

State and Local

'Cats' performance mesmerizes, transforms theater with imagery

By Richard Tijerina
Senior Staff Writer

Rudder Auditorium was transformed Tuesday night into a vast junkyard, cluttered with litter against the backdrop of a full moon in a lonely sky, as the MSC Opera and Performing Arts Society presented "Cats," the musical inspired by T.S. Eliot's "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats."

The stage was filled with small odds and ends to enhance the image of being in a junkyard, including such everyday things as umbrellas, ovens, tennis racquets, tires, books, lampshades and an old car.

Just as the audience became acquainted with that setting, small eyes appear from behind the junk, preceding an explosion of sights and sounds as the orchestra blared to a dazzling lightshow of theatrical fireworks.

Entering from behind the junk, the cast of cats came on stage to start the show.

The second scene of the show explained the plot of the musical. Once a year, all of the jellicle cats gather in one place at the jellicle ball, where the leader of them all, an ancient cat named Old Deuteronomy, names the cat who is to be "reborn" and come back in a new jellicle form. Unfortunately, none of the cats know who is to be chosen, thus bringing on a lengthy list of worthy candidates.

Among these candidates, the Rum Tum Tugger, Grizabella the Glamour Cat and Mr. Mistoffelees stand out. The Rum Tum Tugger, portrayed by Bradford Minkoff, is magnificent as the black alley cat with the tough demeanor. A rough, tough feline with a silver-spiked belt around his waist, the Rum Tum Tugger sings of his freestyle way of life, and tells how no one can change his rumbly and tumbling ways.

Grizabella the Glamour Cat is glamorous to no one but herself, a fact that all the other cats recognize and despise. She is run off by the other cats before she gets to say her piece.

Flutes from the distance signal the coming of Old Deuteronomy. He is described as a great leader who has been around since before the reign of Queen Victoria. The jellicle ball begins with the cast of cats rejoicing and recounting past tales.

The first act ends in sadness as Grizabella returns to join the ball, but is left alone as everyone abandons the junkyard at her presence. Only Old Deuteronomy remains to listen to her lament her present situation, and she goes into her beautiful rendition of the classic song, "Memory," singing how wonderful it would be to be beautiful again.

The second act introduced even more characters to the company of kitties, including the treacherous Macavity, described as a "criminal extraordinaire, who, when you return to the scene of the crime, is not there."

Upon Rum Tum Tugger's suggestion, the cats turn to a clever cat named Mr. Mistoffelees, a renowned magician who, as the legend goes, can make seven cats appear out of an ordinary hat. Although he doesn't produce seven cats, he does produce a very important one — Old Deuteronomy.

Upon his return, the festivities begin again, as all the cats are abuzz over who he will pick to be reborn into another life. They are all surprised as he picks none other than Grizabella, who sings "Memory" again as she is being taken to her destination of rebirth.

Overall, the show was wonderful. What made it so good were the little things the cast members did to create the image that they were cats. They'd stretch, arch their backs, yawn and rub each other with their bodies. Also, the cats would often interact with the audience.

All of this playful interaction with the crowd only enhanced the feeling that the audience was viewing a junkyard full of cats, not actors.



Photo by Mike C. Mulvey

Actors perform the "Grizabella, the Glamour Cat" act of the musical "Cats," which was performed Tuesday night in Rudder Auditorium. The show was sponsored by OPAS.

Officials predict turbulence after Prince resigns

DALLAS (AP) — In a city split by the turmoil over its police department, the man in the middle stepped out Tuesday, leaving behind even more turbulence on the horizon.

Police Chief Billy Prince announced his retirement at age 45. "I feel kind of run over here," Prince said. "It's come to the point when it's time to let someone else get in the middle, and that's what I've decided to do."

What's left behind for Dallas, police and city leaders predict, is even more tension — tension that will mark the search for a new chief, the continuing struggle over a citizens' review board and probably even the 1989 race for mayor.

Within minutes of Prince's announcement, black City Council members who have been sharp critics of the department called for hiring a black police chief, and insisted the new chief be an outsider.

Supporters of Prince, including one law-and-order city councilman already talking about running for mayor, criticized Mayor Annette Strauss and called the retiring chief a "scapegoat" who was "hounded out of office."

The mayor denied Prince was forced out.

And the head of the Dallas Police Association, which had been at war with Prince last year and is currently doing battle with the City Council, said she, too, saw more trouble on the horizon, including uncertainty on patrol and battles over selection of a new chief.

"I'd like to talk to my membership about what they want — not that anybody will ask us," said Monica Smith, president of the officers' organization.

The beat goes on in Dallas' struggle with police and politics.

When Prince was plucked from the department ranks for the chief's job six years ago, he was hailed as a community relations expert. When he announced his retirement, City Manager Richard Knight said he would look for a chief with community relations expertise.

"No single police chief can overcome all of the scars and wounds of the past," Prince offered. "It's going to take years and decades before things get to the point where we want."

On Prince's watch, the department has been scrutinized and criticized for a record number of police shootings of citizens, mostly black and Hispanic.

In 1986, a 70-year-old black woman was shot to death by an officer responding to a burglary call at her home. After Prince fired the officer, the Dallas Police Association passed a "no confidence" vote on the chief.

Prince had been on rocky terms with the City Council since last year when he lobbied against reforms of his department, including broader powers of a citizens' police review board.

In January, following the downtown slaying of Officer John Chase, the chief said members of the council, and the mayor, shared some blame for creating an atmosphere of hostility toward police.

The shooting and the feud produced a backlash of support for the police in Dallas, and the DPA took to polling places on Super Tuesday and collected 20,000 signatures to usurp the City Council and force a referendum on the review board.

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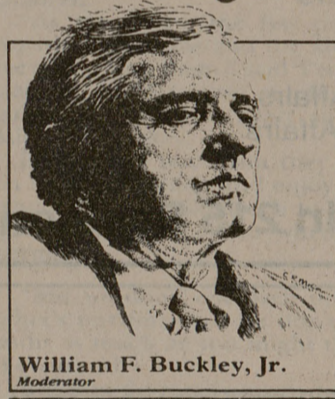
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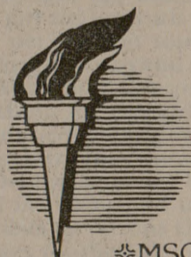


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