

# ASU alum returns to home state, Gammage stage for 'Life of Pi' premiere

## Toussaint Jeanlouis helps bring the iconic tiger to life

By Wendy Maddox, ASU News  
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Arizona State University alum Toussaint Jeanlouis will be returning to Tempe on the "Life of Pi" national Broadway tour, where he voices and puppeteers the head of Richard Parker, the tiger, while also acting as the hyena and Cook.

With an impressive background in music, singing, dancing, martial arts and more, Jeanlouis first realized his passion for performance in high school where he saw the impact of the arts firsthand.

"If I can make a change in the world by performing, then this is totally what I'm interested in doing," Jeanlouis said.

As he moved into his years as an ASU theater major, Jeanlouis found that the support from his teachers and the knowledge they gave him helped him "develop the sense of being an artist." Following his graduation, Jeanlouis attended the California Institute of the Arts, and after years of performing and teaching the arts, he is making his way back to Arizona this summer.

Joining the "Life of Pi" cast to play an animal through puppetry is no easy task. In order to bring inanimate puppets to life throughout the show, Jeanlouis and his fellow cast members had to research how tigers, hyenas and more interact with the world around them by watching videos.

Through this process, Jeanlouis learned how to effectively communicate what an animal needed, what they were feeling and how they see the world.

"You hear things differently. You see things differently; you can feel the wind. You can feel the change in things," Jeanlouis said. "The difference between where I used to be and where I feel like I'm at now because of the tiger is that I can feel all of these things, but I'm in control."

Not only did Jeanlouis learn how to "let the tiger do the thinking" for him, but he learned how to communicate with the two other performers — the heart and the hind puppeteers — to make the

Richard Parker puppet really come to life. Using mere sounds, the trio are able to communicate and bring life to the Richard Parker puppet through various choreographed movements throughout the show.

Another major aspect that goes into playing the role of Richard Parker is a deep understanding of voice acting, to which Jeanlouis credits his education.

“The voice training I got at ASU was extremely helpful to really be able to breathe deep and find other resonances in your body that you don't normally use on a regular basis,” Jeanlouis said.

Before becoming a part of the "Life of Pi" national Broadway tour cast, Jeanlouis said he felt subjected to the perceptions of others, and would try and “shrink” himself in order to please everyone around him. But since he began performing as Richard Parker, he has been able to grow his confidence on and off the stage.

“The most beautiful gift that I've gotten from doing this show is just kind of being more comfortable with myself,” Jeanlouis said.

As he continues his journey with the LIFE OF PI tour and beyond, Jeanlouis looks back to ASU as an important step toward his future in the performance world.

“I'm forever grateful for my time at ASU because I wouldn't be where I'm at today if I hadn't had those experiences,” Jeanlouis said.

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

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## How to watch

["Life of Pi" performances](#) begin at ASU Gammage on June 17.

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## Main image



Taha Mandviwala as Pi and puppeteers Anna Leigh Gortner, Shiloh Goodin and Toussaint Jeanlouis as Richard Parker the tiger in the national tour of "Life of Pi." Photo by Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade 2024

**Text image(s)**



Taha Mandviwala as Pi; puppeteers Anna Leigh Gortner, Shiloh Goodin and Toussaint Jeanlouis as Richard Parker, the tiger; and the cast of the national tour of "Life of Pi." Photo by Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade 2024





Taha Mandviwala as Pi and puppeteers Anna Leigh Gortner, Shiloh Goodin and Toussaint Jeanlouis as Richard Parker, the tiger, in the national tour of "Life of Pi." Photo by Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade 2024