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Julie Taymor.
Charles Sykes/Associated Press

Taymor To Direct 'Midsummer' As Inaugural Show For Theater's New Home

By PATRICK HEALY

The Tony Award-winning director Julie Taymor will return to the New York stage in October with a production of Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream" to open the new Brooklyn home of Theater for a New Audience, an Off Broadway company where Ms. Taymor has regularly worked since its founding in 1979. "Midsummer" will be Ms. Taymor's first show since her high-profile firing from the Broadway musical "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark" in 2011 by its producers, with whom she is still in a legal battle over back pay, royalty and copyright protection.

In a telephone interview on Wednesday, Ms. Taymor said she chose "Midsummer" as the theater's inaugural production because of the play's celebratory nature: Characters fall in love, reunite after spats and wed, and others put on a play themselves.

A celebrated downtown theater director and puppet-maker before finding fame and fortune directing the blockbuster musical "The Lion King," Ms. Taymor she was still thinking over concepts for staging "Midsummer" and did not know yet if she would be designing puppets or masks for the show. As for the "Midsummer" budget, she said she did not know how much the production would cost, but added that it would be "typical" for Off Broadway and noted that Theater for a New Audience "never does big budgets."

"Spider-Man" attracted international headlines for, among other things, its \$75 million budget, more than twice as much money as any Broadway show in history.

Ms. Taymor said she was talking over ideas for "Midsummer" with Es Devlin, the British set and costume designer who is known for big-budget spectacles like the closing ceremony for the London Olympic Games last summer.

"Midsummer" will not be set in any particular time or period, "but rather in its own world," Ms. Taymor said. She did say that she may include children and teenagers in the cast, after recently holding a workshop of the play with children "to play with their energy and physicality and to think about raw elemental energy." Ms. Taymor's long-time partner, Elliot Goldenthal, will compose original music for "Midsummer."

"There is a visceral nature to the theater, and I want to have that in the production," said Ms. Taymor, who has never directed a "Midsummer" before. She was a designer on the play in 1984 when Theater for a New Audience did a children's version – her first collaboration with the company

and its artistic director, Jeffrey Horowitz, who is now a close friend.

The play will begin performances on Oct. 19 in the theater's new 299-seat main stage space, which has been designed by architect Hugh Hardy. Opening night is set for Nov. 2.

Asked if her return to New York theater was any more special because of her experiences on "Spider-Man," Ms. Taymor simply said that she was looking forward to working on the play.

"Spider-Man" became the most talked-about Broadway show in many years because of a nightmare's-worth of creative and technical delays, cast injuries, and offstage showdowns between Ms. Taymor and her composers – Bono and the Edge of U2 – and the show's producers.

Bono, Edge, and the producers ultimately replaced Ms. Taymor as the show's director after more than three months of preview performances during the winter of 2011. The producers contended that she resisted their pleas to revamp "Spider-Man" into a more family-friendly musical (thereby possibly selling more tickets and recovering its high costs), while Ms. Taymor said the producers refused to support her requests and ideas for changes in the script and the score.

"Spider-Man" opened in June 2011 to mostly negative reviews but has gone on to become a popular show with tourists, although ticket sales have cooled a bit in recent months.

Ms. Taymor sued the producers in federal court in late 2011, saying they were profiting from her "Spider-Man" script and staging and owed her more than \$1 million in back pay and royalties; they countersued, arguing that she had been fired for breach of contract. The judge in the case announced last August that the two sides had reached a settlement agreement in principle, but since then the sides have not been able to come to terms.

The specifics of their ongoing differences have never been disclosed; Ms. Taymor declined to comment on Wednesday about the issues holding up a settlement, but said that a negotiated resolution was "looking good."

"I'm hoping that we're going have a good outcome very soon," she said.