

Several interesting  
facts



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Remarkable English poet T. S. Eliot hardly could imagine that his poems for children “ Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats” will be known to millions of inhabitants of different continents as a basis of fantastic by its beauty classical musical “ Cats” (music of well-known composer A. L. Webber).

Musical “ Cats” was so successful, that broke all records of theatrical longevity in Broadway and London. For the first time “ Cats” were presented to spectators in New London Theater in West-End (May 11, 1981) and already 8 years later they held the first record: musical became the most “ long-playing” performance in the history of British Theater. Musical is staged in London with unchangeable success after more than 8000 performances.

In the long history of Broadway “ Cats” – the only musical which was put on stage with unchangeable success for 18 years. From October 7 1982 this enchanting sight was presented for 7485 times. History of musical strikes with figures: musical was staged for more than 48 million people in 26 countries and 300 cities and profit from musical reached almost 2 milliards dollars.

Show was presented at 10 languages, but always by its original name. It is interesting that questioning which made Mexican producers before start of the musical, stated that for spectators of any country word “ Cats” doesn’t need translation. Musical “ Cats” received the most prestigious theatrical awards: Oliver, Evening Standard, 7 Tony awards, Drama Desk, 7 national awards of Japan, 7 awards of Canada, etc.

Why is musical “ Cats” so attractive for millions of people with different tastes and predilections? What makes spectators, who saw the musical once, to see it again and over again? What is “ Cats”?

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A bit of history.

Actually, text and music plays great role in triumphal success of musical. In 1931 future Nobel Prize laureate T. S. Eliot started to write fairy-tale poems about cats for his small godsons. Old Possum, as he was called by his friends, managed to invent unusual names for cats and dogs of his friends. The book was published in 1939 and from those times it remains a favourite book for children and grown-ups, being re-edited in different languages and different countries.

The idea to compose music for those poems came to composer Webber already in 1977. Webber liked those wonderful stories about cats, written in amazingly musical words, from his childhood, and composed several musical compositions for his friends. Some of them were presented with success during musical festival in Sidmonton, where Valerie Eliot got acquainted with Webber.

She had shown to him unpublished poems from the book, particularly, poem about Grizabelle, which stroke Webber by dramatic image (Eliot didn't include it into his book, because he considered it too sad for small children). In such a way idea to create a big musical-theatrical composition about fantastic world of cats, which relations remind human world of passions and contradictions, appeared.

Phenomena of “ Cats” consists of many components, main of which, except of wonderful lyrics and charming music, are professionalism and talent of director, producer, choreographer and designer. Famous producer Cameron Mackintosh liked the idea of Webber and musical was created in extremely short terms – 15 months.

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Mackintosh remembers several dramatic moments of that period: how prima of musical Judi Dench got trauma before the opening night; how long and without success they tried to find sponsors; how difficult was creation of mysterious enchanting spectacle from primary chaos.

Trevor Nunn tells that he likes poems of Elliot – childish poems for grown-ups, where in descriptions of definite cats you can find satirical gentle hints to their owners and to the whole English society in common. Cats are similar to us, people. They charm us, maybe because they help to understand us in their mysterious way.

Book of Eliot is a collection of separate small poems, which are not connected. People, who created musical, faced a problem to unite those poems into one whole and not to lose the original idea of author. The figure of Grizabelle became the main figure of musical – serious, touching and a bit tragic.

Famous aria of Grizabelle “ Memory” which is known also to those who never visited “ Cats”, during first 6 months only more than 7000 times was heard over British radio, and in American radio more than 1 million times. Besides, to listen to the aria 1 million times, you’ll need 5 years. “ Memory” was recorded 600 times by more than 150 singers, and Barbra Streisand and Johnny Mathis are among those singers; Placido Domingo also sang in together with Natalie Cole during his world concert tour.

Difficult make-up, shaggy wigs and tails create fantastic gallery of actors, and each of actors has his own character. Colored skin-tight costumes don’t bother motion, and it is very important for such choreography. Unbelievable

plastics strikes as well as easiness of motion, but this is a result of many hours of rehearsals. The next difficult task was creation of scenic stage.

Designer John Napier changed the hall into “ a big playground for cats”, which intrigues spectators before the musical starts. You’ll not find here usual division of scene and spectator’s rows. To create cats’ world Napier changed hall into a city scrap-heap, where all objects correspond to size of cats-actors (it means, they are several times bigger their own normal size). Not only in the stage, but also in the hall huge cans and tins, ragged tires, rusty bicycle wheels and kettles, spoiled shoes, etc (besides, quantity of objects is 2500 pieces!) are thrown in “ picturesque” disorder.

Over a long period of time inscription on a playbill of Broadway theater Winter Garden said: “ Cats - now and forever!”. “ Cats” left Broadway, earned millions of dollars and won hundred thousands of spectators’ hearts all over the world. “ Cats” is an exciting combination of mystery, magic, poetry and dance - continue their triumphal procession over the worlds, winning more and more fans after each stage. “ Cats” is a delightful, admirable, glorious, charming, captivating, killing, delectable musical - a real masterpiece. It is the best musical which I managed to see in this genre. “ Cats” - forever!