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Julie Taymor

Artist, Director, Playwright (1952–)

Director, playwright and designer Julie Taymor was the creative force behind Broadway's *The Lion King*, and is a director of theater, opera and film.

Synopsis

Julie Taymor was born December 15, 1952 in Boston, Massachusetts. The creative force behind numerous productions, including Broadway's smash musical *The Lion King*, Julie Taymor has become a much-admired, innovative director in the worlds of theater and opera. She has also employed her visionary talents to create several feature films, including *Frida* (2002) and *Across the Universe* (2007).

NAME

Julie Taymor

OCCUPATION

Artist, Director, Playwright

BIRTH DATE

December 15, 1952 (age
63)

EDUCATION

Oberlin College

PLACE OF BIRTH

Boston, Massachusetts

ZODIAC SIGN

Sagittarius

Early Theater Life

Director, playwright, puppeteer, designer. Born on December 15, 1952, in Boston, Massachusetts. The creative force behind numerous stunning productions, including Broadway's smash musical *The Lion King*, Julie Taymor has become a much-admired, innovative director in the worlds of theater and opera. She has also employed her visionary talents to create several feature films, including *Frida* (2002) and *Across the Universe* (2007).

Growing up in Newton, Massachusetts, Taymor developed a love of theater at an early age. She enjoyed putting on shows at home and later joined a Boston theater company. Also interested in other cultures, Taymor spent time in India and Sri Lanka when she was 15 as part of an educational program. She then went to Paris to study mime with Jacques LeCoq after finishing high school. This trip was also an introduction to theatrical potential of masks and puppetry, two art forms that would be reappear in her later work.

After graduating from Oberlin College in 1974, Taymor traveled to Asia on a fellowship. She visited Indonesia, Japan, Bali, and Java during her travels and decided to remain abroad after her program ended. In Bali, Taymor established her own theater company, Teatr Loh. She told *Back Stage* that she was impressed by theater's role in society there. "I was very taken with the fact that the theatre productions there were a part of everyday life. . . . You don't do it because . . . you're going to be reviewed in Time magazine, but it's part of what it is to be a living human being."

Returning to the United States in 1980, Taymor continued to pursue a career in the theater. She won the American Theatre Wing's Hewes Design Award for Scenic, Costume, and Puppet Design for her work on *The Haggadah*. For *Juan Darien*, Taymor won the Hewes Award for Concept Puppetry and Masks in 1988. She did not only design the puppets and masks for this production, however. She directed and wrote the book for this musical, which drew its inspiration from a story by Horacio Quiroga. For the music, Taymor had turned to her life partner, composer Elliot Goldenthal. In 1996, a Broadway production of the play earned five Tony Award nominations, including one for Taymor's direction and another for Goldenthal's score.

Success on Broadway

Propelling Taymor's career to new heights, the musical *The Lion King* demonstrated her immense talents in many aspects of the theatrical arts. She helped translate a popular Disney animated film about a lion cub—and on a grander level, about the cycle of life itself—into one of Broadway's greatest spectacles. As with *Juan Darien*, Taymor was deeply involved in much of the design work as well as directing the project. She even contributed lyrics to some of the songs.

All of her hard work paid off. After its fall 1997 debut, the production received a lot of critical attention and netted 11 Tony Award nominations, including two wins for Taymor for Best Director and Costume Designer. The musical featured an interesting fusion of actors and puppets. "You're getting the human and the animal simultaneously. The audience is able to follow the story and the character, but you're also enjoying the art of it," she explained to *Back Stage*. *The Lion King* continues to attract eager audiences today—more than a decade after its premiere.

Film Work

Making a leap to the big screen, Taymor directed her first film, *Titus*, which was released in 1999. It was based on one of William Shakespeare's lesser known plays, *Titus Andronicus*, a violent tale about revenge. Starring Anthony Hopkins, this adaptation by Taymor was praised for its rich, vivid imagery. But some struggled with its dark subject matter.

For her next film, Taymor worked with actress Salma Hayek on the biographical film *Frida* (2002). Hayek starred as the famed Mexican artist Frida Kahlo who battled with chronic pain from a terrible bus accident as well as struggled with her stormy relationship with Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (played by Alfred Molina). In the film, one of Taymor's inventive touches was to have pieces of Kahlo's deeply personal artwork spring to life. She also collaborated with Goldenthal on one of the film's songs, "Burn It Blue," writing the lyrics for it. The song was nominated for an Academy Award. In total, *Frida* earned six Academy Award nominations, including two wins for Best Makeup and Best Original Score by Goldenthal.

In 2007, Taymor took movie audiences on a realistic yet fantastical journey with *Across the Universe*. The film uses the music of the Beatles to help tell the story of two lovers (Evan Rachel Wood and Jim Sturgess) during the 1960s. According to *Variety*, this brilliant spectacle was shot at 70 locations and used "5,000 costumes, 300 dancers, giant puppets, masks, choreographed dance numbers, fanciful sets, CG effects and animation."

Recent Projects

Taymor worked on a musical adaptation of *Spider-Man*, the beloved comic book and feature film hero, which debuted on Broadway in 2011. Bono and The Edge from the legendary rock group U2 wrote the music for the show. Taymor was fired as the director from this costly and elaborate show not long after its start, reportedly for making too many last-minute changes. She then sued the show's producers and both sides eventually settled out of court.

After this stage controversy, Taymor returned to film. She has directed the upcoming film adaptation of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*.

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