

CATS HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS

In today's budget-cutting economy, it's more important than ever to provide students with a well-rounded education, and live theatre can enrich a young life like few other experiences. The *Cats HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS* is intended as a guide for teachers to enhance students' enjoyment of *Cats* while instilling a broader appreciation and knowledge of our great American legacy of musical theatre.

As the *HANDBOOK* explores ways of bringing the classroom into the theatre and vice versa, students can become excited about learning through the excitement of the theatre. The *HANDBOOK* may be helpful as a tool to persuade school administrators to sponsor theatre attendance as well as an informational resource once scheduled. It has been developed for the *Cats* Company for nonprofit educational use.

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CATS

is based on a collection of whimsical poems titled *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, published in 1939 by T.S. Eliot. Until Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical opened in London on May 11, 1981, *Practical Cats* was the least famous work of the celebrated English poet who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

One of the most influential literary figures of his generation, and considered by many the most important poet of the twentieth century, Eliot was far better known for his serious works, among them "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "The Hollow Men" and "The Waste Land."

The immense worldwide success of the stage production of *Cats* changed that dramatically, popularizing the humorous, nonsensical verse of *Practical Cats* to a degree no volume of poetry could. Its impact on the composer was equally profound.

ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER

Andrew Lloyd Webber, the foremost theatrical composer of our time and the most successful in the history of the musical theatre, was born in 1948, into a bohemian London flat filled with cats. His father was composer William Lloyd Webber (1914-1982), director of the London College of Music, and his mother, Jean, taught piano. By five, the youngster was playing piano and violin, and at seven, was playing string duets with his three-year-old brother Julian, who is now a noted concert cellist. His first work was published at age 11, after which he began mounting mock musicals in a toy theatre. At 14, Lloyd Webber won a scholarship to London's Westminster School; he later attended Magdalen College at Oxford and the Royal College of Music.

In 1965, the classically trained 17-year-old met Tim Rice, a 21-year-old London law student steeped in pop music, and the pair wrote *The Likes of Us*. A musical about Victorian philanthropist Dr. Bernardo

and frankly modeled on *Oliver!*, it was never commercially produced, but the unlikely young team had forged a complementary composer-lyricist relationship. The next effort was *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1967), fortuitous in its inverted production odyssey from album to stage, as their first commercial success in 1971 with *Jesus Christ Superstar* was similarly accomplished. *Evita* (1976), as innovative and nearly as controversial as *Superstar*, was the pair's last collaboration, apart from a short invitational presentation titled *Cricket*, performed a decade later for Queen Elizabeth's 60th and Prince Phillip's 65th birthday celebration at Windsor Castle in 1986.

Although the idea of setting T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* to music had occurred to Lloyd Webber while rereading the childhood favorite on a transatlantic flight in 1972, the mega-hit musical that would propel him to international superstar status did not come to fruition until 1981. During this period he composed the film scores for *Gumshoe* (1971) and, with his brother Julian, *The Odessa File* (1973). *Jeeves* (1974), based on the popular series of P.G. Wodehouse novels and written with the British playwright Alan Ayckbourn in his first effort as a lyricist, was Lloyd Webber's only conventional book musical, and his only unsuccessful stage effort.

On May 11, 1981, *Cats* opened in London, changing inexorably the composer's life and the course of the contemporary musical theatre. With its New York opening on October 7, 1982, Lloyd Webber became the first man in history to have three musicals running simultaneously on Broadway and in the West End, and he had yet to turn 35. In Britain, not even Noel Coward had claimed such a record; in America, only Rodgers and Hammerstein had achieved similar success in so short a time, and not even they had put together such consecutive blockbusters as *Evita* and *Cats*.

Also in 1982, Lloyd Webber's orchestral piece, *Variations*, was combined with his one-act musical, *Tell Me On A Sunday*, as *Song and Dance*. For the New York version, a libretto by director/lyricist Richard Maltby, Jr., was added to the music from a theme by Paganini, which had originally been created for cellist Julian in 1978. *Tell Me On a Sunday*, a 1980 BBC TV mini-opera, had lyrics provided by Don Black, Oscar Award-winning lyricist of "Born Free," among other hit songs.

The spectacular train fantasy, *Starlight Express* (1984), with lyricist Richard Stilgoe, featured actors on roller skates maneuvering cantilevered bridges and sleek ramps, and forged frontiers with its highly-advanced technology. *Requiem*, Lloyd Webber's setting of the Latin Mass in memory of his father, had its New York premiere at St. Thomas Church in 1985. The recipient of a Grammy Award as Best Classical Contemporary Composition, its "Pie Jesu" became a hit single, climbing to No.1 on the British charts.

In January of 1988, when *The Phantom of the Opera* finally crossed the Atlantic to open on Broadway with the largest advance sale ever, Lloyd Webber matched the record he'd set earlier with *Cats* to become the first recipient of the Triple Play Award, established in 1988 by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). Charles Hart joined Stilgoe in supplying the libretto for Lloyd Webber's grand operatic musical reworking of French novelist Gaston Leroux's 1910 Gothic thriller. That fall, partly in response to ticket demand for shows sold out far in advance, a touring concert showcasing the prolific composer's work was devised. *The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber* (1988), with full orchestra and a large cast of singers, began touring across Canada and the U.S.

Aspects of Love soon followed; the chamber musical of romantic intrigue, with lyrics by Hart and Black, was based on a 1955 novella by David Garnet. With its New York opening in April 1990, the 42-year-old founder of a worldwide entertainment empire achieved unprecedented distinction as the only person ever to have five musicals playing in London and three on Broadway simultaneously. In June 1990, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* completed its epochal cycle to open at the London Palladium; and in September 1991, with the London opening of the Shiki Theatrical Company's Kabuki production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the composer became the first person to have six shows running concurrently in the West End.

Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber is the recipient of four Tony Awards, four Drama Desk Awards, three Grammys and three Laurence Olivier Awards. In 1988, he was honored with an award for Creative

Achievement by B'nai B'rith in New York and received a fellowship of the Royal College of Music. Most recently, he devised the children's board game *Calamity: The International High-Risk Insurance Game* and was commissioned by the Olympic Committee to write the official song for the 1992 Olympic Games. In June 1992, the 44-year-old composer was awarded a knighthood for service to the arts by Queen Elizabeth II.

THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT (1888-1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot, although considered an English poet, was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 26, 1888, and educated at Harvard, as well as the Sorbonne in Paris and Merton College, Oxford. The youngest of seven children, he was of English origin, the American line of the family descending from Andrew Eliot, who had come to Massachusetts from the Somerset village of East Coker in the 17th century.

As a young man, T.S. Eliot was interested in philosophy, foreign languages and criticism, and at age 22, began seriously to pursue a career in writing, his early poetry influenced by the French symbolists, especially Baudelaire and Laforgue. Eliot settled permanently in England in 1915, the year he married, and the year he met his contemporary Ezra Pound. He taught briefly at two schools before joining the foreign and colonial department of Lloyds Bank in London, where he remained until 1925, leaving to become director of the publishing house of Faber and Faber.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was published in Eliot's first volume of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917). His second book, *Poems* (1919) was hand printed by Leonard and Virginia Woolf. *The Sacred Wood*, a collection of critical essays, appeared in 1920.

Much of the poet's serious work is characterized by a sense of loss, confusion and frustration shared by many other artists of the generation. Eliot spoke for those—including Picasso and Stravinsky—for whom World War I represented the irrevocable end of the old order, and the beginning of a new one of lethargy and pain. The height of poetic art was generally attributed to the Romantic poets writing nearly a century before, but when Eliot looked to the past for literary forms to express his disillusionment and disorientation, he found the old forms failed: The world they voiced had vanished. Eliot believed the Romantic poets had concentrated on feelings to the detriment of form, and he favored a poetic style that could itself be considered art.

Although he rejected the earlier styles and ordered structures of the Romantic movement and the Victorian period, Eliot salvaged the images and language of the past. His most famous works, *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925), suggest in their titles the emptiness of modern life. These poems consist of a series of scattered images, out of their original contexts; references to earlier poems, passages in foreign languages, allusions to historical events and literary characters, and snatches of popular songs appear in an unconnected collage. Contemporary critics attempting to analyze Eliot's complex work on the basis of time-honored standards of plot and structure found no continuing thread to unify the whole.

Early efforts to subject his poetry to conventional criticism misunderstood the artist's intent, which was to force examination of individual images *as* discontinuous and separate pieces unrelated to any unified whole. Each image is calculated to resist unity or cohesion evoking instead a particular emotion or memory in the reader without directly stating the emotions of the poet, a technique Eliot referred to as the "objective correlative."

During the second part of his life Eliot wrote less poetry, pursuing instead his growing interest in playwriting. During the 1920s, he frequented the ballet, theatre and London music halls, especially the Palladium. He wrote a celebrated tribute to actress Marie Lloyd on her death in 1922, and began writing verse for the theatre with the *Sweeney Agonistes* fragments in 1927. The same year, Eliot became a naturalized British citizen and was received into the Church of England. *Ash Wednesday* was published at Easter 1930, and he wrote the London churches' 1934 pageant play, *The Rock*. Eliot soon became one of

the leaders of Anglo-Catholic opinion and a devoted churchwarden in Kensington, drawing comfort and inspiration from his new religion.

Eliot's plays are all concerned directly or indirectly with moralistic themes. *Murder in the Cathedral*, which was commissioned for the Canterbury Festival in 1935 and later filmed, deals ritualistically with the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas a Becket. *The Family Reunion*, first performed at the Westminster Theater in 1939 with Michael Redgrave as Lord Monchensey, concerns the problems of guilt and redemption in a contemporary upper class English family. Each premiering at The Edinburgh Festival, his three later plays— *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958)—cast serious religious themes in the form of modern social comedy.

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats was published in 1939, with the author's drawings on the cover and dustjacket. In 1983, Eliot posthumously received the Tony Award for the book of the musical *Cats*.

There have been various collected editions of Eliot's poems, and volumes of his social criticism, notably *Selected Essays*, *On Poetry and Poets* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. *Four Quartets*, now generally regarded as his masterpiece, included "Burnt Norton" (1936), "East Coker" (1940), "The Dry Salvages" (1941) and "Little Gidding" (1942); the separate poems were gathered together as a collection in 1943.

T.S. Eliot received the Order of Merit in January 1948, and in the autumn of the same year was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Among many other honors and distinctions, he was an Officier de la Legion d'Honneur, the recipient of the Hanseatic Goethe Prize in 1954, and was awarded the Dante Gold Medal in 1959. Eliot married a second time in 1957; he remained an active and vital literary and intellectual force until his death in London in January 1965. There is a memorial to Thomas Sterns Eliot in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey, beside those of Tennyson and Browning. His ashes rest in St. Michael's Church, East Coker.

TSE'S 'PRACTICAL CATS'

Eliot scholar Burton Raffel dismissed the poems of *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* as whimsy—"pleasant, inoffensive and unremarkable"—hardly the work of an intellectual and celebrated poet who would become a Nobel Laureate. But Eliot was not always serious—he once wrote a fan letter to Groucho Marx—and certainly not with his godchildren, for whom the verse was written. There are also numerous references to cats in the poet's other work, such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," wherein he likens the yellow fog of St. Louis to a cat in its meanderings.

Eliot began writing the poems collected in *Practical Cats* for birthdays and special occasions to entertain his godchildren—particularly Tom Faber and Alison Tandy—revealing himself as "Old Possum," a nickname given him by Ezra Pound, who in turn he called "Ole Ez." Writing to Tom in 1931, Eliot described and drew his Lilliecat called Jellylorum, and told him he'd like to tell him about Cus Cus, too, but couldn't yet draw dogs as well as cats. Other letters discussed the importance of determining proper names for cats, suitable to their characteristics and, indeed, personalities. In 1936, he sent both children "The Naming of Cats."

Eliot was frequently asked by friends and strangers to invent appropriate cat names. Some were silly but sounded right; others combined traits. "Jellicle Cats" actually comes from Old English: "Dear little cat" was pronounced "jea' little cat," which sounded like "jellicle cat." Similarly, "Pollicle Dog" derived from "poor little dog." In 1936, Alison received "Rum Tum Tugger," and the following year, a poem about two mischievous cats called "Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer." "Skimbleshanks," telling of a railway train cat, arrived in 1938.

Eliot also tapped historical and literary nomenclature for his anthropomorphic felines: "Deuteronomy," the Old Testament prophet; and "Victoria," who reigned as Queen of England from 1837

to 1901. In Greek mythology, "Cassandra" was the daughter of the King of Troy, endowed with the gift of prophecy but fated never to be believed. "Tumblebrutus" was suggested by Brutus, the historical/literary figure who betrayed and murdered Julius Caesar; and "Mistoffolees" is a spoonerism or word play on Mephistopheles, the character representing the devil in Goethe's *Dr. Faustus*.

Although Faber & Faber announced "Mr. Eliot's book of *Pollicle Dogs and Jellicle Cats As Recited to Him by the Man in White Spats*" in their 1936 Spring publishing catalogue, the author had run into difficulties in his general approach. "The idea of the volume was to have different poems on appropriate subjects . . . recited by the Man in White Spats. At the end, they all go up in a balloon, self, Spats, and the dogs and cats.

'Up up up past the Russell Hotel, Up up up to the Heavside Layer.'"

Three more years brought, as Eliot's publisher put it, "a growing perception that it would be impolite to wrap cats up with dogs," and the realization that the book would be exclusively feline. Ralph Hodgson, the poet who bred bull terriers, had hoped to illustrate it, but at the crucial period he was house-hunting in America. He felt that "the fun of doing it—or attempting it—is the thing, and that is only possible with my feet up on the mantelpiece, as the saying is."

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats was published on October 5, 1939, in an edition of 3,005 copies, using Eliot's own drawings on the cover and dustjacket. The poet was quite nervous about its reception; his verse play, *The Family Reunion*, had appeared in March, and *The Idea of a Christian Society* was due in three weeks. The new book "is intended for a *new* public," he informed Geoffrey Faber, "but I am afraid cannot dispense with the old one." He need not have worried. "*Cats* are giving general satisfaction," the sales manager reported shortly afterwards. Today, they've become a minor classic and can be found in Danish, German, Italian, Japanese, Swedish, Hungarian and Polish translations.

Eliot turned down a Walt Disney proposal for an animated feature, saying that his were hard-scrabble alley cats, not cute little anthropomorphs. He did, in his own lifetime, give cautious endorsement to a musical treatment of the poems. Commissioned by the Edinburgh Festival where the piece was first performed in 1954, British composer Alan Rawsthorne developed a concert for children around six of the poems. Titled *T.S. Eliot: Practical Cats*, the symphonic composition was performed by the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Rawsthorne. Eliot's poetry was recited over the music by Robert Donat, one of England's most popular stage and screen actors, known to American audiences for his films *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *39 Steps* and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, for which he won an Academy Award in 1939. Angel's recording of the production, first released in 1956, received delighted critical praise; in 1982, Capitol Records released *T.S. Eliot: Practical Cats* on the same disc with Dame Edith Evans reading Shakespearean sonnets.

Despite Raffel's evaluation of the seemingly nonsensical *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, Eliot took the verses seriously. They were, after all, written for his two young godchildren, and he'd certainly not forgotten that his friends would be reading them over the youngsters' shoulders. Indeed, the work offers grown-ups a satisfying sophistication and double entendre; it is a unique collection of children's poems for adults.

Each poem is a precise and accurate definition of a particular kind of cat, but, at the same time, Eliot appears to be satirizing the cats' owners and the English society in which they live. "Bustopher Jones" is an aristocrat; the "Gumbie Cat" portrays a combination nanny-housekeeper in the middleclass household. A proud and vigorous member of the nation's workforce is presented in "Skimbleshanks," while "Gus," who has known better days, is now so poor he hasn't the price of a drink. In its published form, *Practical Cats* doesn't amount to a picture of a whole society, but there is the sense of an England now lost, never to return. Thematically, Eliot hadn't veered.

The poet's widow, Valerie Eliot, postscripts that whenever he was unwell or could not sleep, T.S. Eliot would recite the verses of *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* under his breath.

ALW'S IMPRACTICAL 'CATS'

In 1977, five years after Andrew Lloyd Webber reread T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* on a plane, the composer began setting it to music. *Evita* had opened the previous year, and the poet's whimsical verse offered a dramatic contrast for inspiration. As a child raised among cats, he'd enjoyed his mother's recitation of the poems; still a keeper of feline pets, the man heard music in the lyrics. Too, Lloyd Webber's method of working had been just the opposite: Once a story line was determined, lyrics were written to music he composed; reversing the process would be an interesting exercise.

"Very luckily, *Practical Cats* contains verses that are extraordinarily musical," Lloyd Webber observes. "They have rhythms that are very much their own, like 'Rum Tum Tugger' or 'Old Deuteronomy,' and although they dictate to some degree the music that will accompany them, they are frequently of irregular and exciting meter that's very challenging to a composer." By determining the rhythmic structure within each poem, he could then alter the rhythms and decide on the style of music to best fit the mood and character of the cats.

When first performed at the composer's Sydmonon Festival in the summer of 1980, the work wasn't yet musical theatre. Consideration was given to fashioning a concert anthology, or combining it with other short pieces. The poet's widow, Valerie Eliot, had been invited to attend the performance, and brought along various unpublished works of her husband. "The musical and dramatic images that these created for me made me feel that there was very much more to the project than I had realized," Lloyd Webber recalls. "I decided I needed the support of another to encourage me to rework my settings and see if a dramatic whole would be woven from the delightful verse I was now to be allowed to develop."

At the suggestion of impresario Cameron Mackintosh, a fellow theatre fanatic who had joined the project, Lloyd Webber enlisted the fertile stage imagination of Trevor Nunn, respected director of the government-subsidized Royal Shakespeare Company. Already the possessor of formidable theatrical credits, the inventive co-director of the monumental *Nicholas Nickleby* was about to embark on an auxiliary career in the commercial musical theatre which would include *Les Misérables*, in addition to other Andrew Lloyd Webber collaborations.

Valerie Eliot continued to serve as catalytic conduit in the creation of *Cats* by bringing the pair additional unpublished poetry, letters and fragments of work. Three of the poems were incorporated into the musical in their entirety. What appeared to be the draft of an opening poem for the abandoned *Pollicle Dogs and Jellicle Cats* . . . volume, although inappropriate for the stage, inspired a lyric with the same intention of celebrating the supremacy of Jellicle cats; lines from the end of it now introduce "The Naming of Cats."

"But what was most thrilling was to find reference in one of Eliot's letters to a coherent, albeit incomplete structure for an evening," Lloyd Webber reveals. "He proposed that eventually the cats were to go 'Up up up past the Russell Hotel, up up up to the Heaviside Layer,' a kind of heaven to which a worthy cat (or dog) might be transported." Nunn concurred, "It is possible to deduce that this work might have had something approaching a plot; at least there was a guide to link the various passages together."

"However, all that has come down to us is a collection of poems with no discernible narrative link, and the major task confronting Andrew and myself was to put the poems in an order which would allow them to connect up with each other in a free flowing way without distorting their original content or intention," the director continued. "Over several months we experimented with many versions and were rigorously self-critical if impermissible liberties started to creep in; but we recognized that what we have done in giving Eliot's material theatrical structure is entirely subjective and that the connections we see may be different from what aficionados of Eliot and his cats would have proposed."

Among the unpublished material was "Grizabella the Glamour Cat," a fragment of which only the last eight lines were written because the poet thought her history too sad for children. "The discovery of this fragment was a fulcrum moment in our work," Nunn disclosed. "Here in eight lines, Eliot was describing an intensely recognizable character with powerful human resonances, while introducing the

themes of mortality, and the past, which occur repeatedly in the major poems. We decided if Eliot had thought of being serious, touching, almost tragic in his presentation of a feline character, then we had to be doing a show which could contain that material, and the implications of it."

Nevertheless, both director and composer realized that "we must not take our seriousness too seriously," as Nunn put it. "In 'The Ad-dressing of Cats,' Eliot says you should have discovered by now that cats are very much like human beings; that, I imagine, is the point of his work, and it most certainly remains the point of ours." Nunn concludes, "We are fascinated by cats, for a multitude of reasons, but perhaps most of all because in a mysterious way they allow us more clearly to see ourselves."

The director recruited Royal Shakespeare Company designer John Napier, with whom he had fashioned the eight-and-a-half hour epic *Nicholas Nickleby*, and Gillian Lynne, who was a classical dancer with the Royal Ballet before she began choreographing musicals, among them two RSC efforts with Nunn. Both artists have worked on subsequent Lloyd Webber-Nunn productions, Napier on *Starlight Express* and Lynne on *Aspects of Love*. *Cats'* famous unit set junkyard also led the designer to assignments on *Les Miserables*, with Nunn, and *Miss Saigon*. Lynne, whose extensive choreography in *Cats* defined the musical as a work of dance theatre and earned her associate director billing, choreographed the composer's *The Phantom of the Opera* as well.

With the completion of casting, all that remained artistically was the discovery of the Big Tune, a hit song everyone would walk out humming. Eliot's words had yet to call forth a "Superstar" or "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" to give the evening a unity and focus. Lloyd Webber went to the keyboard and his outtakes drawer, wherein waited ideas and pieces of melodies written or begun for other projects, then set aside for various reasons. One was a Puccini-like melody Nunn suggested be made "more emotional, more extravagant, and we'll have it in *Cats*." The result was "Memory," with the director eventually writing the lyrics himself. Generating more than 600 albums, one of them a hit for Barbra Streisand, the irresistible song became the one most requested of cocktail pianists throughout the 1980s.

The business of financing loomed as the last hurdle and it looked insurmountable: *Nobody* wanted to invest in the show that had once been called *Practical Cats*. As the composer described it to an interviewer several years later: "I can give you the objections and they sound a convincing lot. Andrew Lloyd Webber without Robert Stigwood [the influential producer of his previous hits]; without Tim Rice [the lyricist with whom he'd written those hits, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita*]; working with a dead poet; with a whole load of songs about cats; asking us to believe that people dressed up as cats are going to work; working with Trevor Nunn from the Royal Shakespeare Company, who's never done a musical in his life; working in the New London, the theatre with the worst track record in London; asking us to believe that 20 English people can do a dance show when England had never been able to put together any kind of fashionable dance entertainment before. It was just a recipe for disaster. But we knew in the rehearsal room that even if we lost everything, we'd attempted something that hadn't been done before."

In the darkest days of 1980, the 32-year-old Lloyd Webber mortgaged Sydmonton for a second time, and the tenacious Mackintosh, then 34, placed an ad in the financial newspapers, inviting the general public to risk a stake. Nearly 250 did, one man gambling his life savings on the improbable success of the impractical project. The morning after the historic May 11, 1981, London premiere, the legendary Broadway producer David Merrick offered Mackintosh the British rights to his own current hit *42nd Street* in exchange for the American rights to *Cats*; Mackintosh declined. By 1991, *42nd Street* had earned \$10 million; *Cats* had passed the \$100 million mark to become the most profitable show in history, and there was no end in sight.

By the time the musical opened in New York, October 7, 1982—needing but four major backers—it did so with the largest advance sale in Broadway history: \$6.2 million, two-thirds of it already paid in full. Andrew Lloyd Webber also became the first person in the history of musical theatre to have three shows running simultaneously on Broadway and the West End, a record he would later match and then break.

Many New York critics ignored box office response and wrote unfavorable reviews, some rudely hostile ("a dog," "kitty litter"). Much of the negative criticism echoed charges leveled at T.S. Eliot decades

before: Plotless and without form, therefore lacking substance, *Cats* certainly did not conform to traditional standards by which Broadway musicals were judged.

The crucial review, however, belonged to the *New York Times* and its new chief drama critic Frank Rich, a lover of the magic of theatre, who found the show a guilty pleasure. He explained "why people will hunger to see *Cats*" quite simply: "It's a musical that transports the audience into a complete fantasy world that could only exist in the theatre and yet, these days, rarely does. It believes in purely theatrical magic, and on that faith it unquestionably delivers "

Proving its billing as "a theatrical event," *Cats* put London back on the musical theatre map and revitalized Broadway; hits didn't come any more smash than this. But most importantly, its debut ushered in a new era in the history of the international musical stage and established Andrew Lloyd Webber as its visionary standard bearer.

STAGING THE MAGIC

The creation of theatre is a collaborative art; although a singular vision may have inspired or originally conceived a work, multiple talents are enlisted in its physical realization, the leap in the dark from page to stage. *Cats* mesmerizes audiences with the spontaneity of its feline fantasy; but unlike an event in real life, stage magic doesn't simply happen. Just as the dancer-singer-actors you see perform as an ensemble, an aggregate of artists you never see put them there, guided by the wit, charm and philosophy of T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber translated the poems into music, and in conjunction with director Trevor Nunn, developed a theatrical structure mirroring the poet's mildly satirical cats-eye view of late 1930s London; designer John Napier expressed the illusion in makeup, costumes and environment; and choreographer Gillian Lynne gave life to the anthropomorphic creatures in movement and dance.

"The staging of *Cats* is a difficult matter, it isn't just one of your everyday games," to paraphrase one of Eliot's slyly insightful poems; every physical element is carefully planned to illuminate the show's innate mystique. In initial discussions, the production team agreed an important requisite was to "charge the atmosphere even before the performance begins." In London, they rediscovered the New London Theatre with a revolving stage and flexible seating; in New York, the Winter Garden Theatre was selected for its huge open spaces. On the road, *Cats* travels with its own portable version of the original setting adaptable to many different theatres all over the country. Flexibility for the performers and intimacy for the audience intensify the theatrical experience and ultimate enjoyment in much the same way the exchange between singers and audiences promoted the immense popularity of English music hall (see HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE).

Napier began work on the original designs in November 1980, attempting to envision a natural habitat where cats might congregate, which would also allow maximum room for dancing. In the resulting playground cum garbage dump, everything was constructed to a cat's scale—a bit over three times life-size: Huge empty food cans, a rusted car trunk, massive tires, even old fish bones, worn out apparel and a surfeit of rubbish and objects lying about from which the feline occupants can improvise various disguises to tell the story. Normally, a show's designer can go out and buy the necessary props and set pieces, but in *Cats*, everything had to be custom-made larger, even though the setting comprises items we discard everyday.

One of the contemporary theatre's most innovative production designers and scenic artists, Napier seems to sculpt his work three-dimensionally, while traditional stage design looks architectural. One of the most startling and memorable images of his brilliant design vision for Peter Shaffer's *Equus* remains the steel wire equestrian heads framing the actors' own; and, although he designed no other scenic structures for *Les Miserables*, the rampart structure was so powerful that the show achieved a reputation for spectacle on that basis alone.

"I like to work on something that needs investigation, followed by manufacture out of unusual elements; I enjoy the process of discovery and invention," the British designer explains. "I am interested in contributing a concept to be worked out in collaboration with a group of people. What I don't do is present

pretty pictures; what I try to do is help events." Apropos *Cats* specifically, Napier continues, "There was very little written material, and the aim was to do something hugely spectacular, make humans cat scale, disorient the audience and lift the thing into a happening."

In fashioning the costumes, the designer followed hints in Eliot's text to blend human and cat traits into the wondrous composite creatures who materialize on stage; the theatre's magical suspension of belief occurs when our imagination is engaged by the virtual transformation of a human into a feline. While contributing integrally to the ambience of the show, the costumes characterize each cat as an individual. Rum Tum Tugger's custom made, handpainted boots are as essential to his identity as his jaunty strut. Bustopher Jones' identity is established at first glimpse of his sleek black suit.

Cats is a work of dance theatre and the clothing must allow ease of movement as well as durability; footwear was custom constructed by Capezio in New York as a cross between a ballet slipper and gymnastic shoe. The basic garment before adornment is a stretch latex unitard or body stocking which is personalized by handpainted designs, knitting, sewn sequins or beads; leather or fur may be strategically placed to suggest a paw, mane or tail.

Somewhat surprisingly, the fur embellishing the cast's heads and tails isn't even a distant relation to the cat family; incorporated into *Cats*' unique costumes and wigs is yak hair. All wigs in the show—except Grizabella's, which is human hair—are made from yak hair. A bovine like a cow or ox, the yak is found primarily in China where it is used in the mountains as a pack animal. Like sheep, the yak is sheared; its treated and bleached hair is available through a New York importer. No human or synthetic hair could withstand the feline frenzy of *Cats*, but yak hair is coarse and durable, impervious to water and perspiration, and springs back when crushed.

Color photographs are used to reproduce Napier's costume, wig and makeup designs for each new performer in a role; touring company audiences see the same show they would on Broadway, with all design elements exact copies of the originals. The feline face is a "T" shape, unlike the human oval, and each cat's makeup is created to accentuate that "T." The illusion of whiskers is especially successful, with many people willing to swear that the tiny black dots painted around the actor's nose are protrusions of hair. Initially requiring about 90 minutes to apply, the intricate face patterns are eventually mastered in half that time; performers are responsible for duplicating their own makeup at each performance.

The extraordinarily well-suited movement and dance in *Cats* was created by associate director/choreographer Gillian Lynne, based in part on observation of her own pet. "I watched minutely, the way it moved, stretched, used its eyes . . . Then I helped the kids in the show try to get that total feeling—how to use their stomach muscles, how to de-focus their eyes in that odd way that cats have of looking at you while not looking at you. I taught them how to hear, but not just with their ears; if you watch cats, they sit still but they listen with the backs of their necks. I had to constantly remind them to keep their bodies fluid because cats move as if they have no bones. And they had to master that cat quality of movement, which is sensual and totally aloof and introverted."

The top-flight dance troupe is superbly schooled in uncanny resemblance to cats—clawing, stretching, rubbing and comic feline posturing. They lithely move in a non-stop pulse of dance, switching and swirling from ballet to jazz, from gymnastics to boogie. The former ballerina who guides them notes that in London, she and Nunn didn't find as many dancers as in America, "who are trained across the board—who could do ballet, tap and modern dance and also were good singers. England has no history of jazz as the Americans do. The American dance musical is unique—it comes from your multicultural history, your feeling for jazz, and something in the air we don't have in England." In fact, Lynne is credited in part for British reclamation of the dance musical; before *Cats*, few if any were even attempted, furthering a negative consensus of innate inability.

"When I explained the physical needs we should try to conquer in the initial stages of rehearsals," declares the choreographer, "I was often regarded on both sides of the Atlantic as a mad cat myself! For instance, cats seeming boneless, a great deal of strength and sensitivity is needed in the stomach and spine; and, attempting almost anything physically, they've a sense of daring to replicate. Most importantly, with

all those disciplines intact—the kind of feline movement and reaction necessary—our ‘cats’ needed to interpret human emotions accurately.” Endeavoring to “find something and an energy we could call our own,” Lynne replaced or supplemented conventional dance styles with “vigorous exercises of an unusual nature leading eventually to total freedom in what we could attempt physically.”

“Having observed that cats are at once aloof, hypersensual, cold, warm, completely elastic and mysterious, the goals we set ourselves physically were daunting in their attempt to translate those wonderful words in an exciting, theatrical and witty way. I fell in love with Andrew’s music the minute I heard it and building the pivotal ‘Jellicle Ball’ with him was hard and thrilling work. We knew that were we to achieve our aim of producing an explosive dance musical, we had to succeed there or die. The number is based on the ‘Jellicle Cats’ poem, but I knew I had to extend it and find a dance poem where we could create a piece of exciting theatre whilst showing the cats at the height of their passion, dancing their most private, energetic and anarchic rituals.”

Lynne continues animatedly relating the genesis of the original dance routines in *Cats*, “Making a worthy attempt at the exotic theatre of Groultiger’s dreams of Siamese, building a savage and believable cat-fight for Macavity, trying to make the cockroaches succeed in a beetle’s tattoo that might have echoes of Busby Berkeley, finding dance characters for the Tugger, the Pokes and Pollicles, and a sad memory of the Ball dance for Grizabella while lighting the jazz-classic fireworks for Mr. Mistoffelees; indeed, trying to do justice to the variety of T.S. Eliot’s characters in as wide a span of dance styles has been a fascinating and frightening task. It’s also been one of the most exciting and rewarding I can remember.”

London theatre critic/historian Sheridan Morely attributes in large part a reversal in West End theatre-goers’ negative attitude toward the stage musical to *Cats*’ creative team. Overturning a deep-seated “reluctance to admit that a great musical can also be the greatest form of theatre,” Morely notes happily that *Cats* helped prove “great musicals can now be a preserve of the classical as well as of the commercial theatre in Britain.”

THE MUSIC OF ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER

From the outset, Andrew Lloyd Webber’s music has echoed his cultural heritage, upbringing and experience. The precursor to the modern musical was British operetta, developed by Gilbert and Sullivan by welding techniques of opera with elements of the church-choral tradition to produce a distinctly “English” sound. Popular English music hall of the same period was built on traditional folk songs, satire and parody. The son of a London musician, the composer began at an early age to play piano and other musical instruments; he studied classical music voraciously. When he started composing musicals, everyone wanted to be one of the Beatles, the famous British group that revolutionized popular music.

In *Cats*, as in Lloyd Webber’s work before and since, there is a medley of musical reference, from classical to rock; a fugue may appear among ballads and pop. Though often called operatic, his shows pioneered the theatrical use of such contemporary music technology as synthesizers, virtually unknown on Broadway until *Cats*. The music is as much a collage as is the set; this provocative difference is what gives the composer’s music a sound of its own and its essential appeal. As eclectic as it may be, his work synthesizes disparate influences into a consistent musical sensibility, the natural expression of a classically trained child of the rock revolution.

Every composer absorbs music into his subconscious, and trained composers are invariably influenced by their predecessors. Hardly unusual in Broadway musicals, musical history abounds with uncanny resemblances, some intentional. Mozart was influenced by Haydn; Beethoven by Mozart; Leonard Bernstein drew from Stravinsky and Copland; and Stephen Sondheim evokes Bernstein and Ravel. A composer filters those influences through a very distinctive musical personality to find his own voice; the unique elements Andrew Lloyd Webber synthesized in finding his produced a new and vital—not just popular—style. The composer himself is the real source of his melodies; his music sounds like his music, an occasional nod to Puccini or Prokofiev notwithstanding.

Lloyd Webber put today's musical theatre in touch with the realities of contemporary mass culture. He supplemented traditional show tunes—often replacing them altogether—with a vocabulary of opera, operetta, period, jazz, liturgical and Latin music, as well as rock and roll. His composing is tonal, with strong melodic lines and extensive use of lush harmonic resolutions. But, he also dares to use dissonance and is comfortable with atonal passages, aware of their strengths; he will insert unusual syncopations and sudden rock beats. However, as the composer puts it, "If the songs don't have a basic strength to them, then you couldn't begin to have other things people notice."

The crossover appeal of combining classical with popular music enlists audiences who want both "entertainment" and "serious" music. While baffling musical comedy purists, Lloyd Webber's unconventional musicals attracted a generation of theatregoers estranged from a Broadway sorely outdated by Hollywood and the electronic age of music. "The whole point of doing something in theatre is to give the audience an experience they couldn't get from any other medium," states Lloyd Webber. "If you aren't giving them that, you aren't really giving them anything."

Some maintain that Lloyd Webber's introduction of "through-composing" a musical reinvented the form. To the composer, intending every word to be sung reflected his two loves: postwar Broadway musicals and grand opera. Continuous music—as opposed to "spotting" songs amidst spoken dialogue—is a normal practice in grand opera, and to some extent in the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, but there are no precedents in the musical theatre, except the 1935 *Porgy and Bess*. In *Evita*, the libretto was entirely sung; further developing the technique in *Cats*, Lloyd Webber perfected it in *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Cats' ready-made libretto is a prime example of the composer's facility in selecting subject matter that lends itself to his singular musical art. In translating the poems of T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* into music, a different style is used to interpret each cat's individual traits. "The Rum Tum Tugger" song is Rock 'n Roll, using electric guitar and drums; this lovable, electric cat who struts his stuff while breaking lady cats' hearts is the Mick Jagger or Elvis Presley of the cat world.

"The Old Gumbie Cat" leads a lazy life during the day, but at night becomes protector of the household and the commander of the "night stalkers" (cockroaches and beetles); the piece begins as a benign ballad and is transformed into the "big band" sound of brass instruments popular in the ballroom dancing 1940s. The Andrews Sisters, famous club and concert singers of the swing era, are even represented in a trio of "female cats." A tap dance ending the number parodies a type of British military march called the Tattoo.

"Gus the Theatre Cat" is a musical monologue in the form of a ballad, some lines spoken, some sung. "Growltiger's Last Stand" presents a spoof of Italian opera, especially those of Puccini, with lush music and a hero (tenor) who must fight villains to defend his honor. The humorous hoax extends to the use of words taken from an Italian translation of *Practical Cats*. The ballad embodiment of the unpublished "Grizabella the Glamour Cat" includes lines from "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and other early works of the poet; while sad, it suggests a sense of hope.

"Memory"—the haunting, hypnotic foundation of *Cats*—exudes the emotion and musical structure of an operatic aria, orchestrated with rich legato lines to touch the heart. The collage of musical vignettes that comprise the show is as precisely drawn and uniquely entertaining as the poems that inspired it.

'CATS' STATS

The third sold-out visit of *Cats* to San Francisco in 1991 prompted one Bay Area critic to comment in print that the show was becoming the musical theatre equivalent of *The Nutcracker*, an annual entertainment tradition for the entire family. Although Tchaikovsky's ballet reached its 100th birthday in 1992 as Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* celebrated a decade on Broadway, the latter has amassed impressive statistics attesting to its perennial popularity.

The phenomenally successful *Cats* propelled its composer to the center of a worldwide entertainment empire as the maker of mega-hit musicals. By 1992, it had been seen by more than 18 million people in

North America alone, performing in all but five of the United States and every province in Canada. When the League of American Theatres and Producers conducted a survey in March 1992, domestic touring companies had played 179 American cities since the first tour was launched in Boston in 1983. Of the total, 55 cities had seen *Cats* twice, 23 three times, and six cities had been paid four visits. Memphis had hosted five engagements and Atlanta an astonishing seven; in the fall of 1992, *Cats* made its eleventh trip to the greater Los Angeles area.

Cats became the longest continuously-touring musical in North American history with the fourth national company's 1991 appearance in San Francisco, surpassing the previous record held by *Annie*, whose four traveling companies played a total of 630 weeks on the road between 1979-1983. The first professional Broadway musical to visit Nova Scotia and Newfoundland as well as Alaska, *Cats* was also the first to successfully play sports arenas: In 1991, the show completed an unprecedented 10-week tour of the Eastern U.S. and Canada, performing a scenically and technically enlarged production augmented by live-action screens in huge coliseums and stadiums.

The longest running musical in London and third longest in New York, *Cats* began its worldwide conquest with 1983 productions in Hungary, Japan and Austria, the latter including tours to East Berlin and Moscow. Germany, Norway, Finland, The Netherlands, Sweden and France followed, along with seven different Australian cities. Zurich and Mexico City were added to the international roster in 1991. Universally embraced, *Cats* has proven a musical of many lives.

The original London cast recording took the 1982 Grammy Award for Best Cast Album; in 1983, the same honor went to the original Broadway cast recording, which has sold more than two million copies. *Cats* swept the 1983 Tony Awards with seven, including Best Musical. The now classic "Memory" attracted as wide a range of recording artists as listeners; in addition to Barbra Streisand, those with the song on records include Barry Manilow, Johnny Mathis, Judy Collins, Eddie Fisher and Liberace.

At the end of 1991, the combined gross of the Broadway and U.S. touring companies of *Cats* was projected at \$518 million; the worldwide figure was estimated in excess of one billion dollars. In comparison, a decade after its 1982 release, *E.T.* reigned as the all-time movie moneymaker, top-grossing in U.S. ticket sales with \$400 million. *Star Wars* (1972) was its closest rival at \$322 million and the 1989 *Batman* ranked sixth with \$251 million. The diminutive, alien and agile cats seem to have captivated humanity with their affecting reflections of it.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Impetus for the development of the musical theatre was a rebellion against grand opera and the desire for a popular musical entertainment accessible to the masses, rather than restricted to the cultural, intellectual or privileged elite. With origins in Offenbach's Vienna, the musical came to Gilbert and Sullivan's London as operetta, and finally to Broadway, where it bloomed into an international art form. *Cats* contemporized the art, introducing a new generation of musical theatre to correspond with the times. The music of Andrew Lloyd Webber brings work of operatic proportion to the popular musical stage, and the evolution full circle.

* * *

In the early 1800s, a form of opera with dialogue—usually witty, its music lighter—called opera-buffa emerged in Italy; its French counterpart became known as opera-comique, later opera-bouffe and opera-vaudeville. In coalescing and refining these forms, cellist-composer Jacob Offenbach (1820-1880), a Parisian refugee of German anti-Semitism, fashioned operetta; considered the father of modern musical theatre, his most famous works—*Orpheus in the Underworld* and *The Tales of Hoffman*—remain in opera house repertoires worldwide. The Viennese waltz also played a role in development of the new genre, with Johann Strauss (1825-1899) composing his masterpiece *Die Fledermaus*, still internationally performed, and Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow* (1907) influencing composers of both Edwardian London and the American lyric stage.

English music halls—convivial singing in a social context—had proliferated, and by the turn of the 19th century, more than 200 dotted the countryside. Humor, particularly parody, was a key element. A common musical language evolved from the central dynamic of singers and audiences, with texts printed and tunes transmitted orally; often new words were written to existing melodies or tunes combined into a medley. The practice of casual composition by improvisation led to the birth of a new breed of lyricists and composers, and songs became the result of a partnership.

When operetta surfaced in late Victorian England, its main ingredient was lyrical humor, and its creative proponents were Gilbert and Sullivan. Although some historians consider John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) an early musical comedy and refute Gilbert and Sullivan's precedential position in the development of British musical theatre, its humor derives from the subject, rather than the lyrics. *The Beggar's Opera* is essentially a ballad opera, predecessor to English opera; the celebrated work reached the height of its fame with Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's 1927 German adaptation, *The Threepenny Opera*.

In 1875, William Schwenk Gilbert (1836-1911) and Arthur Seymour Sullivan (1842-1900) began a highly successful 18-year collaboration that would produce the operetta classics *Pirates of Penzance*, *HMS Pinafore* and *The Mikado*. To Sullivan's scores are attributed grace, skill and melodic invention; Gilbert's poetic librettos raised lyric writing from serviceable craft to legitimate art. The pair wrote the first modern hit songs with both music and lyrics passed intact to posterity. In writing them exclusively and specifically for the theatre, they opened the way to an Edwardian era saturated with operettas and musical comedies.

In London, the first theatrical production described in its own advertising as a "musical comedy" was *A Gaiety Girl* (1893), which toured America the following year, and was rapidly followed by numerous "Girls," then a series of "Belles." Titles varied little, and gradually an all-purpose plot established itself. When the American musical arrived around the turn of the century, it changed the West End concept forever, but it wasn't until *Oklahoma!* (1943) was exported that the British version of musical comedy appeared substantially outdated. "British producers and composers alike went into a state of prolonged and understandable shock," as editorialized by Sheridan Morley, arts editor and drama critic of *Punch* since 1975. The well-known London writer/theatre historian adds, "they only really began to emerge in the 1970s with the advent of Rice and Lloyd Webber."

* * *

The growth of the American musical theatre followed the development of cultural consciousness and national maturity in general. The minstrel show—a combination of songs and dances with banter and variety sketches presumed to represent Southern Negro folklore—was among the first indigenous forms. Early variety shows—with music and pantomime—borrowed from the English music hall, then underwent transformation in the saloons, becoming vaudeville and burlesque, later the revue; the extravaganza, a hybrid of French extraction, was also popular. European operetta flooded the New York market after the Civil War (1861-65), stimulating experimentation from which an authentically American musical style began to take shape.

The patriotic productions of George M. Cohan (1878-1943) debuted in 1901 and continued for 27 years, advancing a new assertion of nationalism on the musical stage. Literally born in a theatre and often his own star performer, the consummate showman is sometimes regarded as the father of musical comedy, his first successes in primitive book musicals, later revues. In his 58 years on the stage, Cohan wrote more than 40 plays, collaborated on 40 others, helped to produce another 150 and published over 500 songs.

Another famous figure epitomizing early show business was producer Florenz Ziegfeld (1867-1932), whose sumptuous *Ziegfeld Follies* of 1907 inaugurated two decades of nearly annual editions of spectacular music revues and initiated dozens of copies, some adhering to a book of sorts. While providing training ground for theatrical composers (Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern and Richard Rogers among them), these productions propounded the need for more sophisticated fare in a public weary of repetition.

World War I (1914-18) had bought an abrupt end to European importation and a crucial independence to the American theatre. The new musical, like the society for which it was composed, was to

achieve a far greater informality, simplicity and directness than its forebears. The pivotal production introducing the new idiom was *Show Boat* (1927). Representing the consolidation of earlier innovations, this Jerome Kern-Oscar Hammerstein II landmark initiated a move in the direction of integrated musicals, with fresh music and lyrics, and books that could involve audiences.

The end of the 1920s signaled a turning point in the American musical theatre, with *Show Boat* the salient link between past and future. Ragtime and more importantly, jazz, the musical speech for the age, influenced those writing for the stage. The first sound movie appeared in 1927, Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*, and radio techniques being developed during the decade would effect all forms of entertainment outside the home. While the Depression would be felt throughout the country, it forced the makers of musical theatre to substitute imagination and creative invention for the expensive trappings that lured – then lulled – audiences.

The first generation of Broadway composers, who wrote from the 1920s into the 1950s, was dominated by the giants of the American musical theatre: Kern, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, George Gershwin and Richard Rogers. The artists who originated the basic style, sound and tradition of musical comedy defined it for the international stage and provided a repertory of musicals and songs that constitute an American cultural institution. By 1948, when the entertainment world was invaded by television, soon its strongest competitor, musical comedy was firmly established as a contender for supremacy on the Broadway stage.

* * *

The following generation of songwriters were the professionals who perfected the form and created the shows that established musicals as the predominant theatre of Broadway. Maintaining the tradition of composer-lyricist partnerships, composers who wrote their own lyrics became the exception, Jerry Herman and Stephen Sondheim among them. Librettos were being refined as the halcyon years of musical comedy extended into the 1950s, and in 1957, *West Side Story* premiered. With music by Leonard Bernstein, the trail-blazing musical gave Sondheim his initial Broadway credit as a lyricist. Based on a conception by choreographer/director Jerome Robbins, it prefaced a movement toward production-oriented "concept musicals," creative staging that would threaten to usurp the absolute province held by conventional "book musicals." Intent on differentiating musicals from plays—delineating the form as an entity—"concept musicals" blended as one elements previously presented independently; book, music, lyrics and dance were combined in a ballet-like collage, integrating content as form.

When *Hair* (1967) became a popular worldwide hit, "the American tribal love rock musical" was dismissed by the Broadway establishment as an embarrassment and unpleasant accident. In 1970, Stephen Schwartz offered traditional theatregoers a somewhat more palatable portrait of the "love generation" and its music in *Godspell*. The following year, *Jesus Christ Superstar* opened on Broadway, the work of British outsiders Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Denounced as an audacious, if not iconoclastic treatment of a sacred subject, the musical depicting the last seven days of Christ's life in rock and roll won seven Tony Awards and ran for two years in New York and for a decade in London.

Having debuted as a best-selling "original cast album" before there even was an original cast, *Superstar* attracted young audiences raised on Elvis and the Beatles that Broadway had lost. The title song was a radio standard for years, and "I Don't Know How To Love Him" a million seller for two different artists. Concert versions, many unlicensed, sprung up all over the U.S., and young people uninterested in old-fashioned music came to see what they perceived as a rock concert of a favorite album. In fact, financing for the album had been sought because no one would back it on stage; after being rejected by RCA, which had passed on the 1957 *My Fair Lady*, *Superstar* was finally recorded in large part because of the 1969 success of The Who's "rock opera" *Tommy*.

During the 1970s, Sondheim premiered *Follies*, *Company*, *Sweeney Todd* and *A Little Night Music*, his biggest commercial success; in 1975, *A Chorus Line* made its historic bow, settling in for an unprecedented 15-year engagement. A year later, Lloyd Webber and Rice reappeared on Broadway with *Evita*, again a popular album before stage presentation and already established in London. The semi-

fictional Brechtian account of the career of Argentina's Eva Peron became an international blockbuster, running in London for eight years and in New York for four, in spite of tepid reviews. Deemed by British critics the best thing to have happened, musically and industrially, to the West End since World War II, *Evita* appealed as theatre on its own terms, rather than as a concert with plot, as in earlier criticisms of *Superstar*. Composed entirely of Latin rhythms, the inventive score includes the powerful "Don't Cry For Me, Argentina."

Broadway returned to an innocuous status quo, *Annie* and *42nd Street* the decade's concluding hits. The Great White Way was fading; audiences needed replenishing and conventional musicals weren't attracting a new generation grown to expect more for its entertainment dollar. Sondheim was writing innovative shows, all well respected but some too "cerebral" for mass consumption; other Broadway composers clung to convention. In the past, musical theatre grew as it changed with the economics and tastes of its age; the world was entering the 1980s without it.

Retrospectively, Lloyd Webber biographer Michael Walsh, a music critic and associate editor of *Time*, notes, "Andrew Lloyd Webber's contribution has been to recognize that the Rogers and Hammerstein musicals he grew up with are as closely aligned to their time and place as Mozart's operas or Wagner's music dramas to theirs, and that the circumstances that gave rise to them are irrevocably changed." Just as T.S. Eliot found historic precedent inadequate and created new poetic frontiers for his own day, the British composer based his music in contemporary culture rather than on antiquated musical theatre models.

* * *

A new era finally arrived on Broadway via the West End—no small cause for chagrin in New York theatrical circles—with the 1982 opening of *Cats*, Lloyd Webber's unique musical entertainment based on the Nobel Prize-winning poet's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. The elaborately designed and choreographed production, imaginatively staged by Trevor Nunn of London's prestigious Royal Shakespeare Company, was an immediate hit, still running two decades later in factual homage to its advertising slogan, "Now and forever."

As Lloyd Webber's *Song and Dance* had joined *Evita* earlier in 1982, it was increasingly clear the composer's success was no fluke; this Englishman was proving the major force in revitalizing a form thought to be American but fallen on hard times. The enormous expense of mounting Broadway musicals and resultant ticket prices necessitated producers and public alike demand reciprocal value, a blockbuster; Lloyd Webber delivered. His unusual combination of musical styles, operatic technique and intuitive stage sense had a timely appeal audiences loved. Essentially fusing opera with musical theatre and high production values—imperative in a world weaned on movie magic and electronic sound—the new formula for success was a marketable, exportable international entertainment, enunciated by brilliant visual design and expressed entirely through music.

Cats was a theatrical event; it was phenomenally popular and beloved. Companies appeared all over the globe, tapping foreign markets unavailable to other English productions; it was even a hit in France, a country long resistant to musicals. An ensemble show, it's neither dependent on stars nor culture-specific; its subject, familiar to all, is communicated in the universal language of music. The *book* musical was difficult to export; opera, the original "bookless" musical (devoid of dialogue) is easily understood in virtually any tongue. Lloyd Webber rewrote the rules to synchronize the musical theatre with the dawn of the 21st century.

CURRICULUM LINKS

The phenomenal worldwide appeal of *Cats* is ageless; student audiences range from elementary school through college. The *Cats HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS* may be used at different levels of instruction by adjusting the depth to which analysis or discussion is directed.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical of T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is uniquely suited to supplement academic curriculum. The richness of the material offers teachers in a variety of subjects a

wide range of options and topics that can be readily used in the classroom.

Extensive background information is included in the *HANDBOOK* to stimulate study ideas in English/literature, drama, music, history, art/design, dance/movement/physical education, geography/social studies and foreign languages. Creative teachers may find these suggestions motivation for other parallel learning.

BEFORE THE SHOW

1. The following sections of the *Cats HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS* will be helpful in preparing the class for what it will be seeing prior to performance:

CATS (Introduction)

T.S. Eliot's collection of poems titled *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* and Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Cats* are placed in contemporary context

ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER

A brief chronological outline of the British composer's accomplishments, including the significance of *Cats* in relation to his body of work

THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT

A brief biographical outline of the Nobel Prize-winning poet, including analysis and historical perspective of his work and the relationship of *Practical Cats* to the whole

TSE'S 'PRACTICAL CATS'

An explanation of how and why the "serious" poet wrote the "whimsical" volume, and its evolution from conception to printed page

ALW'S IMPRACTICAL CATS

An explanation of how, why, and with whom the composer produced the unlikely musical, and its epochal path from inspiration to stage

2. Reading *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*—to the class, as an individual assignment, or as a group out loud—will add greatly to the enjoyment and understanding of the adaptation of Eliot's poetry to music in *Cats*. (The slim volume is available in most school and public libraries, as well as in various online forms.)

Note: The GLOSSARY (UNFAMILIAR NAMES & PLACES IN *OLD POSSUM'S BOOK OF PRACTICAL CATS*) included at the back of the *HANDBOOK* will be of considerable help in interpreting the poetry in print and on stage

AT THE THEATRE

Some general guidelines apply to classes in all subjects; students should have some preparation for the unique experience of going to see live theatre, the behavior expected of them, and what to expect in return.

***Cats* is a special kind of musical, performed in non-stop song and dance. The show is continuous music: The entire story is sung, and there is no spoken dialogue without musical accompaniment.**

Depending on the age, maturity and previous theatre-going experience of students, teachers will want to suggest some or all of the following pointers for their own enjoyment and that of those around them:

1. Being seated as a member of the audience carries a responsibility, including the agreement to suspend reality: It's important to believe what is happening on stage is real and happening—live—before your eyes.
2. YOU are the audience. In theatre, the audience plays an important role in the experience. Listen carefully and quietly. Let the production unfold and enfold you. Remember, there are many other people sitting in the audience around you and your group and they, too, need to hear every word and must not be distracted or disturbed. Everyone wants to enjoy the performance.
3. A very special relationship between the actors and the audience is established during a performance. The actors are aware of your presence and your responses can stimulate or stifle the show. If you're paying attention, your natural reactions will be appropriate (laughing when it's funny, and so on). When the house lights go down and the stage lights come up, a performance especially for you begins; it's an opportunity only live theatre can provide.

AFTER THE SHOW

1. *Cats HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS* sections especially useful in post-performance discussion and critical analysis:

STAGING THE MAGIC

A detailed synopsis of the physical aspects of the production, including the setting, costumes, makeup, choreography, and humans performing as cats

THE MUSIC OF ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER

An analysis of the types of music used in *Cats* and the composer's other stage productions, as well as the influence his background, experience and heritage have had in the development of a unique new form of musical theatre

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The evolution of modern musical theatre, traced from the rebellion against grand opera to its contemporary return to operatic roots

2. Reviewing the production—as an individual written assignment, as a group effort with separate elements assigned to different students, or in classroom discussion—will help clarify the experience, articulate impressions and evaluate opinions.

Discuss the role critics play in the theatre

Reviews serve as consumer guides for the public and often as tools for advertising and promoting a play. Explore how a critic looks at, analyzes and writes about a production. Compare a professional critic's review of *Cats* in your local newspaper with class-written ones. Consider what points in the newspaper review would make you/your little brother/your grandmother want/not want to see the show. Consider what quotations from the review might persuade other students to see it.

Support your own critical opinion

A review, whether written or spoken, should give specific examples from the show that support the reviewer's opinion. Remember that when asked "What did you think of the show?" by a friend, a response of "great" tells them nothing about the show; it doesn't help someone who hasn't seen it formulate an idea

of exactly what the production is like.

Compare/Contrast opinions

Start by listing and describing all the production elements, and give your reaction to each, with an example indicating why you formed that opinion:

Characters / Acting / Singing / Dancing

Set / Props / Lights / Special Effects

Costumes / Makeup

Script / Music / Directing

Note that, just as professional critics differ and one may praise the same show another disliked, student reviews are no less subjective. There may be as many different opinions of one theatre performance as there are people seeing it; discuss why and possible influences on people's opinions.

STUDY GUIDE

Following are specific suggestions—at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels—for discussion, written or oral assignments and/or individual or group projects, referenced by sections of the *Cats HANDBOOK* as source material.

TSE'S 'PRACTICAL CATS'

1. Students owning pet cats describe their various traits and behavior, then assign appropriate names by
 - a. making up a name that sounds right
 - b. combining traits to make a name
 - c. suggesting figures from history or literature to fit
2. Identify the characters in *Cats* by describing how their names relate to their personalities
3. Suggest cat names for family members, friends, teachers and other persons known personally, then for people identified by occupation or type (doctor, carpenter, movie star)
4. In the poem/song "The Naming of Cats," who were Plato, Ademetus, Electra and Demeter?
5. Translate the word "cat" into a language you are studying and do exercise #1 in that language
6. Make up a cat character and write a description of it; write a story, narrative poem or rap song describing one or more cat character(s) and act it out
7. Considering *Practical Cats* "a unique collection of children's poems for adults," identify lines in the poems with double entendre
8. Find parallels between cats and their situations and/or activities in the play and those of people in 1930s England
9. Describe a human situation or activity in contemporary life and assign a stage setting, characters and activity for feline counterparts

ALW'S IMPRACTICAL 'CATS'

1. Discuss the reasons you like/dislike T.S. Eliot's *Practical Cats* poetry and why you like/dislike the musical *Cats*; discuss how they are alike and how they differ .
2. Eliot said that cats are very much like human beings; *Cats* director Trevor Nunn suggested that the main reason we're fascinated by the creatures is that in a mysterious way they allow us more clearly to see ourselves. Discuss how people and cats are similar and how they differ.
3. Discuss the "standards" by which we judge poetry today; musical theatre productions; movies; music; other people. What makes these standards change, how are they revised and why?
4. Discuss the reasons certain songs become hits; analyze what it is about "Memory" that popularized it so; select currently popular songs and analyze their success. How many other pop songs can you think of now and in recent years that were taken from stage musicals?
5. Select a poem from Eliot's *Practical Cats* that was *not* incorporated into the musical *Cats* and
 - a. Suggest a style of music to best interpret its meaning
 - b. Discuss possible reasons why it wasn't included in *Cats*
 - c. Discuss where it might fit in were it to be used in *Cats*
 - d. Develop your own scene as if it had been included in *Cats*; cast it from the class, select a director and perform it as if it were taking place on the junkyard set
6. Select a short poem of any other poet you've studied and
 - a. Suggest a style of music to best interpret its meaning
 - b. Discuss how you might go about staging it as a one-act play: decide on a setting, costumes, casting, etc.
7. Compare a work of Puccini's with Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Memory": how are the melodies similar, and how are they different?

STAGING THE MAGIC

1. Identify 10 familiar objects or props included in the set. How do they relate to and/or further the story?
2. How does makeup in the show help each actor create his or her own cat character?
3. Describe the types of movement/dance performed by the cast members to make them appear like cats
4. How was the audience included in the play; how would you describe the audience's reactions during the show?
5. What makes live theatre different from reading a poem? Seeing a movie? Listening to music? Attending a symphony? A rock show? A dance concert? How are these activities alike; what's required of the performers and the audiences at each?
6. Describe the costumes for various cat characters; how do they help identify each as independent personalities? How does the clothing worn by you, a friend or relative, your teacher, a rock singer reflect and/or help define the wearer?
7. Continue the action of the play beyond the ending you've seen; create the next scene yourself
8. Assuming an unlimited budget, how would you costume the cat characters in your own story/poem/song? What would be the setting? Draw designs of the costumes, makeup and setting.

9. Create makeup for one of the cat characters in your own story

- a. using the "ethereal" (light, airy, delicate, celestial) effect selected for the show's cats
- b. using a totally unrealistic "cartoon" likeness
- c. using the photo realism of *National Geographic* magazine to create literal cat makeup

Before executing the design, do a character analysis, describing in detail age, heredity, race, environment and temperament; also consider facial features as they pertain to your character, including hair, cheeks, mouth and nose. The objective is to create a cat whose face exemplifies these characteristics.

10. Choose 10 feelings, ideas or attitudes that were communicated in *Cats* by various characters; then, working individually or as a group, create cat-like movements to communicate these nonverbally, emphasizing in the rehearsal process:

a. Variety of movement

Use the entire body, not just feet, hands, head; use combinations of fast and slow actions as well as little or no action; use the entire performance space, and put cats on different levels if possible.

b. Ensemble performance

Like the performers in *Cats*, each cat is a part of the whole; it is what they communicate together that's most important

Further application: Select music from *Cats* or another source to accompany and enhance the performance; combine into a program to present before an assembled audience

THE MUSIC OF ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER

1. What musical instruments can you identify by hearing them in *Cats*?
2. Discuss other possible interpretations of the music. For example, if Rum Tum Tugger were a country-western singer, how would his musical representation differ; what are other possible artistic choices?
3. Identify musical styles in *Cats*: which number is a fugue, which are ballads, etc.
4. Analyze different styles of music in terms of the emotions they evoke and cite examples
5. Discuss similarities in contemporary artists' music with the work of ones who may have influenced them.
6. Suggest advantages/disadvantages of a musical production being "through-composed"/written entirely in music

CATS STATS

1. Using a world globe, locate some of the international cities in which *Cats* has been seen: London (England), New York (USA), Tokyo (Japan), Hamburg (Germany), Budapest (Hungary), Vienna (Austria) Toronto (Canada), Oslo (Norway), Helsinki (Finland), Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Stockholm (Sweden), Paris (France), Mexico City (Mexico), Zurich (Switzerland), and Sydney (Australia).
2. Discuss traditions: what are they; name some traditions and consider how they came about.
3. What similarities can be found in a comparison to perennially popular entertainments such as *The Nutcracker*, *Cats*, *A Christmas Carol*, the circus, Ice Capades, rodeo, etc.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1. What elements of opera make it "less accessible to the masses"? What elements of opera are becoming popularized in the music of ALW, and why are they more accessible in contemporary life?
2. What does *Cats* have in common with the productions of George M. Cohan and Florenz Ziegfeld?
3. Identify influences in *Cats* of opera, operetta, English music hall and contemporary rock.
4. What are some examples of how our musical "hit parades" reflect current events (before the war, after World War II, during Vietnam, today). What national or international news events of the last decade can you think of that might be appropriate as a musical?
5. Trace the parallel development of dramatic plays with musicals in theatre history (Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams with Rodgers and Hammerstein, etc.).
6. Examine how collateral advances in industry and technology as well as changes in government and the economy affected the growth of the American musical theatre.
7. Suggest other topics, like the Bible and cats, that are not culture-specific and might enjoy popularity in many countries if made into a musical.
8. How can it be said that music, like mime, is a "universal language"?

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GLOSSARY

UNFAMILIAR NAMES & PLACES IN OLD POSSUM'S BOOK OF PRACTICAL CATS

"THE NAMING OF CATS"

- Plato—Greek Philosopher
 Ademetus—mythological figure whose wife Alcestis died to save his life
 Electra—daughter of Agamemnon in the Greek Orestian Trilogy
 Demeter—Greek goddess of the harvest

"THE OLD GUMBIE CAT"

- Tattoo—an outdoor military exercise given by the English troops as an evening entertainment

"THE RUM TUM TUGGER"

- flat—apartment
 larder—pantry; closet where food is stored
 muddle—mess

"BUSTOPHER JONES: THE CAT ABOUT TOWN"

- St. James Street—a street of expensive stores in London
 Brummel—George Bryan, a.k.a. Beau Brummel, an English dandy (1778-1840)
 Senior Educational
 Joint Superior Schools

private clubs whose members differ on educational theories
Fox's
Billimp's
Stage and Screen
Pothunter's
Drones
Siamese
Glutton
Tomb

restaurants and clubs in London
Pall Mall—wide street from Trafalgar Square to Buckingham Palace where people walk to show off clothes
spats—elegant coverings worn over one's shoes

"MUNGOJERRIE AND RUMPELTEAZER"

Cornwall Gardens
Victoria Square
Launceston Place
Kensington Square
areas of London
vests—undershirts

"OLD DEUTERONOMY"

Queen Victoria—Queen of England (1837-1901)
physiognomy—qualities of the mind or character shown through facial features
vicarage—home of the vicar, who preaches at church
market day—weekday when farmers sell produce at stands on the street
lorries—trucks
Fox and French Horn—a pub

"THE AWFUL BATTLE..."

Park—most likely Regent's Park in London
Bricklayer's Arms—a pub
Yorkshire—a county in the north of England
pipers—men who play bagpipes
Underground—the London subway

"THE SONG OF THE JELICLES"

gavotte—lively dances
toilette—the process of grooming
terpsichorean—of or relating to dancing; from Terpsichore, the Greek muse of dancing and choral song

"GUS: THE THEATRE CAT"

pub—an English bar
Irving—Sir Henry Irving, English actor (1838-1905)
Tree—Sir Herbert Bearbohm Tree, English actor/manager (1853-1917)
pantomime—elaborate play performed without words
Dick Whittington—legendary mayor of London whose cat helped him out of many problems
"East Lynne"—a popular 19th century melodrama

"GROWLTIGER'S LAST STAND"

Gravesend—port city on the Thames River
Oxford—university city in England
Thames—river that flows through southern England, past London and out to sea
Cottagers of Rotherhithe—people who live in small houses in the village of Rotherhithe
Hammersmith—area of London
Putney—town outside London on the Thames
Bandicoot—a very large rat from India or Ceylon
Molesey—town outside of London
Bell at Hampton—a pub or bar near Hampton
Lion—a pub
toasting forks—long two-pronged forks used to hold bread over the fire for toasting
strand—land at the river's edge; shore; beach
Wapping
Maidenhead
Henley
Brentford
Victoria Dock
English towns on the northern railway route

"SKIMBLESHANKS, THE RAILWAY CAT"

Night Mail—train that takes the late mail to the north of England
Sleeping Car Express—an overnight train that makes very few stops
Crewe
Carlisle
Dumpeys
Gallowgate
villages and towns along the Thames River

"MACAVITY: THE MYSTERY CAT"

Scotland Yard—the investigative unit of the British police force; similar to the FBI in the United States
Flying Squad—special police group for containing volatile situations; somewhat comparable to American "SWAT Team"
Foreign Office—department of British government similar to the United States State Department
Admiralty—department of the British government similar to the U.S. Navy

"MR. MISTOFFELEES"

Prestidigitation
Legerdemain
sleight-of-hand; magic tricks

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The latest information about "Cats" and other Andrew Lloyd Webber shows is available on the Internet at the Really Useful Company website. The address is: <http://www.reallyuseful.com>

CATS HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS

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