



Helen Mirren Still Packs Heat For 'The Tempest'

Acclaimed Actress, Taymor Redefine Famed Shakespeare Character

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Disney/Miramax Image

Helen Mirren in "The Tempest"

Having left the prim and proper demeanor of "The Queen" in her dust as a retired MI-5 assassin in the recent hit action comedy "Red," Helen Mirren assured me this week that her days of kicking some ass are far from over -- even when she's playing out the work of William Shakespeare.

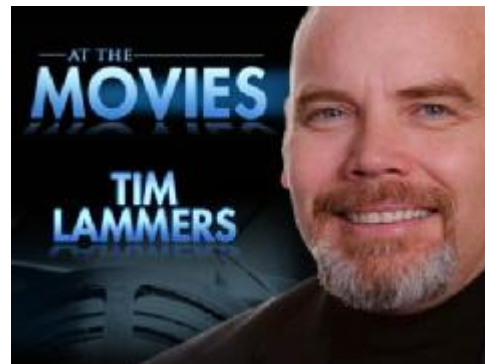
"I *did* kick ass, didn't I?" the British dame mused, quizzically, in an @ The Movies interview Monday. "And I kick a bit of ass in 'The Tempest' as well. Although I'm doing it with my magic instead of my gun, I'm another ass-kicker."

It's no mistake that the esteemed 65-year-old stage and screen dynamo sounds like she's having the time of her life in the wake of her 2007 Oscar win for playing Queen Elizabeth II. It's allowed her to virtually take on any role she's wanted to, from Nicolas Cage's mom in the action adventure of the "National Treasure" follow-up "Book of Secrets" -- to her Best Actress Oscar-nominated role as Sofya Tolstoy in last year's historical drama "The Last Station."

Mirren admits that she's having so much fun, in fact, that she has to take a break now and then to take it all in.

"I'm not saying that I'm taking it for granted, but I've just been putting my head down and doing the work and enjoying it as much as I can and hoping for the best," Mirren said. "So, yes, I am very grateful for the opportunities that I've had."

Taking center stage once again with "The Tempest," Mirren stars as Prospera, a sorceress hell-bent on vengeance against her shipwrecked enemies as she rules over a magical island. Directed by Julie Taymor, the film, which opens Friday, boasts an all-star cast that includes Russell Brand, Djimon Honsou, Chris Cooper, David Strathairn and Alfred Molina.



The biggest departure for "The Tempest" is that Taymor has switched the gender of its main character from Shakespeare's famed piece from male to female. Mirren said that rewriting the lead in The Bard's 400-year-old play wasn't a move that she and Taymor took lightly.

"About six months before we started shooting the movie, we did a read of the script to see how it was going to work," Mirren said. "You never quite know until you hear something spoken out loud. We looked at each other at the end of the reading and said, 'Well, that works. That's great.'"

Mirren said leaped at the chance to work with Taymor, mainly because the acclaimed stage director -- whose films Shakespeare's "Titus," the historical drama "Frida" and the Beatles musical "Across the Universe" -- rarely gets behind the camera. And when the Taymor does, she generally aims to stretch the boundaries of creativity.



Disney Enterprises Image

"The Tempest" director Julie Taymor and her star Helen Mirren

big screen since it gives its performers a chance to be seen in a different light. since it gives its performers a chance to be seen in a different light. The sensibilities of performing Shakespeare on stage as opposed to film don't change much, Mirren added, just the way it's viewed.

"What you get on film is the incredible advantage of the close-up, where the audience can *see* what you're thinking. They can see it on your face and you don't get that on the stage," Mirren explained. "Another great advantage of film is that you don't have to shout or talk loudly. You can whisper, and Shakespeare just sounds *so beautiful* when you can whisper it. You can talk in a more naturalistic tone and it really makes the poetry work."

"The great difficulty of doing Shakespeare on stage is that you have to project it," Mirren added. "The language is difficult, the thoughts are complicated and it's often very emotional. So to get that all working on stage is much more difficult. So, the essence doesn't change on film, you just have more tools to work with, effectively."

"The Tempest" opens in limited release Friday and will expand to more theaters in the coming weeks.

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The story Helen Mirren Still Packs Heat For 'The Tempest' is provided by LifeWhile

"If anyone was going to do 'The Tempest' with me taking on the role of Prospera, it was going to be Julie, so I was very, very lucky," Mirren said. "Things don't always work out that way. You'll want to do something but there's not the right kind of director out there or there isn't the money -- or by the time all that comes together you're doing something else, or you're too old for it. Synchronicity is so important in my work and it was just so brilliant that Julie, of all people, wanted to do this film and I got the chance to do it."

A veteran of the stage as well, Mirren was thrilled to interpret Shakespeare's work on the