

# NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

## *What's a Jellicle Cat?*

I think my best friend Rachel would agree with the following details from our first year at college during exam time. We'd set up camp in the basement of our dorm to study for our finals. We took over the room as we filled it with blowpop suckers, pillows and textbooks, a hotpot for cooking Ramen noodles, and, most importantly, a cd player with Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* ready to play. Whenever our study stress levels moved above the boiling point, we'd turn on the cd player and wait for the opening dance number to come on. And with the first beat of the music, we'd perk up like we were cats ourselves (for the next four minutes at least) as we'd dance our hearts out, skipping around the room, climbing on furniture, stepping on notebooks, and all the while laughing until our sides ached. I'm sure everyone outside that room who walked by and glanced in thought we were insane. And maybe we were.

Back then, I had actually not seen *Cats*. Rachel grew up in New York City and her family visited many musicals. Our second year in college, she brought me and my brother Joel to New York City, and *Cats* became the first Broadway musical I ever saw. I knew when I sat in that theater over fifteen years ago that one day I would be part of this show; I just never thought I'd actually be directing it.

I've had a lot of people ask me, "So what is *Cats* about?" I'd like to answer, "It's about Rach and I dancing around our study room and climbing up the walls during exams," but they wouldn't get that—wouldn't get that I mean it's about excitement and life, about celebrating and sharing, about friends and fun. So I simply say, "It's about cats." Which is, after all, what they're hoping I'll say so that they can begin telling me their own cat story. And then, with enough animated stage presence that I'd like to cast them in my show, they tell me how Spots can open the cupboard door when he wants to be fed, or how Muppy meows the word "cweeem" when she's hungry, or how Cody cuddles better than anyone in the world. They tell me about Zeke and Rocky, Earnie and Riley, about their Raskalnikof and Kitser. Why? Because they are part of our family. Because they are our partners and our pals. Because they are our best friends, and sometimes our only friend.

For T.S. Eliot, the poet who wrote *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, a book of whimsical poems upon which Andrew Lloyd Webber crafted the musical, *Cats* is a story about the yearly meeting of the Jellicle tribe—the group of typical felines who are peaceful and calm during the day, but inquisitive and lively at night. All cats gather at this meeting and celebrate their individuality, their names, and their roles in life, and, in a way, audition to be the one special cat chosen by the spiritual leader Old Deuteronomy to be sent on for redemption to the Heavyside Layer. *Cats* is story of joy and sorrow, mystery and romance, rejection and redemption. And for Eliot and Webber, the Jellicles themselves are individuals with unique personalities, individual conflicts, and special stories—just like your Zelda and Lizzy. But more importantly, just like you.

*You've learned enough to take the view, that cats are very much like you.*

