

Sunshine Fest's CATS simply stunning

Bravo! Bravo!

Congratulations to the cast and crew and everyone involved in making the Sunshine Festival's production of Andrew Lloyd-Webber's mega musical CATS an unforgettable experience.

This show has it all – big time stars, fresh new faces, international experience and home-town talent – all working together to make this show the must-see theatre production of the season.

Obviously, the show was a potential winner right from the start, as CATS was a phenomenal success, running 18 years and achieving cult-like status after opening on Broadway in 1982.

But when a show is so well known, the music so familiar and people's recollections of the New York and Toronto productions so vivid, that leaves high expectations for Orillia to live up to.

There's been so much talk about this groundbreaking production already, and on opening night there was such so much buzz in the Orillia Opera House the air was practically electric. By intermission, the excitement had reached a feverish pitch and by the show's end, everyone was saying the same thing: 'I'm coming back'.

The dancing and singing in this production are unrivaled by anything else you've ever seen in Orillia. Director Dave Campbell,



Eye on the arts

Jennifer Jaensch

choreographers Kiri-Lyn Muir and Gino Berti, along with musical director Lona Davis, set designer Tim Webb and lighting director Maurice Cloutier all played a starring role in what surely will become a new era of musical theatre in Orillia.

And such is the magic of a mega musical – a big, bold, colourful, fabulous whirling kaleidoscope of sight and sound, that takes you on a musical ride unlike any other kind of production.

Based on T.S. Eliott's poems from 'Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats', Webber has immortalized these fantastical felines: Rum Tum Tugger and Jennyanydots, Skimbleshanks the Railway cat, and Macavity. There's the magical Mr. Mistoffelees and the old theatre cat, Gus.

Don't forget the youngsters Mungojerry, Rumpleteazer and little Sillabub – the beautiful, innocent kitten that reminds poor old Grizabella just how distant her memories



Director Dave Campbell has crafted a stellar production of CATS in Orillia.

have become.

All of these delightful Jellicle cats are gathered together in their junkyard haven for the annual Jellicle Ball, when Old Deuteronomy will choose one lucky cat to be reborn to a new Jellicle life.

Thin as the plot may be, the magic of cats isn't found in the storyline so much as it is the fantasy created. Each cat has their moment of glory in one incredible number of song, dance and theatrical genius after the next.

And it's on these strengths that this small-house production excels – especially when you consider the small-scale budget in comparison to the Toronto and Broadway produc-

tions.

Productions that many of these same stars were a part of over the years. Martin Samuel is Rum Tum Tugger – a role he performed with the European Tour of CATS. He's since been in Aida on Broadway and in Starlight Express in Germany, and toured with both the Canadian and U.S. productions of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat.

Robert Yeretch launched his career with an audition for the Toronto production of CATS, and is now playing the role of Skimbleshanks after years on the stage at the Stratford Festival. Kelly Robertson is incredible singing the Italian opera as Growltiger, thanks to years of vocal training and competitions that include extensive opera credits, as well as musical theatre roles such as Gus/Growltiger and Old Deuteronomy in the German company of CATS.

Christina Gordon steps back into Jenny and Jelly's shoes after years spent working in Japan and in seven of the 10 Canadian provinces, as well as spending three seasons at Stratford, appearing in such classics as The Music Man, Fiddler on the Roof and Alice Through The Looking Glass.

Sherri McFarlane has spent the past 20 years in theatres across the country, including seven seasons at The Shaw Festival and three years in the role of Jennyanydots and Demeter in the first Canadian production of CATS.

CATS has it all, an incredible score, awesome choreography, amazing dancing and singing from a fabulous cast, in great costumes on an inspired set with a top-notch technical crew, and an artistic dream team.

Make no mistake, you do not want to miss this production. CATS continues in the Orillia Opera House until July 31. Tickets are \$30 and are available by calling the Sunshine Festival Box Office at 325-2074, or the opera house, at 326-8011.