



Raleigh

BWW Reviews: CATS Brings Broadway Talent to Raleigh

by

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October 12

<http://www.broadwayworld.com/raleigh/article/BWW-Reviews-CATS-Brings-Broadway-Talent-to-Raleigh-20131012>



Cats, the popular show which was a hallmark of the Broadway landscape for almost two decades, is the current show being staged by North Carolina Theatre in downtown Raleigh, in the Raleigh Memorial Auditorium of the Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts.

The show, which is relatively non-linear and features many vignettes rather than one complete story (though there is a loose through-line of a plot) features the cats of T.S. Eliot's 1939 poem *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. The cats are a sort of tribe, and they refer to themselves as the "Jellicle Cats." The cats sing about their exploits, memories, and fears, and dance a Jellicle ball.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's fanciful and now worldwide show opened in London's West End in 1981 and on Broadway in 1982, broke records for attendance, and ran on Broadway until 2000, and it still remains the second-longest running show in Broadway history. Part of the appeal which keeps *Cats* going is nostalgia - many people saw *Cats* in New York, and many recall it among the first shows they ever saw live, since it appeals to children as well as adults. Additionally, now that it's 2013, *Cats* is a genuine time capsule from the early 1980s - everything that was innovative and exciting back then bottled into one show. Even though some of the music sounds a little dated and the large space in the auditorium at Duke Energy Center make the show seem distant at times, people still connect with the excitement that

Cats offered when it burst onto the scene.

This production features high-quality talent, many of them have done quite a few Broadway shows, including Ken Prymus, who played the role of Old Deuteronomy for seven and a half years in *Cats* on Broadway. Thay Floyd is a standout as Rum Tum Tugger, a cat always on the prowl. Floyd is vibrant, lively, and connects well with the audience. With an equally impressive voice is Jennifer Shrader, whose Grizabella sings the iconic tune "Memory." Additionally, the cast features a number of actors who are very dedicated to *Cats*, with their program biographies boasting a number of previous productions of the show. There must be something about *Cats* that keeps actors as well as audiences coming back time and again. The quality of the production is incredibly high, when considering the intersection of the excellent orchestra under the direction of Edward Robinson, the onstage talent, and the creative elements of set and costume. The choreography makes great use of the space on stage and includes great gymnastic elements, though there are some moments where the level of dancing required by the choreography is just a step above the ability level of the dancer(s). Also, partly due to the poetic nature of the lyrics, some lyrics are difficult to understand, particularly when the entire cast is singing. However, those things were minor in the grand scheme of things, and the overall effect was impressive.

When you see *Cats*, you might even get inspired and adopt one of the actual cats in the lobby, as NC Theatre has partnered with the SPCA of Wake County. *Cats* runs through October 13. There will be matinee and evening performances on both Saturday and Sunday. For tickets and more information, visit www.nctheatre.com.

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