THE CREATIVE TEAM

CATS was the idea of Andrew Lloyd Webber, who composed the music to TS Eliot's poems. Once he had begun to create the show, Andrew Lloyd Webber gathered a few other people together to work on **CATS**, including Trevor Nunn and Gillian Lynne.

ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER

Andrew Lloyd Webber has composed the scores of some of the world's most famous musicals. His shows have run continually in the West End for 50 years and on Broadway for 43.

When the original *Sunset Boul*evard joined *School of Rock*, **CATS**, and *The Phantom of the Opera* in 1994, Lloyd Webber equalled Rodgers & Hammerstein's record of four shows running simultaneously on Broadway. He is also one of the select group of artists with EGOT status, having received Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony Awards.

Lloyd Webber owns six London theatres including the iconic London Palladium and Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Reopened in July 2021, the latter was completely restored and renovated at a cost of over £60 million. It was one of the biggest projects ever undertaken by a private theatre owner in recent times. His mantra is that every penny of profit made from his theatres is ploughed back into the buildings.

Lloyd Webber is passionate about the importance of musical education and diversity in the arts. The Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation provides 30 performing arts scholarships every year for talented students with financial need and supports a range of projects such as the Music in Secondary School Trust and commissioning research into diversity in theatre.

Lloyd Webber has composed music for globally significant moments, including Olympic ceremonies and World Cup celebrations. He has also been asked to compose for many royal occasions, the most recent being "Make a Joyful Noise", an Anthem for the Coronation of King Charles III.

Lloyd Webber was knighted in 1992, created an honorary life peer in 1997, and made a Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter by King Charles III in 2024.

TREVOR NUNN

Trevor Nunn was Artistic Director of the RSC for eighteen years and his work there included a great number of Shakespeare plays, alongside Restoration Comedy and new writing. With his colleague, John Caird, he co-directed *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Les Miserables*. He has also directed *Starlight Express, Aspects of Love* and *Sunset Boulevard* for Andrew Lloyd Webber and several operas for Glyndebourne and the Royal Opera House. He spent several years as Director of the Royal National Theatre, and has directed many television productions and three films.

Trevor Nunn was intrigued by the premise of **CATS** but felt that some sort of narrative was vital to making the piece work. When Valerie Eliot sent the fragment of Eliot's poem *Grizabella*, *the Glamour Cat* to Andrew Lloyd Webber, Trevor Nunn felt it was the key to the whole piece and could be used to form a story that the other poems and dance would fit in to. He worked alongside Andrew Lloyd Webber to create the musical and even contributed lyrics in the structure of the song 'Memory'.

CATS was difficult to cast. At the beginning, there was no script and few of the cat characters had names. Trevor Nunn knew Judi Dench from his work with the RSC and she expressed an interest – asking if there was a sleepy old cat that she could play. She was cast as both the Old Gumbie Cat and Grizabella, and gradually the rest of the cast came together, including Paul Nicholas as the Rum Tum Tugger. Initially, rehearsals were spent working on the dancing, improvisation and character development. Several days into rehearsals, after a lunch time spent in the pub, Trevor Nunn was able to come up with sixteen cat names (all from the poems) and allocate them to the different performers based on the improvisation work they had done, and so enabled each cat to have a character and to begin to tell their individual story.

GILLIAN LYNNE

Gillian Lynne has been involved in over fifty West End and Broadway shows as either director or choreographer, as well as working extensively in film and television. She was instrumental in the development of jazz dance in Great Britain and is recognised world-wide for her groundbreaking choreographic style.

Gillian Lynne was asked to go and see Andrew Lloyd Webber regarding a new project based on *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. She had never read the poems, so quickly bought a copy to read on the train on her way to the meeting. He played her some of the music he had composed, and she was instantly very excited by it and became involved in the creative process. She worked with a small team (dance assistant, dance captain and one boy and one girl dancer) and put together ideas for movement and choreography for three quarters of the show, which was then presented to Andrew Lloyd Webber and Trevor Nunn. She observed her own cats in developing the dances, often creating completely new steps and movements, and helped Andrew Lloyd Webber develop some of the music, especially for the Jellicle Ball, as he had never written music purely for dance before. Once rehearsals began, she worked with the cast, alongside Trevor Nunn, developing the piece and making sure all the dancers were

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of the same standard and were fit and flexible enough to cope with a show that demanded two and a half hours of exhausting dancing. There were only five weeks available for rehearsal and when they began there were still constant changes to the music and some incomplete songs. Many characters were developed through the way that they moved, with constant reference back to the poems.

The theatre and the design itself threw new challenges at Gillian Lynne as there were no wings or sides of the stage where the dancers could easily go on or off and regroup for different numbers. This was especially difficult in the Jellicle Ball, which is nearly fifteen minutes long. The choreography had to be tailored to work within the design, so one group of cats would dance to take the focus of the audience off another group of cats while they rested or regrouped on another part of the stage.

As rehearsals progressed, the show began to come together more. It was a challenging time for everyone – a show like this had never been seen before and there was great scepticism about whether it would work, to the extent that the venue, the New London Theatre, had to be persuaded not to pull out at the last moment. Then disaster struck when Judi Dench snapped her Achilles tendon during rehearsals and had to go into hospital. An anxious wait to see if she would recover in time ensued, but when she returned to rehearsals, she fell off the stage and injured herself again and it was obvious she would have to be replaced. Elaine Paige, who had starred in *Evita*, agreed to save the day and, with minimal rehearsal, was ready for the first preview, even though the song she has become famous for – 'Memory' – wasn't. The show continued to be changed and developed throughout the previews but was receiving a favourable response from the audiences. On opening night, **CATS** was well received by the critics and soon queues began to form at the box office. Broadway producers expressed an interest, and **CATS** went on to become a worldwide phenomenon, changing opinions and ideas about musical theatre along the way.

2024-2025 International Tour Company. Photo by: Xiadong

CATS