

Another life for 'Cats'

at White Plains Performing Arts Center

By DEBRA BANERJEE

If you somehow missed "Cats" during its 18-year run on Broadway, now's your chance to see the musical at the White Plains Performing Arts Center in the City Center. The Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, which is based on T.S. Eliot's poems in "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats," will be on stage through Dec. 30.

Theater Review

"Cats," told entirely through music and dance, is a whimsical tale. The tribe of junkyard Jellicle cats attends the Jellicle Ball every year at which their leader, Old Deuteronomy, chooses one cat to go to "Heaviside Layer" to be reborn. If one is not familiar with the story or the poems, a quick bit of research will go a long way to enhancing the theater experience. But even going in without a clue, the musical's fanciful aesthetic and engaging cat characters draw the theatergoer in.

Part of the magic of "Cats" is the extravagantly imaginative feline cos-

tumes and makeup. The choreography of graceful acrobatics and joint-defying leaps and pounces recalls catlike movements.

Jeremy Quinn, WPPAC's producing artistic director, and director of "Cats," makes good use of the theater's aisles, where the cast of cats slink and slither, engage with the audience and frolic up to the stage. Co-director and choreographer is Greg Baccarini.

The cats include the feisty tom Rum Tum Tugger, played with scrappy swagger by Matthew J. Taylor, who sang beautifully, as did Munkustrap, played by David Raimo.

Michael Clement as Mr. Mistoffelees, a black cat with a mime's white face, showed his dancer's talent in "Magical Mr. Mistoffelees."

Tiger cats Mungojerrie and Rumpleteazer, played by Matthew Tiberi and Lauren Kay, have a wacky duet which they perform with style. (And here I thought Mungo Jerry was a 1970s rock band!)

John Anthony Lopez plays cat leader Old Deuteronomy with gravitas.

Devon Yates plays the old glamour cat Grizabella, the faded diva, making "Memories," the most famous song to come out of the musical, her own. Yates notes in her program entry that she is following in the paw prints of her mother, who also played Grizabella on stage.

The junkyard set is perfectly realized by Joseph Egan and makes use of every inch of stage space. Lighting by Andrew Gmoser, complete with stars and twinkly lights and an orange Jellicle moon, evokes a dreamlike state.

"Cats" at WPPAC is a fine production and is presented through an exclusive arrangement with R & H Theatricals and the Really Useful Theatre Co. Ltd., Webber and Cameron Mackintosh's production company.

To order tickets by phone, call (877) 548-3237 or see www.wppac.com.

