
Walt Disney Pictures
presents

“THE LION KING”

LARGE FORMAT CINEMA SPECIAL EDITION PRODUCTION INFORMATION

Still the mightiest animated feature of them all and the undisputed “king” of the box office, Walt Disney Pictures’ “The Lion King” roars to life as never before with its dazzling Large Format Cinema debut. Reformatted specifically for the Giant Screen from the film’s original digital elements, this special limited engagement in IMAX® Theatres and other Large Format cinemas offers moviegoers a chance to experience one of the greatest animated adventures of all time on the most majestic canvas imaginable. The original filmmaking trio – producer Don Hahn and directors Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff – joined forces with a team of top artists and technicians to oversee the creation of this new Large Format version that boasts added detail, richer colors, a newly remixed soundtrack, and a theatrical experience uniquely suited to capture the scope and beauty of its African settings.

Thomas Schumacher, president of Walt Disney Feature Animation and executive producer of “The Lion King,” observes, “‘The Lion King’ has had a massive impact on moviegoers around the world and on our Studio. It has struck a chord and become part of our culture. The film has been translated into 32 languages from Swedish to Zulu, because its message about community, stepping up and taking your place, accepting responsibility, resonates no matter where you go. From the day that it was first released, the film has been something that people wanted to share. They wanted to share its universal message, its content, its fantastic look, the great music, its powerful theme. And the great thing about this Large Format release is that they can go and share the experience all over again. So much of the film benefits from the Giant Screen experience.”

According to Hahn, “Seeing ‘The Lion King’ on the Giant Screen is a very special way to experience the film. It not only allows you to watch the movie; it allows you to kind of be in the movie. Large Format screens are six to eight stories tall and

surround you with images. Your whole periphery of vision is filled with images, not only east and west, but north and south. And the sound surrounds you too so that when you’re in a wildebeest stampede, you feel as if you’re really there. You feel the wildebeests coming over the top of you and you feel the sound around you. Your chest shakes with the vibration of the ground and it connects you with the movie in a special way. ‘The Lion King’ is especially well suited to the Giant Screen with its spectacular visual tapestry of Africa, beautiful sunsets and misty, dusty mornings and clouds rolling across the Savannah. You feel like you’ve actually made a trip there in some sense. And that’s something that Large Format films can do better than anything else.”

Dick Cook, chairman of The Walt Disney Studios, adds, “This is a movie that is really bigger than life and there is no substitute for seeing it on the big screen. The Giant Screen is the ultimate way to see it. I’ve seen ‘The Lion King’ probably 100 times, but when I saw it for the first time in this format, I was deeply moved and I loved the movie more than ever. When you see this film projected eight stories high, it is just magical and a whole new way to experience this modern classic.”

With its compelling story, breathtaking animation, colorful characters, Oscar®-winning music (songs by Elton John and Tim Rice; score by Hans Zimmer), the film follows the adventures of a young lion cub named Simba, who just can’t wait to be king. The sudden death of his father, Mufasa, and the treacherous actions of his Uncle Scar lead Simba into exile and ultimately on a hero’s journey of self-discovery. Adopting the “hakuna matata” philosophy of his comical jungle guardians – a warthog named Pumbaa and a meerkat named Timon – Simba grows to maturity, but eventually comes to terms with his destiny and returns home to Pride Rock to help put things right.

“The Lion King” was originally released in 1994 and went on to become the most successful animated film of all time with a worldwide gross in excess of \$771 million. Eight years after its debut, it continues to hold the box-office crown as the top-grossing animated film and it occupies the #10 spot on the list of all time worldwide box-office champs, just behind “Star Wars” and “E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial.”

In addition to its commercial success, “The Lion King” was a critical smash as well. In its four-star review, Rolling Stone Magazine lionized the film and called it a “hugely entertaining blend of music, fun and eye-popping thrills, though it doesn’t lack for heart. The father-son relationship is movingly rendered.” Film Critic Michael Medved, in his New York Post review, noted, “Every scene contains some new splendor to delight the eye or refresh the spirit, and to advance the film’s higher purpose: inspiring a sense of wonder at ‘the circle of life’ in which we all play our part.” The Hollywood Reporter said, “‘The Lion King’ is a scrumptiously delightful moviegoing experience” and “a future classic. Directors Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff have fashioned a radiantly multi-dimensional film.”

Beyond its record-breaking success at the box office, “The Lion King” went on to become the best-selling video in home entertainment history (with more than 30 million units sold in the U.S. alone) and inspired one of the most successful Broadway shows of all-time. “The Lion King,” under Julie Taymor’s acclaimed direction, opened on Broadway on November 13, 1997, and has since become a worldwide phenomenon. To date, there have been eight productions around the world (including New York, London, Toronto, Tokyo, Los Angeles and Hamburg), and a U.S. national tour. As the stage production celebrates its fifth anniversary, it has been seen by over 15 million theatergoers and will have earned over \$900 million worldwide at the box office. Among its many achievements, “The Lion King” has won over 30 major awards including six Tony Awards (Best Musical, etc.), eight Drama Desk Awards, six Outer Circle Awards, and a Grammy Award for Best Musical Show Album, among others.

The characters from “The Lion King” were seen in the hugely successful 1998 direct-to-video sequel “The Lion King II: Simba’s Pride” and Timon and Pumbaa went on to star in their own television series, “The Lion King’s Timon and Pumbaa,” which debuted in 1995. Currently in production for release in 2004 is the Disney video premiere of “The Lion King 1-1/2,” in which the story of the original film is seen from a whole new perspective – through the eyes of Timon and Pumbaa.

“The Lion King” was directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, two versatile Disney veterans

whose impressive backgrounds run the gamut from character animation to story supervision, design and short film direction. The duo made their feature film directing debuts on “The Lion King.” Allers has gone on to develop other feature projects for the Studio, receive a Tony Award nomination for writing the book for the Broadway production of “The Lion King” (along with Irene Mecchi), and direct an upcoming Disney animated short based on Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Little Match Girl.” Rob Minkoff followed his success on “The Lion King” with two impressive live-action directing stints on “Stuart Little” and “Stuart Little 2.” He is currently in production on Disney’s 2003 live-action release, “The Haunted Mansion,” starring Eddie Murphy.

Producer Don Hahn, a major contributor to Disney’s animation renaissance during his 26 years at the Studio, has guided such other animated features as “Who Framed Roger Rabbit,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “The Hunchback of Notre Dame,” and “Atlantis: The Lost Empire.” He is currently reteamed with Minkoff in his role as producer of “The Haunted Mansion,” and has several new animated feature projects in the works. Thomas Schumacher, who has served as president of Walt Disney Feature Animation since 1999 and played a major role in taking “The Lion King” to Broadway in his role as president of Disney Theatrical Productions, was the executive producer of “The Lion King.” Sarah McArthur, a veteran Disney animation executive and now executive vice president, production, at Pixar Animation Studios, also executive produced. The film’s original screenplay is by Irene Mecchi and Jonathan Roberts and Linda Woolverton. Thirteen supervising animators, both in California and Florida, were responsible for establishing the personalities and setting the tone for the film’s main characters. Nearly 20 minutes of the film were animated at Disney Feature Animation Florida.

Helping to bring the film’s colorful cast of characters convincingly to life is a stellar group of vocal talents. Jonathan Taylor Thomas lends a tone of sincerity and humor to the curious cub, young Simba. Simba’s voice as an adult belongs to popular actor Matthew Broderick (whose most recent credits include an acclaimed stint in “The Producers” on Broadway), who brings the proper blend of comedy, compassion and complexity to the character. The

unmistakable roar of King Mufasa comes from renowned actor James Earl Jones, one of the most popular and recognizable voices in the world.

Academy Award®-winner Jeremy Irons earned his place in Disney's gallery of classic villains with his deliciously nasty delivery as Scar, the tyrannical uncle who is "prepared" to do whatever it takes to gain control of the Pride Lands. Ready to do his bidding are a laughable trio of hyena henchmen who may be at the bottom of the food chain, but are tops at stirring up laughter and treachery. Academy Award®-winner Whoopi Goldberg lends her impressive comic talents to the vocalizations of Shenzi while Cheech Marin chases down lots of laughs as the bedraggled Banzai. Versatile vocalist Jim Cummings uses an expressive range of laughs from giggles to guffaws to add personality to a slap-happy hyena named Ed, a cross between Harpo Marx and Ed McMahon.

Also featured in the vocal cast is Rowan Atkinson, the popular British comic actor best known for his television portrayals of "Mr. Bean" and "Blackadder," who fills the bill here as a haughty hornbill serving as the king's loyal assistant and guardian to young Simba. Broadway veterans Nathan Lane (a Tony Award winner for "The Producers" and an Emmy Award winner for his vocal performance in the "Timon & Pumbaa" animated series) and Ernie Sabella bring their hilarious comic antics to the roles of a carefree meerkat named Timon and his pungent warthog pal, Pumbaa. Multi-talented Robert Guillaume adds heart, eccentricity and touch of mysticism to the proceedings as the voice of Rafiki, a wise baboon who leads Simba back on track. Rounding out the cast are Niketa Calame as the playful voice of Simba's young playmate, Nala, with Moira Kelly taking over as that character grows into a lovely lioness. Actress Madge Sinclair provides the maternal voice behind Simba's royal mother, Queen Sarabi.

'The Lion King' is very much in the great Disney tradition of using allegories with animals for storytelling purposes," says Roy E. Disney, vice chairman of The Walt Disney Company. "In the early days, Walt adapted many of Aesop's fables for animation and used animal characters like Mickey and Donald to tell his stories. Later 'Bambi,' 'Lady and the Tramp' and 'One Hundred and One Dalmatians,' and some of the 'True-Life Adventures'

further explored the approach to telling stories about animals in human terms and with strong moral themes. I think 'Lion King' very much has its roots in those films and I am personally delighted because it opens up whole new worlds for us in storytelling."

Don Hahn observes, "'The Lion King' is essentially a love story between a father and a son. It's about that moment in life when you realize that your father is going to pass on to you his wisdom and knowledge. The circle of life. Someday we all become adults. The baton will be passed on to us and we're going to have to grow up."

To prepare the filmmakers for the daunting task of capturing the vast natural beauty of Africa in animation, six members of the creative team visited Eastern Africa during the early stages of production. For each of them, the trip had a profound impact and helped them create and design the exciting visuals that make this film so special and unique. Close encounters with real lions and other jungle animals helped to shape and define the roles the characters would play in the film. The numerous sketches, photos and videos they brought back with them enabled art director Andy Gaskill and production designer Chris Sanders to add authentic flavor to the reality-based "fantasy Africa" they were creating for the film. The unforgettable images of fiery sunrises, velvety-blue nights, dusty gorges, lush green jungles and the earthtone colors of the Serengeti were all inspired by this trip and the natural beauty that abounds there.

For the more than 600 artists, animators and technicians who contributed to "The Lion King" over its lengthy production schedule, the film presented many challenges. In the end, more than one million drawings were created for the film, which is made up of 1,197 hand-painted backgrounds and 119,058 individually colored frames of film.

THE BIG PICTURE: “THE LION KING” STAMPEDES ONTO THE GIANT SCREEN

“The Lion King” is the fourth major Disney animated feature to be presented on the Giant Screen. “Fantasia/2000” made its historic debut in IMAX® Theatres on January 1, 2000. “Beauty and the Beast” featured an added musical number (“Human Again”) when it bowed in a special Large Format Cinema Edition in 2002. More recently, Disney’s exciting new animated adventure, “Treasure Planet” made movie history when it became the first new film to receive a simultaneous release in 35mm and Large Format versions. Looking forward, the Studio has an ambitious slate of live-action projects in production designed especially for the Giant Screen, including a new “Black Stallion” film due out in 2003, the James Cameron-directed 3-D project “Ghosts of the Abyss,” and a new wildlife documentary entitled “Birds of Prey.”

Instead of simply blowing up an existing 35mm negative of “The Lion King” for the Giant Screen, the filmmakers chose to create new elements from the original digital information. This allows for greater clarity in the image. In the process of reformatting the film frame-by-frame, they set out to remove any particles and artifacts from the original production and correct any images that would appear unsightly or inappropriate when projected seven stories high. The average Large Format screen is actually 8-10 times larger than the typical 35mm screen.

Creating a Large Format version of “The Lion King” took over a year and required the talents of a top creative and technical team. Producer Don Hahn and director Roger Allers spearheaded the effort and consulted throughout the process with Rob Minkoff (who was filming “Stuart Little 2” at the time). Overseeing the creation of the Large Format prints was artistic director Dave Bossert and Joe Juliano, director of the camera department for Walt Disney Feature Animation.

The original “Lion King” movie is archived on 8,754 data CDs and totals 2.2 Terabytes (one million million bytes) of data. The film was initially stored on 4,331 magnetic 8mm tapes and subsequently converted to the more stable CD medium. With the additional reformatting and animation done for the

Large Cinema Edition, “The Lion King” is now archived on 12,156 CDs (or 3.6 Terabytes).

Allers recalls, “We began the reformatting process by looking closely at the original film. Tiny figures in the distance had to be re-drawn larger so that when they were projected on the Giant Screen they would hold up. We looked at the film scene by scene, not only for characters that needed to be tightened up in their clean-up, but also for backgrounds where brushstrokes were too loose or places where the grain of the paper might become too visible. We touched up those backgrounds and added detail where necessary to background characters.”

For Allers, reformatting the film for the Giant Screen also meant having a second chance to fix certain things in the original film that weren’t quite right. This proved to be a director’s dream come true.

“One of the things that I was never satisfied with in the original release was the waterfall in the love song, ‘Can You Feel the Love Tonight,’ explains Allers. “The water was meant to be soft, but it came off as a blurry stripe on the screen. It had no sense of falling texture. We had done this scene close to the end of production and had just run out of time. For this version of the film, we were able to go in and make it look like real falling water. At the same time, we were able to improve the color palette by simplifying it and changing the sky effect. This also added a sense of back-lighting on Simba and Nala as they walked down the cliff. I love it now. I’m so happy to actually see falling water. It still has a very soft effect, but there’s something there.”

Allers also got a chance to fix another source of irritation in the “Just Can’t Wait to be King” musical sequence. “The singing crocodiles in this sequence never looked right. It’s a very short scene but they were never properly designed. For the Large Format version, we were able to redesign the crocodiles and the birds in their mouths and re-do the animation. The color palette was also changed. Now this scene is much more integrated.”

Dave Bossert observes, “Creating a Large Format version of ‘The Lion King’ is like polishing a gem for the large screen. It has been very gratifying to have the opportunity to improve one of our great movies and make it that much better for the audience to experience. We were able to go in and fix little mistakes that we would have liked to have done the

first time around. There were some paint pops and operational things that were never finished in time for release. We were also able to make some camera moves smoother. The technology has improved so rapidly in just eight years, that we can now calculate moves out to an extra decimal point. With that extra difference, we reprocessed some camera moves and it made a difference.”

Once the animation, clean-up and background improvements were complete, a new Large Format version of the film was created in-house at Disney using state-of-the-art, digital laser cameras. Each frame of film was re-photographed one frame at a time to build a new 65mm negative. Special software is used to increase the amount of pixels needed to make this print.

Joe Jiuliano explains, “Our job in the camera department is to make sure the film comes out looking the way the artists envisioned it in terms of color, contrast, saturation, etc. The artwork comes to us as a finished, final frame stored in digital files. We put it through digital film recorders, which convert those files into light that is exposed directly onto the frame of film. We take advantage of the new film stocks, new camera equipment, and new lab processes to make our Large Format versions.”

Bossert adds, “There was a reverence about this project and the sense of working on a classic. Everyone really wanted to do justice to the film in this new format and make sure that the experience lived up to the audiences’ high expectations. We took a lot of care and turned to many of the artists who had worked on the original release. You really haven’t seen this movie until you’ve seen it on the Giant Screen, because it is so spectacular. This is a completely different experience than the 35mm release or the Broadway play. I think audiences are going to be blown away.”

Allers concludes, “Seeing ‘The Lion King’ on the Giant Screen has a big impact. The film lends itself to this format for a variety of reasons. The film has longer scenes and set pieces that offer a big vista. Our biggest action scene, the wildebeest stampede moves largely on the Z axis, which the Giant Screen loves. You get that wonderful sense of movement as you travel through an environment.

“From a sound perspective, our expert team headed by Terry Porter and Mel Metcalf, did some new sound design that takes full advantage of the superior speakers and sound placement in the IMAX and Large Format Cinemas,” he adds. “The stampede now has a greater impact sonically and you can sense the reverb and sound echoing off the canyon walls.”

REFLECTIONS ON “THE LION KING” EIGHT YEARS LATER

Looking back on the success of “The Lion King” eight years after its original theatrical release, producer Don Hahn observes, “When we were making the film, we had no idea that it would become the phenomenon that it eventually became. At the time, we were just hoping that this kind of offbeat story about a lion cub that gets framed for murder by his uncle would be something that audiences would enjoy at the end of the day. We tried to tell a story that was engaging and we were really fortunate that the elements came together. As human beings, we want to watch that story. We want to see it again and again. The idea of paradise lost, paradise found, losing your dreams and goal, and then finding them again is so compelling. That is why ‘The Lion King’ has been able to exist this long.

“The magic of animation is the range of emotions you can pack into a film,” adds Hahn. “There are things as profound as the death of a parent when Mufasa is killed in a horrific wildebeest stampede. Twenty minutes later, there’s a flatulent warthog on the screen and there’s singing and dancing and great comedy. That range of emotion is something that is unique to animation. The fact that you can have something as broad as life and death and comedy and pathos and all those emotions packed into one movie is really a magical thing about the art of animation. It takes the audience places that live-action can’t.”

Director Rob Minkoff notes, “‘The Lion King’ is the thing I’m most proud of in my career. There’s something about the story that touches people. It’s very moving and the characters are rich with a lot to say. I hadn’t seen the film in about eight years and when they showed it to me on the Giant Screen, I was swept away by it. It is truly amazing to see it in this format.”

Thomas Schumacher recalls, “At the time we were making ‘The Lion King,’ it was shocking to everyone that we had turned to a major pop star, a rock star, a contemporary singer who had never written for voices other than his own. The fact is that what Elton John brought to the process was a universal quality. He writes fantastic songs. We didn’t know it at the time, but it really was the key component to making this film a hit. The combination of Elton and Tim Rice’s songs and the musical genius of Hans Zimmer, Mark Mancina and Lebo M. created the extraordinary music for the film and took it to a whole new plane.”

ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

The idea for an African-based coming-of-age story told as an allegory originated in the story department of Walt Disney Feature Animation. The project was initially called “King of the Jungle” and, like most animated features at Disney, its development was evolutionary, taking years to create and refine. Unlike the six classic fairy tales that preceded it and the numerous adaptations of literary favorites like “Peter Pan,” “Alice in Wonderland,” “One Hundred and One Dalmatians,” and “The Rescuers,” “The Lion King” is an original story, not based on any previously published account.

According to producer Hahn, “The strength of our process here at Disney is the ability and willingness to throw things out, move things around or try something completely different. For example, the song ‘Can You Feel the Love Tonight’ was in different places and sung by different characters during the course of the production and finally became the beautiful love ballad that is in the final film.”

Having two directors with impressive story and development backgrounds proved to be a tremendous asset to the film. Minkoff and Allers’ interest and participation in theater also prepared them well for this assignment and proved to be another great strength of this directing team.

According to Allers, who joined the project in October 1991, “The real heart and emotional underpinning of the whole story is the father-son relationship. At one point in the film, Simba steps into

his father’s paw print and we see this image of his little paw in an enormous print. It is very symbolic. When his father is taken away from him too soon, he feels unworthy and inadequate. My favorite part of the film is when his father returns in ghost form and tells him that his spirit lives on in his son.”

Minkoff adds, “We set out to do something very different from the things that had been done before. ‘Aladdin,’ ‘Beauty,’ and ‘Mermaid’ were all basically love stories and this one is more about the relationship between a father and a son. It is just as crucial and interesting in its own way, but a real different subject and a change of pace from other Disney films.

For story head Brenda Chapman, the process was very rewarding but not without its share of frustrations. “Writing an original story is definitely more challenging,” says Chapman, “because there is nothing to fall back on. There is no structure to begin with. Sometimes we found ourselves in left field and didn’t know it until we were way out there. The story changed quite a bit from the initial idea that Simba would stay with the pride after his father’s death. It was our job to make the main characters likable and sympathetic. It was also challenging to make the environment and characters interesting. In real life, lions basically sleep, eat and have no props.”

Chapman credits her trip to Kenya in 1991 as being a real turning point on this project. “It made me very passionate about this film and helped me to approach it with lots of new insights about the animals and the environment. It also gave us the idea for ‘Hakuna Matata,’ which is a very popular expression over there. Rafiki’s ‘nonsense’ rhyme – Asante sana. Squash banana. We we nugu. Mi mi apana. – also came out of that trip.

In April 1992, when Rob Minkoff joined the directing team, a brainstorming session was held to revamp the story. For two days, Don Hahn presided over the intensive discussion that included the two directors and Chapman. Also attending were Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale, the directors and story-savvy duo responsible for “Beauty and the Beast.” What emerged was a character makeover for Simba and a radically revised second half of the film.

By that summer, screenwriter Irene Mecchi was brought on board to help further develop the characters and define their personalities. Several months later, she was joined by Jonathan Roberts in

the rewriting process. Working together as the “Nick and Nora Charles” of the animation department and in conjunction with the directors and story team, they tackled the difficult, unresolved emotional issues in the script and also added lots of new comic situations with foils, Pumbaa and Timon, as well as the hyenas.

THE MUSIC

For “The Lion King,” the filmmakers brought together a trio of musical talents to create one of the most integral, sophisticated and delightful collaborations in the Studio’s history. Their inspired work resulted in a phenomenal four Oscar® nominations (for the songs “Circle of Life,” “Hakuna Matata,” the 1995 Award-winning “Can You Feel the Love Tonight,” and the film’s Oscar®-winning score) along with other major awards and acclaim.

Lyricist Tim Rice was the first member of the musical team to join the project. He recalls, “The Studio asked me if I had any suggestions as to who could write the music. They said choose anybody in the world and choose the best. I said, well, Elton John would be fantastic but you probably won’t get ahold of him simply because he’s very busy and hasn’t done a film score like this in 25 years. They asked him and to my amazement, Elton said yes.”

Schumacher was dispatched to London to present the story to Elton and persuade him to participate in the project. He recalls, “We were terrified at first to even approach him because we thought he might be extremely busy or difficult to work with. Instead, we found him to be a very interested and insightful collaborator who was a big champion of turning this story into a musical. We showed him drafts of the script and screened the rough cut of the film for him on several occasions. He provided numerous comments and notes, which we incorporated into the film and which benefited the overall production. With Tim as our main creative liaison, Elton became an important part of the filmmaking process and really seemed to enjoy himself along the way.”

Rice had barely started on the assignment back in 1991 when he was asked to help out on “Aladdin” and spend the next six months collaborating with composer Alan Menken on the Academy Award®-

winning ballad, “A Whole New World,” as well as two others.

Elton confesses, “I actually jumped at the chance because I knew that Disney was a class act and I liked the story line and the people immediately. The Disney films last forever and children watch them and adults get just as much fun out of them. For me, this project was exciting and challenging because I had to write differently from what I would write for myself. I was pleased that the story was about animals because ‘The Jungle Book’ is one of my favorite Disney films. I think that ‘The Lion King’ is the funniest movie Disney has made since ‘Jungle Book.’ In fact, I probably think it’s the funniest movie they’ve ever made.”

Elton and Tim had known each other for many years and actually collaborated on several occasions in the past, including the song “Legal Boys” for Elton’s Jump Up album in 1982. Rice, whose distinguished credits include partnerships with such celebrated composers as Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, Paul McCartney, and the late Freddie Mercury, found this assignment to be a true pleasure but a major departure from his usual method of operation.

“Up until now, about 95% of the lyrics I’ve written have been done to a tune,” explains Rice. “Elton is one of those rare examples of a composer who actually likes to get the words first. In the case of a film like ‘The Lion King,’ that proved to be quite useful because the key thing with a Disney animated feature is to get the story line dead right. Everything flows from the story.”

Rice became an integral part of the story team with his lyrics becoming just as important to the film as any other element of the script. He spent a great deal of time in meetings with the producer, directors and writers during the production. Once the lyrics and placement of the songs were agreed upon, Rice would serve as the “go-between” with Elton.

“I was staggered by Elton’s brilliant method of working and the speed of it,” says Rice. “He has always said if he doesn’t get a tune right in 20 minutes he just throws it away. I witnessed him create ‘Circle of Life’ from start to finish. I gave him the lyrics at the beginning of the session at about two in the afternoon. He didn’t want it before. By half past three, he’d finished writing and recording a stunning demo.”

Of the five songs that Elton and Tim wrote for “The Lion King,” “Circle of Life” stands apart as being perhaps the most meaningful to the theme of the film. The song, which was the third to be written by the duo, worked so well, in fact, that it became the “anthem” and was chosen to open the film without any establishing dialogue. The main vocal is delivered in an impressive and powerful gospel style by Carmen Twillie.

“Circle of Life” points out that everything is interrelated and that everybody has some sort of responsibility to somebody else,” says Rice. “We are all bound together. No man or lion for that matter is an island. This powerful song seemed to set the agenda for the film and I think it’s a very dramatic opening to the movie.”

Much of the power and drama of that song and the film’s overall musical impact derive from the contribution of the third major player on the music team – composer/arranger Hans Zimmer. Zimmer had written many brilliant film scores ranging from “Rain Man” to “Thelma and Louise,” but it was his work on the African-themed project “The Power of One” which really impressed the filmmakers. His genius for conceptualizing music and experimentation helped to transform Elton’s essentially western pop/rock/gospel tunes into fully-realized, African-flavored melodies complete with authentic Zulu chanting, extensive choral arrangements and rhythms and instrumentation associated with Africa. African-born singer/arranger Lebo M. helped Zimmer recruit and record singers in Los Angeles, London and South Africa for a series of extensive vocal sessions. Lebo M. wrote the chant that is heard at the start of “Circle of Life” as well as other Zulu lyrics heard throughout the film.

“The one-two punch for us on this film in terms of music was having Tim and Elton write some great songs and then having Hans Zimmer turn them into what they are in the film,” says Hahn. “Elton’s gift is writing memorable, unforgettable melodies that move you. He puts his emotions into his music, which is beautiful and stunning. Hans brings an added dimension to those songs through percussion and the emotion of the voices. It gives a tremendous sense of emotion and a feeling of locale and is very much a celebration of African music. In a sense, he is the final storyteller with his ability to underline the emotions of the piece through his score and music supervision.”

Zimmer recalls, “Elton was a very courageous man to just give me his demos and leave me to do whatever I wanted with them. His songs were great to begin with and what I’ve done is paint a little color into them. I work like an animator, in a way. I do this sort of black and white sketch on a piano and then I start filling in the colors as I go along.”

The decision to use extensive choir vocals was Zimmer’s. He explains, “Musicians playing an instrument are basically just trying to get as close to the emotion of a human voice as possible. So I thought I’d go straight to the source and get some really great singers together for this. The voice speaks to you emotionally and more directly than going through the process of translating it into an instrument.”

Operating a bit like a mad scientist in his laboratory, Zimmer experimented till all hours of the night at his state-of-the-art recording studio in Santa Monica. Lebo M. worked closely by his side to get just the right choral sound that he was looking for. In April 1994, Lebo went to BOP Recording Studios in Mmabatho (160 miles from Johannesburg) to work with Mbongeni Ngema (“Sarafina”) in recording a choir of 30 local singers for the final tracks.

The collaboration between Zimmer and Lebo resulted in a version of “Circle of Life” that was a revelation to the filmmakers and won the approval of composer Elton John. “Hans has done a fantastic job,” says Elton. “It was written as a straight song and it was Zimmer’s idea to give it an African slant and enlist Lebo M. to make it a chant.”

Zimmer contributed in many ways to the overall emotional impact of the movie with his song arrangements and evocative score. “I think music is a great way of telling a story especially where words don’t quite reach you,” says the composer. “Emotions are universal and music is the universal language.”

Perhaps the most difficult song in the film to write was the love ballad, “Can You Feel the Love Tonight.” Although chronologically it was the first to be written, this song went through many modifications as this critical part of the story evolved and was reworked time and again. By Rice’s count, he wrote 15 sets of lyrics for that song over a period of several years. At one point in the restructuring, the song was sung by Pumbaa and Timon. Feeling quite strongly about the role of the “love song” in a Disney

film, Elton lobbied the directors to allow Simba and Nala to sing it as intended. In the end, the filmmakers agreed with him. Joseph Williams and Sally Dworsky provide the singing voices for the two lovers with Kristle Edwards lending support. The original lyrics to “Can You Feel the Love Tonight” can be heard over the end credits in Elton’s own distinct version of the song.

For Simba’s song, “I Just Can’t Wait to be King,” Elton composed an up-tempo, cheeky tune that he describes as “Eddie Cochran meets Motown” in terms of style. Rice’s lyrics reveal the young lion cub’s ambitions and lend themselves to the fantasy-based visuals that accompany the song. Jason Weaver, who played a young Michael Jackson in the 1992 telefilm, “The Jacksons: An American Dream,” is heard as Simba while Laura Williams chimes in as Nala.

Jeremy Irons makes his screen singing debut on “Be Prepared,” as the villainous Scar bares his teeth and ambitions to an army of hideous hyenas. With just the right balance of menace and humor, the song itself grows bigger and bigger as Scar gets carried away with himself and his own oratory. Hahn sees it as “a classic villain’s song where Scar gets to twirl his moustache and hatch his plot. It launches into a kind of bacchanal, conga-line moment where the audience discovers his real motivation.”

The final song written for the film was “Hakuna Matata,” a delightful zydeco-flavored tune based on the Swahili expression for “no worries.” Delivered with great fervor and panache by Broadway superstar Nathan Lane and stage veteran Ernie Sabella, in their respective roles as Timon and Pumbaa, this song presents an opposing philosophy to the one offered in “Circle of Life” and provides a few musical clues as to what Simba’s life will be like with his new companions. Jason Weaver and Joseph Williams both take turns singing for Simba as he matures from a carefree cub to adulthood.

BRINGING THE CHARACTERS TO LIFE

Just as Walt Disney called upon leading experts of the day to help his artists prepare for the task of realistically animating animals for the 1942 nature-based drama “Bambi,” producer Don Hahn enlisted the expertise of today’s top specialists to teach his crew some of the fine points of animal behavior and anatomy. Wildlife expert Jim Fowler visited the Studio on several occasions with an assortment of lions and other jungle inhabitants. Anatomy consultant Stuart Sumida, a biology professor at Cal State San Bernardino, provided the animators with a better understanding for their characters’ movements through lectures on comparative anatomy, skeletal structure and action analysis.

Animators also made frequent trips to the zoo—in particular, the Los Angeles Zoo, the San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park, the Metro Zoo in Miami and the Living Desert Wildlife and Botanical Park in Palm Springs. Lions and other relevant animals also made “house calls” to the Studio for close-up observations. Animal trainer David McMillan and his 700-pound lion, Poncho, became regulars at the animation department while Nick Toth of Cougar Hill Ranch corralled some of his large cat “pets” to help the cause.

Ruben Aquino, the supervising animator responsible for adult Simba, had the distinction of being the first artist assigned to “The Lion King.” His initial job was to research different forms of animal locomotion and lay the groundwork for his colleagues who would soon be joining the production. He watched every wildlife documentary he could get his hands on, made numerous sketches and workbooks, analyzed different forms of locomotion from the rocking, prancing moves of the wildebeests and the loping gait of the hyenas to the trot-like run of the warthog.

“Animal locomotion is one of the hardest things to do in animation,” says Aquino. “With quadrupeds, you’ve got twice as many legs to worry about as you do with human characters. Animating their movements from certain angles can be very difficult and transitioning between a run and a walk cycle is particularly hard. It was important that the audience believe that these characters were real and the more

we understood their anatomy, the easier it was to animate.”

Also helpful to Aquino during his research phase was watching some of the Disney animated classics. “‘Lady and the Tramp’ was a great inspiration in terms of the acting,” adds the animator. “No other film has done better as far as creating personality in four-legged animals goes. I really like the way Tramp delivers his lines while he’s walking. ‘The Jungle Book’ and ‘Bambi’ were also useful for reference purposes.”

Aquino also drew major inspiration from Matthew Broderick, who provides the voice for his character. “He’s got a very warm and appealing voice,” observes Aquino. “There’s also a lot of humor and vulnerability in his delivery, which really gave me something to go on and made it easier for me to flesh out my performance.”

Director Minkoff adds, “Matthew was able to humanize the hero character for us with his performance and give Simba a lot of depth. Sometimes heroes end up becoming two-dimensional because they are very difficult roles to approach. Matthew brought a great deal of sensitivity and thoughtfulness to the role along with the sincerity and a sense of humor.”

Working primarily with four-legged animals also proved challenging to the animators in terms of gesturing and attitudes. According to Andreas Deja, Scar’s supervising animator, “When I first began to animate this character, I remember thinking, ‘How am I going to get all this humanized personality into this character without hands?’ Hands are so important to expressing a character’s emotions. Finally, I learned to concentrate on the overall body attitude – the angle of the head and the facial expressions. Sometimes, very subtle things like raising an eyebrow let you show what the character is thinking. You have fewer things to work with but I think it can be as powerful in the end if you really understand the scene and get the acting right.”

In the case of Scar, Deja used the character’s walk to express personality. “His walk is totally different from the other lions,” explains Deja. “He’s usually lower to the ground because he’s sneakier. He has more of a gliding walk, kind of slick and elegant, while the others are much more powerful and heavy.”

The primary inspiration for Deja’s performance and Scar’s ultimate design came directly from actor Jeremy Irons. “As a voice talent and actor, he was able to do so much with the dialogue and was a great springboard for the character,” recalls Deja. “He has a way of playing with the words and twisting them so that they would come out very sarcastic and always a bit unexpected. I would watch him at the recording sessions and then run back to my desk because I couldn’t wait to get started with the animation.”

Director Allers adds, “Jeremy’s recording sessions produced an embarrassment of riches. He would give us so many different interpretations that it became difficult for us to pick which was the best. He is a craftsman with his voice and was able to give us all kinds of inflection and nuance. He brings to the character an air of incredible intelligence, yet sort of twisted and dark. He was absolutely brilliant.”

“People sometimes ask, ‘don’t you get bored doing all those drawings?’ and the thing of it is that we don’t think about drawing, we think about acting,” continues Deja. “My job is to figure out who this character is and what he’s going through emotionally at any given point. You have to know what his likes and dislikes are and how he feels about himself and the other characters. Jeremy does the voice, but the performance and how he would move and act is really up to me. I have to come up with that performance that you see up there on the screen.”

Deja, who had previously supervised the villains Gaston in “Beauty and the Beast” and Jafar in “Aladdin,” and most recently supervised Lilo in “Lilo & Stitch,” explains, “You don’t really turn down the part of a villain whether you’re an actor or an animator because they’re very juicy. Villains tend to be really expressive and usually motivate the story. They’re also a lot more challenging from an animation standpoint. In the case of Scar, he is probably the most evil of all the villains I have worked with. He enjoys playing with his victims and there are many different levels to his personality.”

The assignment of animating the film’s comic duo – Pumbaa and Timon – fell to real-life pals and co-workers Tony Bancroft and Mike Surrey. The talented twosome had shared offices and scenes in the past (Aladdin and Iago, Cogsworth and Lumiere) and seemed to have just the right chemistry to pull off this entertaining assignment. Voice talents Nathan Lane

(Timon) and Ernie Sabella (Pumbaa) were similarly off-stage friends who had worked together in the Broadway revival of “Guys and Dolls” and proved to have the right comedic combination for the roles.

“In real life, the warthog would probably eat the meerkat, so we’ve obviously taken quite a few liberties in making them best friends,” comments Surrey. “With these two characters, we were able to go much broader and concentrate on their personalities. Nathan was great to work with and just watching him at the recording sessions provided some wonderful material.

Bancroft adds, “I would typically start the animation on most scenes because Pumbaa is almost like a moving stage for Timon. In fact, Timon is usually on Pumbaa’s head or his nose or climbing all over him. Before I did any actual drawing, I’d talk the scene over with Mike to make sure that what I was doing would work with what he had in mind for Timon. There’s a lot of interplay between the two characters and we both had a lot of fun working on them.”

The animated antics of King Mufasa’s dedicated secretary bird, a hornbill named Zazu, were guided by supervising animator Ellen Woodbury. In addition to studying endless footage of birds, her research included a first-hand encounter with Jim Fowler’s visiting hornbill, analyzing skeletons and muscle systems for birds and a trip to a Palm Desert aviary.

“You somehow have to invent the sensation of what it’s like to fly,” remarks Woodbury. “Watching birds fly and hearing the sound their wings make along with all the other research gives you part of the image. By the time I did my test animation, I felt like I could fly. It was very liberating and exhilarating. It really helped me to internalize the process and pretend that I was moving through the scene the way Zazu would. Rowan Atkinson’s voice is incredibly rich and listening to his readings gave me so much to work with.”

Supervising animator Mark Henn, who continues to be one of the industry’s top animation talents, found his assignment overseeing young Simba to be similarly satisfying. “The thing that really excited me about this film was its emotional content,” he observes. “It is very powerful and the struggles that Simba goes through, the highs and lows of his life, is

what sets this film apart for me. The challenge for us as actors and animators was to ‘get into his paws’ and take that feeling and keep building on it. In order for the film to work, the audience has to really like Simba and be willing to cheer for him and cry with him at times.”