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## Dreams do come true!

By **CHARMAINE PATRICIA WARREN**

*Special to the AmNews*

Ayo Janeen Jackson is one of the many aerialist/ensemble members in the new Broadway show "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark," co-written and directed by Julie Taymor, with music and lyrics by Bono and The Edge, co-book writer Glen Berger and choreography by Daniel Ezralow.

Although Jackson has worked with Taymor before, on the movie "Across the Universe" and the opera "Grendel," in "Spider-Man," she admits, "I've become what my childhood dreams were." It's been seven months now since the journey began, but it's all been "exhilarating," she says.

A native of North Carolina and a true New Yorker, Jackson admits that she is a dancer, and over the years she has championed her tenure with the Bill T. Jones/Ar-

nie Zane Company (over five years) and Ballet Preljocaj (over two years), but ever so often she takes a pause from the concert dance world to support her penchant for film and Broadway. Working with Taymor on "Spider-Man" was another such chance.

Jackson was still working with Ballet Preljocaj in France in 2009 when a friend told her about Taymor's upcoming show, and she immediately told her agent that she wanted to audition. It was just by chance that she ended up on a West Coast American tour with Preljocaj, missed the Los Angeles audition, but came home to New York and on a rainy day bumped into Taymor in a subway station who immediately told her that she ought to audition for her new Broadway show. Of course she would.

For the audition they were looking for dancers who were

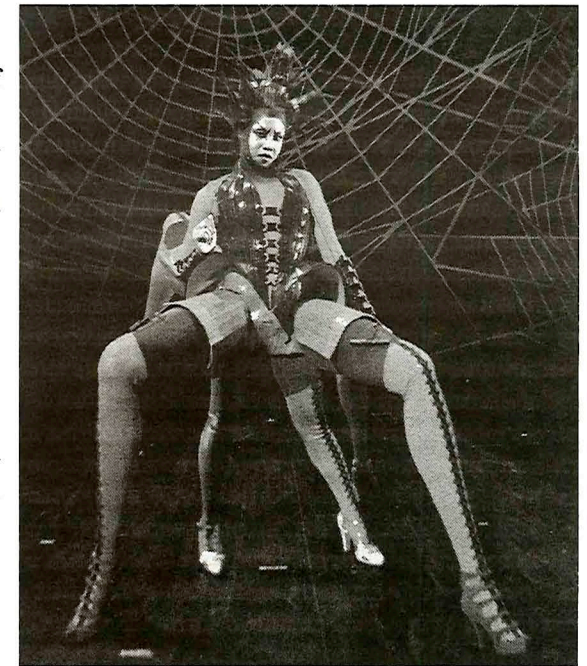
also really good singers. "This deterred me," she said, "because I know that I cannot sing and there was no point." Nevertheless her friends helped her prepare a rock song, though she went to the audition hoping they wouldn't "make [her] sing." She then survived a week of callbacks where at one point, Taymor asked her to sing her song again.

"'Spider-Man' has become my life," says Jackson. As an aerialist, Jackson has learned a lot of silk work, moving and shaping fabric and climbing ropes. There is no sparing on the work and training given in all the genres, including her singing.

Jackson speaks of one dance scene in particular, titled "Deeply Furious," where the women, known as "spider furies" don six extra legs and mimic the mythological Greek characters out to get revenge.

This is one of the highlights for Jackson because she gets to revert to her childhood, picturing Cruella de Vil from the Disney movie "101 Dalmatians," and working really hard "to put on the same face when [she] dances as one of the furies."

Many relationships have been built with the team and cast of "Spider-Man," and the many interpretations of the subtitle, "Turn Off the Dark," have developed special meaning. For Jackson, it has meant "acknowledging the unknown, being forced to face



**Ayo Janeen Jackson in Broadway's "Spider-Man"**

our demons, and also shining a light on relationships." Before and after the accident a few weeks ago, for example, Jackson and the rest of the cast have had "sincere dialogues." She  
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## Jackson

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adds, "I am learning to stand up for what I believe...they, the cast, are all making a difference in my life, and my true nature has begun to shine."

The days are long and the work is challenging, but Jackson insists that with "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark," Taymor "has made the impos-

sible, possible. She's breaking boundaries, and yes, 'Spider-Man' is rock 'n' roll, drama and the circus all in one."

With a smile, Jackson still asks, "How did I get here?" but her answer is firm—"I've become what my childhood dreams were."

Now in previews, "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark" opens February 7. For more information visit [www.spidermanonbroadway.marvel.com](http://www.spidermanonbroadway.marvel.com).