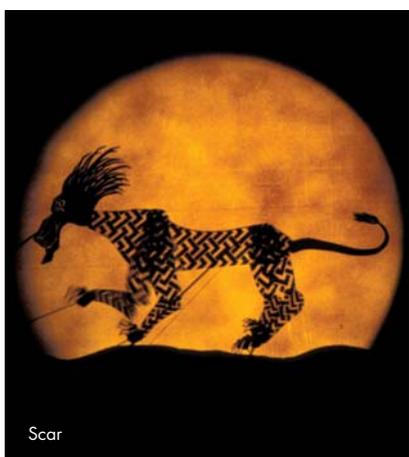


Julie Taymor is a director and designer who is well known for mythical staging inspired by international theatrical forms. When she was approached by Disney Theatrical Productions regarding the proposed stage version of the highly successful film, 'The Lion King', she was excited by the challenge: 'When I looked at the film... I said to myself, what is working in this film for me? What's the most daunting challenge? That's what I like to do - the sheer fact that it's very hard to do is a great challenge to me.'



ABOUT THE PRODUCTION



THE PRODUCTION TEAM

When we sit in the audience at a musical, we see the actors on stage. But where do the costumes they wear come from? What about the words they say, or the songs they sing? Who designed and built the settings in which they act? A musical as large as 'The Lion King' brings together literally dozens of creative people, who work together as a team to bring the show to life.

PRODUCER

The producer gathers the resources needed to put on the production, engaging the creative staff and raising the necessary funds for the production's budget. Dealing with both the creative and the business ends of the production, the producer creates a nurturing environment in which artists can thrive.

DIRECTOR

The director uses elements of the production to bring the written words of the script or score to life on stage. The director usually sets the tone and the 'look' of a production, and sets the blocking, or the actors' movements.

COMPOSER

The composer writes the music of the songs and the incidental music. He or she is responsible for the 'sound' of the show.

LYRICIST

A lyricist writes the words, or the lyrics, for the songs. A lyricist must work very closely with the composer to make sure the words work well with the music.

BOOK WRITER

A musical's 'book' is the 'play' of the musical, that is, the spoken words between the songs. A book writer must work with the composer and lyricist to effectively blend the spoken word with the songs.

CHOREOGRAPHER

Dance seems to go naturally with song, and a musical will often incorporate dance into its action. A choreographer designs a dance, first in his head or on paper, then with the dancers on the stage. The choreographer works with the director to make sure the dance movements complement the blocking.

SCENIC OR SET DESIGNER

The scenic designer creates the environment of the production, conveying the style, mood, period and place of the show. A scenic designer also designs or selects the production's props and furniture.

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Using hundreds of spotlights and lighting instruments, the lighting designer creates the lighting 'plot': the colour, intensity and focus of the lighting in each scene. Since the 1970s, most professional productions have used computerised lighting boards, which can store

thousands of cues and change lighting in a fraction of a second.

COSTUME DESIGNER

A costume designer researches and designs what the performers will wear and look like in the production. As well as having an extensive knowledge of clothing of all cultures and time periods, a costume designer must know how a costume will hinder or help an actor's movements.

MASK AND PUPPET DESIGNER

In a production like 'The Lion King', which uses so many masks and puppets, these designers must work closely with the others on the creative team so that the masks and puppets work efficiently with the rest of the production. A designer of masks or puppets should have training in engineering as well as cultural and artistic knowledge.

STAGE MANAGER

The stage manager is the communication link between all departments starting with pre-production meetings and rehearsals and on to the final coordinating of all departments in performance through the calling of cues and the directing of backstage traffic.

COSTUMES, MASKS AND PUPPETS

'The Lion King' is unique in that we see how the magic works on stage. There's no attempt to cover up the wheels and cogs that make it all happen. The human beings that control the puppets and wear the animal masks are fully seen. As an audience member, you have an important job: with your imagination, you are invited to mix the 'animal' with the human into a magical whole...

As Julie Taymor says: “When the human spirit visibly animates an object, we experience a special, almost life-giving connection. We become engaged by both the method of storytelling as well as the story itself.” Although ‘The Lion King’ is Disney as you’ve never seen it before, there are common strands with which Julie Taymor had to work. She says: “Disney animated characters are so expressive – they’re animals, but they’re very human animals. I had to play with keeping some of the ‘character’ of the Disney characters, so that they’re recognisable. But then, I was also very inspired by African masks, which are much more abstract, much more stylised, much more essential, less soft and round. Because we’re doing three-dimensional theatre, I didn’t want the faces to look flat; I wanted them to have a kind of depth, like wood has. So I used texture and organic materials, fibres, wood – things that would make it less cartoon-like.”

To create masks and puppets in ‘The Lion King’, Taymor worked with Michael Curry, one of the country’s leading puppet experts. Curry had worked with Taymor on several of her films and operas. With a background in engineering as well as puppetry, he would create the technical design of the characters. Of the challenge of creating masks for such a theatrical spectacle, Taymor says: “In contrast to the continually changing facial expressions in the animated film, a mask can project a single, fixed attitude. The sculptor has only one opportunity to incorporate the anger, humour and passion of a character, to tell his or her whole story. I thought, what if I create these giant masks that really are clearly Scar and Mufasa, but then the human face is revealed below, so that you’re not losing the human facial expression, you’re not hiding the actor?”

Taymor and Curry’s first step in creating the theatrical world of ‘The Lion King’ was to craft the masks for Mufasa and Scar. Could a balance be found between the recognisable characters from the animated film and the human actors? The lions’ costumes also helped to create this duality. While the human qualities of the lions come out in the African styled beadwork, corsets, armour and cloth, the costumes use silk cloth to negate the human shape, breaking the shoulder line, enhancing the powerful joints and thighs. The masks are made from carbon graphite, a tough, lightweight material. First the ‘face’ of the mask is created by spraying silicone onto a mould made from paper



or clay. When enough layers of silicone build up, a rubbery shell is left which is removed from the mould to become the imprint for the mask. The mask is completed with the carbon graphite. Although they may look very heavy, Mufasa’s mask, for example, weighs only 312 grams and Scar’s mask, 270 grams. Three of the main theatrical forms that inspired Taymor and Curry were African masks, Bunraku puppetry and shadow puppetry.

By exploring the background of these techniques, ‘The Lion King’ can be a richer experience for young people.

AFRICAN MASKS

In Africa, masks are functional works of art. They are meant to be used; they perform a social purpose. Seen on a wall or a table, it may seem dull and static, but when used in storytelling or a ceremony, the mask takes on a life. As in ‘The Lion King’, many African masks are made to be worn over the head instead of just the face. They serve many ceremonial purposes: accepting a young man into manhood, exorcising evil spirits, capturing invisible supernatural forces. African masks are sometimes referred to as ‘spirit traps’.

From a purely theatrical point of view, too, the mask could be said to trap a spirit.

BUNRAKU PUPPETRY

Named after its founder, Uemura Bunrakuken, this Japanese theatre form started in the 16th century. In Bunraku, master puppeteers, visible to the audience, control large puppet dolls, while a narrator tells the story. The larger puppets, which can be as tall as five feet, are operated by three-man teams. The most experienced man, the only puppeteer allowed to show his face to the audience, operates the head and right arm. The other two puppeteers are

completely covered with black cloth. One operates the ‘puppet’ right hand with a rod, while the other manipulates the ‘puppet’ legs. Through movement and gestures (and, as always, the audience’s imaginations) great expressiveness can be achieved. Because the puppeteers are visible, spectators can concentrate on the story, or on the skill of the puppeteers. Hopefully, these two perceptions eventually merge into a whole appreciation of the theatrical event.

SHADOW PUPPETRY

We have always been fascinated with shadows. Shadows thrown by a campfire can appear to be monsters; fingers twisted in a specific way in front of a light beam can create intricate animal shapes. In shadow puppetry, the audience only sees the shadows of the puppets, thrown onto a screen by a light or a fire. Shadow puppetry seems to be thousands of years old; many think it originated in Greece, although Chinese records show forms of shadow puppetry being performed 2000 years ago.

In Indonesian shadow puppetry, called the wayang kulit, intricate flat puppets made of wood and animal hide are shown before a muslin screen, usually telling stories from Hindu mythology. In Java, audience members sit on both sides of the screen, either to watch the shadows, or to see the puppets and the manipulating puppeteers.

SETS

Working with Julie Taymor, set designer Richard Hudson used the essential concepts of ‘The Lion King’s’ story to create the scenic design for the show. Pride Rock and the Elephant Graveyard seem to be opposites, one full of life, the other radiating death and danger, but they are connected through their design.

Just as Pride Rock is a stylised circular staircase that twists out of the stage as the show opens, the Elephant Graveyard is a twisting series of steps made of bones. We see Mufasa in his place of dignity on Pride Rock as the show opens; it's a shock to see Scar in the same position, but with very different feelings, straddling the bones in the Elephant Graveyard. Perhaps the most dramatic scene in 'The Lion King' is the wildebeest stampede in which Mufasa is killed. The effect in the theatre is electric, as thousands of wildebeests seem to be rushing straight at Simba – and the audience.

The illusion of thousands of racing animals is achieved by a canvas scroll and a series of large rollers. Wildebeests are painted on the scroll and each roller is equipped with sculptures of the animals. On each successive roller, the wildebeest sculptures are slightly larger until, closest to the audience, dancers rhythmically move huge wildebeest masks. This design creates a false perspective of great distance. When the scroll and rollers are moving, the audience seems to see waves of wildebeests driving forward.



Elton John and Tim Rice



Simba

THE MUSIC

'The Lion King' animated film incorporated five songs by Elton John and Tim Rice.

Tim Rice had written the lyrics for such classic musicals as 'Jesus Christ Superstar' and 'Evita', each of which had also been best-selling recordings. Rice seemed the perfect choice to write the lyrics for 'The Lion King', but who would compose the music? Elton John, who has written some of the best known and most endearing popular music in the last half of the twentieth century, said: "I actually jumped at the chance because I knew that Disney was a class act and I liked the story line and people immediately. The Disney films last forever and children watch them and adults watch them and get just as much fun out of them."

As Rice and John began to work together, they knew that their main purpose was to tell the story. "Up until now," said Rice, "about 95 per cent of the lyrics I've written have been done to a tune. Elton is one of those rare examples of a composer who actually likes to get the words first. In the case of... 'The Lion King' that proved to be quite useful because the key thing... is to get the story line dead right. Everything flows from the story."

For the stage version, more songs were needed to explore Simba's growth and Nala's courage. The creative team turned to 'The Rhythm of the Pridelands', a recording inspired by the film, featuring

songs by South African songwriter Lebo M, Mark Mancina, Jay Rifkin and Hans Zimmer. The lyrics of these soulful and evocative melodies were rewritten for the stage version, but their South African sound and mood became the foundation for a unique combination. By integrating the work of musician Lebo M, the score to 'The Lion King' musical tapped into the complex and beautiful rhythms of South African music. Lebo M co-wrote additional music and lyrics in addition to those written by the Rice-John team. As the choral director, he introduced the American cast members to a different style of singing: "I taught them the historical meanings of the lyrics and the practical and spiritual meanings of the songs. The singers must understand the pain or joy, the feeling behind the song. The most difficult part is the interpretation, the African way of singing... there's a rawness that is totally unique; it comes from the heart."

Lebo M sees his life mirrored in the story of 'The Lion King': "This is an African story that happens to parallel my own life. Young Simba's loving education from his father, his rebellion and his eventual struggle to regain a foot-hold in his native land were very familiar to me." He calls his work on 'The Lion King': "a tribute to the New South Africa... like Simba, I too lost family and close friends during my time away, but returned home victorious to the open arms of my newly freed countrymen and family."



'World Music: The Rough Guide' says: "South Africa is distinguished by the most complex musical history, the greatest profusion of styles and the most intensely developed recording industry anywhere in Africa." South Africa's musical history, especially in the past century, is linked to its national history and the racist system of apartheid, in which black South Africans were confined to small areas, their movements and rights tightly controlled by the white minority. Because the growth of its music was so closely tied to the country's history, a study of South African music is a perfect foundation for further exploration into South African history.

AFRICAN MUSIC

Although the continent of Africa holds many different cultures, most have this in common: music is an integral part of everyday life. In Africa, lives are permeated with music. Music has a function in society beyond simple entertainment. Songs are written to entertain, but also to teach, encourage, mourn, heal. Music serves a social function, helping to strengthen the circle of society. It "deepens the connection between people who have come together for reasons casual or profound" (Helen Q Kivnick, 'Where is the Way: Song and Struggle in South Africa'). Africa, south of the Sahara desert, takes in a variety of nations and cultures, yet all African music has some common traits. The following characteristics can be heard in the soundtrack of 'The Lion King'.

REPETITION: Repeated pattern of sound and rhythm.

IMPROVISATION: Because music is an integral part of African life, it is often spontaneous, made up on the spot. Improvised, spontaneous creation of music and words is a highly-regarded skill.

POLYPHONY: Two or more melody lines played simultaneously, working together into a greater whole.

POLYRHYTHMS: Two or more rhythm patterns playing at the same time.

CROSS-RHYTHMS: The accents of a song coming just after the accents of an accompanying rhythmic instrument or other rhythmic device, such as hand-clapping or foot-stamping. Also called syncopation, in a simplified form.

CALL AND RESPONSE: A choral form in which a leader sings or speaks a line, which is echoed and perhaps extended upon by a larger group. Call and response can also work between two groups.

POPULAR SONG AND THE MUSICAL THEATRE

How are the songs in musical theatre different from the popular music you hear every day? A song you hear on a recording, on the radio or at a concert may create a character or tell a story, but its primary purpose is to express a mood or an atmosphere, and create a memorable tune.

In a musical, a song must help in the storytelling. A song in a musical should act as a kind of shorthand, moving the story forward, telling you something about the character's inner life or changing the character in ways that the spoken word cannot. At the turn of the 20th century, the beginning of musical theatre, theatre music was popular music. Songwriters brought a vibrant, fast-talking quality to songwriting, throwing off the long accepted models of the European opera and operetta. But for pioneers of the musical, the theatre, along with vaudeville, burlesque and later recording, radio and the movies, was just another forum for songs. There was no attempt to blend the songs into the story.

The musical changed forever in 1927, with 'Show Boat', based on Edna Ferber's 1926 novel about life in America after the Civil War. Composer Jerome Kern and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II were determined to create an organic work of art from the musical, in which songs, music and text all combined to tell the story. As Denny Flinn Martin writes in 'Musical! A Grand Tour': "Critics described Kern as having left musical comedy behind for something they described as opera or light opera composing. In fact, it was pure musical theatre."