

Seattle University

ScholarWorks @ SeattleU

---

The Spectator Online

Newspapers

---

5-30-2020

## Somewhat Informed: Zodrow's Performing Arts Column; I Just Watched "Cats" and "Carrie: The Musical"

Andru Zodrow  
*Seattle University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online>

---

### Recommended Citation

Zodrow, Andru, "Somewhat Informed: Zodrow's Performing Arts Column; I Just Watched "Cats" and "Carrie: The Musical"" (2020). *The Spectator Online*. 80.  
<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/80>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Newspapers at ScholarWorks @ SeattleU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Spectator Online by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ SeattleU.



# Somewhat Informed: Zodrow's Performing Arts Column; I just watched "Cats" and "Carrie: The Musical."

Andru Zodrow, News Editor

I think I may have had some sort of musical mental break this weekend, because I decided to watch two musicals that are generally regarded as terrible. However, I still think they are worth watching. Both "Cats: The Musical" and "Carrie: The Musical" are cult classics. They have loyal fandoms with passionate opinions about the material. It's worth exploring why.

First, let's talk about "Cats." Andrew Lloyd Webber, the playwright behind "Phantom of the Opera" and "Jesus Christ Super Star," brought "Cats" to London's West End in 1981. It was a huge hit. To this day, the show holds the record as one of the longest-running musicals on Broadway and the West End.

When it opened, in both New York and London, it exploded in popularity. It was the early 80's, Reagan was cracking down on labor unions and whatever the words 'big government' are supposed to mean, and it was a good time to catch the latest Broadway hit before heading home and catching the latest episode of "Cheers."

It is difficult to explain why "Cats" was so widely appreciated. It is based on a collection of T.S. Elliot's poems about cats, and the play consists of a group of alley cats singing Elliot's poetry as the audience gawks in amazement at the cast of people in anthropomorphic cat costumes making oddly sexual meowing noises while slinking around the stage.

Webber's "The Show Must Go On" initiative has been putting productions of his online for free streaming in the midst of the pandemic to ensure that theater fans can still see shows. "Cats" was this week's offering. The version made available online was a recording of a 1998 production starring several members from the original cast. Some small things were cut and some things were added to allow the musical to be more easily captured on video, but it is mostly a faithful stage production of "Cats" that can be watched at home.

There is also a horrifying 2019 film adaptation of "Cats" which has built up its own cult following. The 2019 movie is not a stage production but rather a living nightmare of CGI cats singing while James Corden's cat character bumbles around.

However, there is something wonderful about "Cats." To be clear—it isn't good. The fact that it was so popular in the 1980s is utterly perplexing. But it is worth revisiting because of its sheer audacity. Andrew Lloyd Webber was already a titan of theater by 1980. He could have written and produced anything; and he made "Cats." Directors did not want to touch the project, and Webber took huge financial risks to get the show off the ground. Somehow, Webber's bet paid off, and he crafted one of the most successful musicals of all time.



Photo Courtesy of Cats The Musical.

The week did not end with “Cats.” No, I went further down the weird musicals rabbit hole, and watched the 1988 mega-flop and cult-classic “Carrie: The Musical.”

Yes, Stephen King’s horror novel about an abused highschooler harnessing the forbidden powers she begins to achieve as she reaches womanhood, was adapted into a musical that went to Broadway.

Originally developed with the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford upon Avon and opening in February of 1988 (why the show was developed in such a prestigious setting, I have no idea,) the show went to Broadway in March of that same year. The show opened on March 12, and closed on March 15 after five performances. The New York Times proclaimed that the musical “expires with fireworks like the Hindenberg.” The show’s development to death cycle was spectacularly short, and it was unceremoniously abandoned by its investors.

However, “Carrie: The Musical” has a loyal fan base. It was produced in New York in 2012, and there was a superb Seattle production in 2013 that is worth finding online. The reason the show resonates so widely is because it is a testament to the theatrical format. “Carrie” is not comfortable as a musical. The writers did not go the “Sweeney Todd” route and create a Sondheim-style horror romp, which could have been a hit. Rather, they retrofitted an aggressively bland musical onto the plot of “Carrie,” as the titular character sings Cinderella-style ballads about her woes to the audience. It works.

This is a joy to watch, because the songs are still catchy. Regardless of how terrible of an idea “Carrie: The Musical” was, there is an undeniable charm that runs through the DNA of the script. The fact that time and talent was dedicated to making a Stephen King horror novel a musical is preposterous, and demands attention.

There are some musicals that make an indelible impact on theater culture because they create something so strange and unique that audiences cannot help but admire it. In the cases of both “Cats” and “Carrie,” the shamelessness of their creators—and the very fact that they exist, is wonderful.