Puss in Boots

A Play With Music
In the English Pantomime Tradition

Book and Lyrics by Greg Palmer
Music by Cliff Lenz

ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY
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STORY OF THE PLAY

A musical version of Charles Perrault's story, done in the style of the English Pantomime, and featuring the various pantomime traditions including a "Pantomime Dame" (played by a male), "Principal Boy" (played by a girl), "Principal Girl," fairies who talk in rhyme, and significant audience interaction. This script, with six delightful songs, was commissioned by Seattle Children's Theatre and later televised. A wonderfully antic version of the popular story with enough action for any member of the family. Recipient of the "Ohio State Award Best Children's Program." Perfect for audiences of all ages. About 90 minutes.

"The show has everything. Its script is funny/arch/clever; it's music is a delight. The show keeps its audience happily involved for every one of its 90 minutes. Palmer's adaptation is almost nonstop hilarious. The show should be preserved so that posterity will know that we prized playfulness even as we collectively built the means of forever stopping play and plays." - Wayne Johnson, Seattle Times.

"A wacky, wonderful Puss in Boots"
- Joe Adcock, Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

"It's fun and delightful family entertainment"
- Dorothy Perlman, Seattle's Child.

"New Puss in Boots sparkles"
- Freddie Brinster, Journal American.

Original Production

Puss In Boots was commissioned by and originally presented at the Seattle Children's Theatre. Premiere performance November 9, 1985, with the following cast under the direction of R. Hamilton Wright:

Swifty Front/Grace/Ludovic: Robert A. Barnet
Swifty Back/The Talking Animal Fairy/Iggy: Paul Anthony Weber
Narrator: Geoffrey Alm
Son #1/The Queen: John Pribyl
Son #2/Carmelita/Princess Desiree: Cecilie D. Keenan
The Miller's Son: Julia Smith
Puss in Boots: Rob Burgess

CAST OF CHARACTERS
Flexible cast, approx. 10 m, 4 f (or 7 actors with doubling)

SWIFTY THE WONDER HORSE: Played by two actors,

Horse Front and Horse Back.

THE NARRATOR

MILLER'S SON #1: A bully.

MILLER'S SON #2: A crybaby.

MILLER'S SON (MS): *(Principal Boy) Youngest and nicest,*

later the Marquis of Carabas.

PUSS IN BOOTS

TALKING ANIMAL FAIRY (TAF), LATER KING NORMAN

GRACE: A Fairy Assistant.

CARMELITA: A Fairy Assistant.

LUDOVIC: Palace guard.

THE QUEEN *(Pantomime Dame)*

PRINCESS DESIREE *(Principal Girl)*

IGGY GOGERTY: the 'orrible ogre *(Big-Head Character)*

Possible doubling:
Swifty Front/Grace/Ludovic
Swifty Back/The Talking Animal Fairy/Iggy
Son #1/The Queen
Son #2/Carmelita/Princess Desiree

Several settings, either suggested or elaborate.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT PRESENTATION

Puss in Boots was written in the style of English Pantomime, a theatrical tradition that is now more than 300 years old (and according to some, the only original theatrical innovation of the English-speaking stage). Panto is best known for its recurring features, some of which occur in Puss *in Boots*:

- People impersonating animals *(Puss, Swifty)*
- A pantomime dame, usually a randy old woman, always played by a man *(Queen)*
- A fairy or magical figure who talks in rhymed couplets *(Talking Animal Fairy)*
- Some kind of magical transformation that brings about the desired conclusion
- Big-head character, who literally has a very big head *(Iggy)*
- Awful puns, tongue twisters and extensive word play *("22 tiny tulle toe shoes")*
- A lead character (the principal boy) played by a woman in tights, also called a tights or pants character *(The Miller's Son)*
- Obviously bizarre staging, like the "Five Pantomime Peasants," which in the original production was a kind of rack the Narrator wore over his shoulders, so he was the peasant in the middle, with two semi-realistic life-size puppets attached to the rack on either side, which he -- and Puss -- could manipulate from behind so their mouths and heads animated
- Considerable audience involvement, including audience assistance with the plot, story and character decisions
- Most important, a basic fairy tale for the amusement of children, with more sophisticated humor throughout so their parents won't be bored to death—almost parallel plays going on at the same time, if you will.

PRESENTATION - Continued

For those familiar with panto and its presentation, it is worthwhile to emphasize that such shows work best when there is at least an attempt to make them believable for smaller children. For example, adults will theoretically find humor in the male/female cross-dressing, but children under a certain age should see the Queen as a real woman, not a man in drag (which is why, in true panto, the Dame never does "I'm really a man" jokes). And that at least for very young children, Puss is a cat, not a man in a cat suit. (Swifty is obviously two humans in a horse suit, but what child that can sit up for more than two minutes in a theater seat is going to believe that Swifty is a real horse?)

Also, audience involvement is crucial to good panto. The audience is as much a character herein as any other player, and all the players should show an easy familiarity with the audience. In true panto, performers, especially villains, are not above strolling out into the audience and working it for a considerable time. I once saw Ron Moody as Captain Hook work an audience of children for more than half an hour, snarling, waving his hook in their faces and handing out candy, while the rest of the company waited patiently on stage. I thought it would never end; the children in the audience hoped it would never end.

Finally, *PUSS* may be in the panto tradition, but no true panto fan would consider this work legitimate panto. For one thing, it's too short by an hour or so. And one of the reasons it's short is that the playwright suggests that to succeed, it has to be played very fast.

--Greg Palmer

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on a semi-bare stage; HOUSELIGHTS remain on. SWIFTY is heard in the lobby clip-clopping around. He enters and is led through the audience by an usher, working the crowd a bit—"Does anybody have any oats?" "I love your ponytail!" "That coat isn't horsehair, is it?" etc.)

MUSIC #1 - OPENING NUMBER

(Spoken over the music.)

HORSE FRONT:
   Welcome, my two-footed friends today!
   Puss in Boots is the name of our play!
   But first before the actors start coming out
   I'll tell you what this crazy play is all…
HORSE BACK:
   He'll tell you what this crazy play…
HORSE FRONT:
   I'll tell you what this crazy play…
HORSE BACK AND FRONT:
   This crazy play
   This crazy play
   We'll tell you what this crazy play is all about!

SEGUE TO MUSIC #2 - A LONG TIME AGO

HORSE FRONT: *(Sung.)*
   A LONG TIME AGO BUT NOT FAR AWAY
   IN A KINGDOM SMALL AND SLEEPY,
   A MILLER HAD THREE SONS OF WHICH
   THE *(Spoken.)* oldest two were crazy.
NARRATOR: *(Entering quickly, carrying a large book.)* Stop the music!

(MUSIC out.)

End of Freeview

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