



CATS

“THE JELLICLE BALL”

Cats: The Jellicle Ball is set in the Ballroom scene in Harlem in the present day. It is a fictionalized imagining of one of the biggest balls of the year, with a grand prize that cements one’s place as an Icon in the Ball scene. Our production tells the story of this ball through the music and structure of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Cats*, one of the most successful musicals in the history of Broadway (to learn more about *Cats*, see page 7 of this booklet).

Ballroom refers not to waltzes or tangos, but to a queer- and trans - focused scene centered on and created by primarily Black and Latinx individuals. Its origins can be traced to 1920s New York City, when Black drag queens grew sick of discrimination in white-run drag balls and began building a space for themselves. Originally called pageants, these underground spaces grew and evolved into rooms where queer communities of color could gather and celebrate their unique culture. And by the 1960s and ‘70s, Ballroom was largely taking the form that it still exists in today.

A ball is an *event*, full of tradition and ritual and generally taking place late at night into the wee hours of the morning. It features a series of competitions known as categories, where participants **WALK** (compete) on the runway before a panel of judges who hold **Legendary and Iconic** titles within the community. The key elements of a ball include:

JUDGES

Generally a panel of well-respected members of the Ball scene. Competitors perform for the audience, judges, and fellow community members to receive their **TENS** (perfect scores), avoid getting **CHOPPED** (cut from the category), and outperform the competition. The goal: snatch the grand prize (the first place title and trophy holder).

HOUSES

Most regular Ballroom participants belong to a house, led by a **HOUSE MOTHER OR FATHER**, which is a sort of family that supports and guides one another both in balls and in everyday life. For many members of Ballroom, house families or chosen family have served as necessary support systems when their birth parents/family members became distant. Some of the fictional houses at tonight's Jellicle Ball include the house of Dots (led by house mother Jennyanydots), the house of Macavity, and the house of Glamour. Those with no house affiliation are referred to as **007s**.

THE LSS (LEGENDS, STATEMENTS, AND STARS)

The start of the ball. The **COMMENTATOR** (master of ceremonies) walks the runway, scanning the room and pointing out prominent members of the Ballroom scene. The LSS is an honoring of those who hold status in the community, due to their performances on the runway and/or contributions they've made to the community.

CATEGORIES

The bulk of a ball consists of a series of individual competitions, known as categories, which participants can enter and walk. Some are **Open To All (OTA)** while many have requirements for entry. It is also typical that a given category might be limited to participants of a specific gender. Categories vary from one ball to another and are often themed to the time of year or other cultural touchstones. More information on tonight's categories can be found in the pages to follow.

VOGUE

A dance style that originated in Ballroom in the '60s and '70s, based around the poses and shapes that filled the pages of high fashion magazines (like *Vogue*) and runways. Vogue is still part of the heart of the Ballroom scene. Not all categories involve voguing, but many do.

BATTLES

After a competitor receives their tens they then compete (battle it out) for the grand prize, often involving cash and/or a trophy. A battle consists of two or more participants walking simultaneously, from which the judges then choose a single winner.

LEGENDS & ICONS

When a Ballroom participant has performed exceptionally well in a given category or categories over many years, they are deemed Legendary. Icons are those who have surpassed even legendary status, having spent multiple decades in the scene while making an undeniable impact in the culture of their category or in the community. Even beyond Icon lie Pioneer, Blueprint, and Hall of Famer - in effect, lifetime achievement awards for those with an undeniable resume.

OTHER LANGUAGE

Many terms which have now entered the modern lexicon originated in Ballroom. Participants **BRING IT**, presenting their best selves, **SELLING** their category (or convincing the judges that they should win) as they walk. The best are those who **SERVE** or **WORK**. They might even **SNATCH** the category, if they win it convincingly. But if they don't perform well? They can expect those around them to throw **SHADE**, or criticism.

THE CATEGORY IS...

CATEGORIES AT TONIGHT'S JELLICLE BALL

OTA VIRGIN VOGUE

(Song: The Old Gumbie Cat)

A 'virgin' refers to someone who has hardly, if ever, walked the category before. So this is a voguing category for those new to the competition. Some competitors are 007s while others already have house affiliations.

REALNESS

(Song: The Rum Tum Tugger)

Walking 'realness' is to convincingly portray a particular sort of straight, cisgender person. It is rooted in the safety of one's ability to transform into someone who can exist comfortably in a cis-heteronormative space. Tonight's category includes participants walking 'Pretty Boy realness,' 'Schoolboy realness,' 'Everyday realness,' 'Thug Realness,' and 'Executive realness.'

BODY

(Song: Bustopher Jones)

Body isn't only about having a particular body type - it's about how you sell the body you have confidently. Tonight's category includes participants walking 'Muscular body,' 'Female figure body,' 'Model body' (pronounced 'mo-delle body'), and 'Luscious body.'

TAG TEAM VOGUE FEM

(Song: Mungojerrie & Rumpleteazer)

Tag Team refers to a category where contestants compete in pairs. Vogue Fem, meanwhile, is currently the most popular subcategory of vogue performance - stemming from poses and shapes but inspired by the divine femininity and the feeling of a Fem Queen (or a trans woman of ballroom experience).

UP IN PUMPS

(Part one of the montage in the song: The Jellicle Ball)

While wearing only the highest of high heeled shoes, participants are challenged to nevertheless strut the runway in a fluid, elegant fashion, striking perfect confident poses along the way.

ARMS CONTROL

(Part two of the montage in the song: The Jellicle Ball)

A very focused category that incorporates vogue movements centered only on the participant's arms. Arms Control is often performed wearing specific gloves and/or sleeves to draw attention solely to that part of the body, as they strive for creative, fluid movements.

HANDS PERFORMANCE

(Part three of the montage in the song: The Jellicle Ball)

Similar to Arms Control but with the focus now shifted to solely the performer's hands.

SHAKE THAT ASS

(Part four of the montage in the song: The Jellicle Ball)

All the twerking you can imagine.

FOOT, EYE & BAG

(Part five of the montage in the song: The Jellicle Ball)

A visually dynamic category that challenges participants to walk in dramatic shoes and eyewear while seamlessly making their bag a focal point of their performance.

HAIR AFFAIR

(Part six of the montage in the song: The Jellicle Ball)

Participants style and sculpt dramatic hairstyles, drawn from all sorts of cultural influences, and are judged on their presentation along with the styling itself.

BIZARRE

(Part seven of the montage in the song: The Jellicle Ball)

The weirdest, wildest, and most creative outfits of the night!

OLD WAY VS. NEW WAY

(Song: Skimblehanks: The Railway Cat)

A vogue category that pits two different styles of vogueing against one another. 'Old Way' harkens back to the earlier days of vogue, a style that emphasizes precision, hard angles, and poses often seen in Vogue or other high fashion catalogues. 'New Way' developed later, and is characterized by more fluid, graceful movements and increased flexibility.

LABELS

(Song: Macavity: The Mystery Cat)

A fashion category that's all about dressing in the most exclusive designer clothing. Be careful, though - if you leave the tags on the clothes you'll catch some serious shade.

RUNWAY

(Song: Mr. Mistoffelees)

A show-stopper category, where contestants pull out all the stops and compete in a truly classic runway style. Runway is further divided into All-American Runway (an often more masculine and sharp classic runway style) and European Runway (a walk with more sass, lines, and feminine elegance).

We also see a performer tonight whose category is **FACE** (having beautifully proportioned facial features and selling them effectively to the judges).

THE ORIGINAL CATS

ON BROADWAY
1982-2000

The origin of *Cats* lay more than forty years before the musical's debut, in a book of poems by T. S. Eliot called *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. It was a collection of fifteen poems he had written about cats to entertain his godchildren. The book published in 1939.

In the late 1970s, already-successful composer Andrew Lloyd Webber encountered the book for the first time. He soon decided to adapt the poems into a musical, and was granted permission by Eliot's widow - who also gifted him an unpublished poem from the same collection, titled *Grizabella: the Glamour Cat*.

When *Cats* opened on London's West End in 1981 (and followed with its Broadway debut at the Winter Garden Theatre in 1982), it was unlike anything the musical theatre world had seen. The performers were fully dressed as cats, donning full body suits with iconic ears, tails, and leg warmers, set in a junkyard. And while the show did include a plot, it was largely centered on the parade of characters that came from Eliot's poems.

Initial reviews of the show were mostly positive, though tinged with some uncertainty about the viability of the format. Nevertheless the show garnered eleven Tony® nominations and won seven awards, including Best Musical, Best Original Score, Best Costume Design, and Best Performance for a Featured Actress in a Musical for Betty Buckley, who played Grizabella. *Cats* would go on to become the first musical

in Broadway history to surpass 7,000 performances. It closed in September of 2000, after a nearly eighteen-year run.

The show has of course continued to have life beyond Broadway, spawning many regional productions, a 1998 film recorded on the set of the stage production, a 2016 Broadway revival, and a 2019 movie with a star-studded cast.

Cats: "The Jellicle Ball" is the first production to significantly reinvent the concept of the original show. Its performers portray not literal cats, but a group of people for whom the word 'cat' is a metaphor. Some of the show's original musical arrangements remain, while others have changed. And the scene has moved from a junkyard to a lavish New York City ball. Longtime fans of *Cats* will also notice some significant departures from its plot. But the songs themselves, and we think the spirit of the original production, remain unchanged.