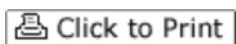




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'Tempest' cast includes Helen Mirren

Jeremy Irons, Djimon Hounsou among other stars cast

By Borys Kit

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Julie Taymor is gathering a cast ranging from blue-blooded Oscar winners to up-and-comers for her big-screen adaptation of Shakespeare's "The Tempest" that, in a gender-defying twist, will see Helen Mirren reigning over the magical island.

Although the play centers on Prospero, an exiled duke-turned-sorcerer, Taymor -- who likes to take an experimental approach to her stage and film projects -- has rechristened the lead character Prospera so that Mirren can take on the role.

Mirren will be surrounded by Jeremy Irons, Djimon Hounsou, Russell Brand, Alfred Molina, Ben Wishaw and Felicity Jones. Geoffrey Rush is in negotiations to join the cast.

The film, being produced by Bob Chartoff, Lynn Hendee and Julia Taylor-Stanley, is eyeing a November start date in Hawaii. Miramax has acquired the rights to all English-speaking territories; Icon is handling foreign sales.

Shakespeare's play mixes romance with fraternal politics and the supernatural. As revised for the screen, it will center around Prospera, her daughter Miranda (Jones) and a shipwrecked crew full of Prospera's enemies.

The island's other inhabitants include Hounsou as the deformed slave Caliban and Wishaw as the airy spirit Ariel.

On the ship are rising comedy star Brand, playing Trinculo, a jester; Irons, as Alonso, the King of Naples; and Molina as the drunken butler Stephano. Rush would play Gonzalo, a royal adviser and old ally of Prospera's.

The cast includes an unusually high concentration of Oscar-winning stars: Mirren earned best actress honors for "The Queen," while Irons took home the best actor trophy for "Reversal of Fortune" and Rush got the nod for "Shine." All three are repped by CAA.

Hounsou won best supporting actor nominations for "Blood Diamond" and "In America." The actor continues to be repped by Gersh and the Peter Safran Co.

Brand, repped by Endeavor, will next be seen in "Bedtime Stories." Brit actors Wishaw and Jones worked together in Miramax's "Brideshead Revisited." Molina is repped by Endeavor.

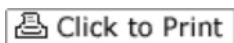
"The Tempest" is Taymor's second big-screen foray into Shakespearean territory -- she turned his "Titus Andronicus" into the 1999 film "Titus."

The pic also continues the strong relationship Taymor has developed with Disney, for which she directed the Broadway musical adaptation of "The Lion King," and Disney's specialty division Miramax, which released her Salma Hayek-starrer "Frida."

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