

onbroadway by sylviane gold



Ezralow, below, briefs the Spider-Man ensemble.

Web Master

Daniel Ezralow sends *Spider-Man* flying.

It's probably safe to say that not too many Broadway choreographers could tell you how the overhead cameras track the action at NFL football games. It's also safe to assume that even if they did happen to know, they'd have no professional use for that information. But back in November, as rehearsals were under way at Broadway's Foxwoods Theatre, Daniel Ezralow was explaining that the flying system he helped devise as choreographer for *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark* is not that different from the one that flies the NFL camera into the middle of a huddle.

It's going to fly Spider-Man and Goblin and a host of other characters above the heads of the audience with technological wizardry that has never before been attempted in a Broadway theater, he said. In the aptly named number "Bouncing Off the Walls," Spidey is going to be, well, bouncing off the walls and dancing upside-down on the ceiling. Even Ezralow's more traditional, gravity-bound numbers will not look like Broadway dance routines. One features a chorus line of lady spiders, each with an extra set of custom-made articulated legs. Another, in which Peter Parker's high school classmates bully him, includes flying tackles and karate kicks. As he scrolls through the videos stored on his computer to show me what he's been up to, Ezralow, 54, sings

along with the lyrics and practically dances along with the moves, punching out the accents and underlining the beats. He's clearly in love with it. "I haven't spent five years working on this for it to be just another job," he says.

And the much-delayed, much-anticipated musical about Parker and his web-throwing alter ego isn't just another show. It has a score by rock superstars Bono and The Edge. It's directed by theater superstar Julie Taymor. And its conceptual framework isn't musical theater but rock-arena extravaganza. "When spectacle rock shows came on the scene," Ezralow says, "when Cirque du Soleil and Vegas came on the scene, they re-created the concept of what spectacle was. We wanted to create something with *Spider-Man* that was like a rock circus."

As it turned out, it was harder than anyone anticipated. And *Spider-Man's* troubles have kept theater gossips busy, especially in the home stretch last fall. But Ezralow, an unlikely choreographer who began as an athlete—yup, football—and who casually and fatefully signed up for a dance class as a pre-med student at Berkeley, could hardly contain his enthusiasm for the project, the production team, his 20 dancers, and for Taymor.

"She gets me," he says. "She understands this little kid that I am that wanted

to move, that became a choreographer, and that wants to make things."

He's worked with her before, most notably on *Across the Universe*, the brilliant 2007 movie that used Beatles songs to tell the story of a group of friends finding their way through the Vietnam era. The dance sequences Ezralow devised—for lookalike soldiers in an army induction center; for teenagers falling, literally, in love in a bowling alley; and, naturally, for high-school football players on the practice field—are among the wittiest and most inventive ever put on film.

He and Taymor first met 25 years ago, when he was dancing with Paul Taylor and was about to take off in a new direction as a founding member of MOMIX. The timing wasn't right for a collaboration. But eventually their timetables meshed and they did an opera in Los Angeles, which is Ezralow's hometown and home base. Then he did the musical staging for *The Green Bird*, her Broadway follow-up to *The Lion King*. His career, which includes choreographing for the Batsheva Dance Company in Israel and Hubbard Street Dance in Chicago, and for the Oscar show, has been anything but a straight line. And it has even included plenty of flying with MOMIX, and a show he did in Italy that featured him rappelling down a rope from the theater's balcony into the orchestra.

Flying, he says, is not about having specific skills. "It's about conquering your fear, about being 60 feet up in the air and saying, 'I'm fine.'" In casting the dancers for *Spider-Man*, he did strength auditions, gymnastic auditions, dance auditions, and interviews. "I knew I had to have people that had the physical ability, a way to really pick the movement up and not be afraid. And I knew I had to have people who were willing to go the distance with me and with Julie."

Ezralow told candidates, "I'm gonna change on you every second—you'll get it and then I'm gonna flip it." Some Broadway veterans he talked to weren't interested. "But some absolute novices were gold—I could see they were just ready," he says. "I don't want the dancers to be dancing for their career. I want them to be with me because they've got to be. The same way I've got to be with Julie."

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