

Cats



By Andrew Lloyd Webber. WAAPA Third Year Musical Theatre. Directed by Crispin Taylor. Geoff Gibbs Theatre, WAAPA, Edith Cowan University, Mt Lawley, WA. Sep 8 – Sep 14, 2023

Love it or hate it, *Cats* is a modern classic in the world of musical theatre. The first time that WAAPA is presenting this divisive musical, this production is the final show for WAAPA's Third Year Musical Theatre and features the work of WAAPA Production and Design Students.



This is not the traditional *Cats*, with no junkyard and not a whisker or tail to be seen. Elouise Greenwell's set design evokes a bare stage in an old theatre, and the innovative costumes (also designed by Elouise Greenwell) are (at least initially) dance inspired. With a touch of cabaret feel in this show, one might be forgiven for thinking that they had accidentally wandered into a production of *Chicago*.



This has always been a strong dance cohort and *Cats*, superbly choreographed by Jayne Smeulders, gives us some of the strongest and most beautifully executed dance numbers that we have seen in WAAPA's Musical Theatre. The vocals are also superb, with strong solo turns and outstanding harmonies, under the guidance of Musical Director Craig Dalton. The show is accompanied by an excellent live orchestra made up mostly of WAAPA students.



Mathew Manning leads the band of cats as Munkustrap; resembling a ringmaster or master of ceremonies in his top hat, he anchors the production well. Most of the other characters step in and out of the ensemble between playing their characters, the possible exception being Genevieve Goldman as Grizabella, delivering a haunting and vocally stunning performance in showstopper song *Memory*.



Lovely teamwork from Curtis Kossart and Emily Lambert as Mungojerrie and Rumpleteaser, giving a very energetic pas de deux in cartoon criminal costumes – amazing singing, whilst dancing energetically. Declan Allen's Mr Mistoffelees also showed great dance and acrobatic skills – in a performance that clearly captured the audience's attention.



Bustopher Jones (literally in white spats) was gorgeously portrayed by Mitchell France, while Jennyanydots was sweetly portrayed by Eilidh Sinnamon. Marcus Frost led the ensemble as Skimbleshanks the Railway Cat, while Patrick Hercamp's rockstar vibe was great for Macavity – overpowering kittens with his sex appeal. No weak links in this highly talented ensemble.



Lighting designer Amber Lorenzi realistically captured the overnight setting of this musical, and created some stunning effects, although the lower than usual light made it difficult to discern facial expression for those sitting in the rear of the theatre.



The general public's final look at this cohort leaves us feeling very positive about the future of these performers, designers, and creatives. A magnificent departing gift for us.

Kimberley Shaw

Photographer: Stephen Heath

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