through casts of thousands or elaborate sets. We prefer you to use your imagination to fill in some of those details – to get right into the experience intellectually and emotionally.



## Who we are

### Enlightening Experiences

At Indian Ink we transport you to vibrant worlds by weaving compelling stories through delightful characters that will leave your heart uplifted, your mind inspired, and your soul nourished.

**Writers** – Justin Lewis & Jacob Rajan

**Director** – Justin Lewis

**Actor** – Justin Rogers

**Actor** – Kalyani Nagarajan

**Production & Tour Manager/LX Operator** – Andrew Potvin

**Dramaturge** – Murray Edmond

**Set Designer** – John Verryt

**Costume Designer** – Fiona Nichols

**Lighting Designer** – Jane Hakaraia

**Sound Design** – Liam Kelly

**General Manager** – Jude Froude

**Producer** – Pene Lister

**Digital Marketer & Office Manager** – Rowan Everton

**Development Manager** – Naomi Campion

**Next Gen Programme Leader** – Te Huamanuka Luiten-Apirana

For more information visit  
[www.indianink.co.nz](http://www.indianink.co.nz)

