

A LION'S SHARE

The *King's* cast reflects on their roles, their director, and the show

By Sheryl Kahn

JASON RAIZE

Character: Simba, the lion cub-turned-king in Act Two.

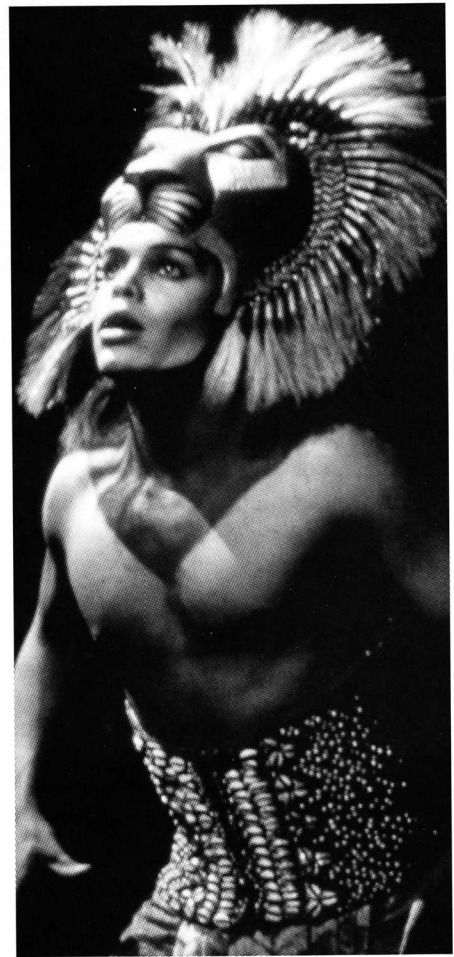
Credits: Recently played Pontius Pilate in the national tour of *Jesus Christ Superstar*; *The King and I*; *Miss Saigon*; Yeston-Kopit's *Phantom* (title role); *Gypsy*.



Two for the price of one: "The hardest part of my role has been achieving Julie's vision of duality. Simba is both man and beast. His expressions show the humanity in him — his movements, the animal nature. The tendency is to sacrifice one for the other, but you can't. You have to remember at the heart of this beast are very basic emotions we can all relate to: fear, denial, grief, pride."

A classic folk tale: "*Lion King* is a coming-of-age story about love, loss, and growth. A child grows into a man and learns from his mistakes. The main characters are animals, but I think you'll find a little of them in all of us."

Hold the helicopter: "The show definitely awakens the mind to the intricacies of the tricks of the trade. There are no falling chandeliers, no helicopters coming from the sky. This is thought and ingenuity — not high-tech gadgetry. And I think that's more impressive — it lets your imagination run wild."



JOAN MARCUS/MARC BRYAN-BROWN

HEATHER HEADLEY

Character: Nala, the Lion Queen.

Credits: Understudied and performed the role of Sarah in *Ragtime*; *Pippin*; *Dreamgirls*; *And the World Goes 'Round*.

I am woman, hear me roar: "This is a very patriarchal story, so Nala has the main female influence. She



opens the door that leads Simba back. There was a lot of pressure to play her strong, but not in a masculine, tough, threatening way. It was frustrating getting that balance down."

Solid like a rock?: "Okay, there were a few glitches in