



Seven Cat People on ‘Cats’

Critics eviscerated the movie musical, but how do people who love felines feel about the humans dressed up in computer-generated fur?

By *Ellen Gamerman*

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Cat lovers have some very specific questions about “Cats.”

If a human plays a cat in a movie, they ask, how much of the human’s body should show? Will “Cats” open up a much-needed conversation about the fate of strays? And how far is too far in body-shaming a fat creature, even if it is a cat?

Critics eviscerated the film (“Artistically, it’s a hairball,” wrote Wall Street Journal critic John Anderson) and the box office numbers this opening weekend were weak, too. But cat people have some of their own opinions about the new big-screen adaptation of the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical “Cats,” based on the poems of known cat man T. S. Eliot, which follows a ragtag gang of cats in garbage-strewn alleys who compete for a chance to be reborn.

To many of them, the movie already seems like a coup for the species—you don’t see Jennifer Hudson, Judi Dench, Taylor Swift and Idris Elba playing dogs—but even cat lovers who have watched the trailer are divided on whether they want to see the film in theaters.

Here, our edited interviews with cat people, who, along with musical lovers and meme-makers, are developing their own consensus.

Embrace the Magic

“There are some people—I’m going to call them purists—who are like, ‘Well, cats don’t really act like that. You can’t humanize cats. They act their own way.’ That’s always the



Michelle Fern and her cat Dennis. PHOTO: MARK WINTER

challenge in a movie like this. Anytime an actor has to portray an animal, it's a challenge: How do you know how to be? But that's also the magic of it."

—Michelle Fern of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., host of the *Cattitude* podcast and owner of Dennis.

We Are Not Amused

"This group of junkyard cats are competing over who gets to die to come back for a better life? That seems odd to me. I had a cat, he was literally Junkyard Johnny, from a junkyard in New Hampshire. It

makes me sad. They're all competing out there to live and eat and not get poisoned or killed or whatever, so I guess the idea that one of them has to actually die to come back and have a better life is a little disturbing to me."

—Liz Mugavero of South Norwalk, Conn., a mystery writer whose books include *"Murder, She Meowed."*

The Movie Your Cat Deserves

"They're showing each cat as a very strong individual character. Not being able to put cats in this one basket and say, 'They are all like this'—the ability to look at each individual cat and say, 'This one is snobby and strong and independent,' 'This one is more introspective and thoughtful,' and 'This one is a blowhard,' that's great. For the first time, anthropomorphizing cats actually works."

—Jackson Galaxy of Los Angeles, cat behavior and wellness expert, host of *Animal*



Liz Mugavero's cat, Junkyard Johnny. PHOTO: LIZ MUGAVERO

Planet's "My Cat From Hell" and owner of eight cats including Pishi.

Fat Cats Aren't Fair Game

"Why do humans make gags about being a fat cat? Most fat cats on the Internet are rescued and their humans already got them fat. Cats struggle a lot to lose their weight. Being restricted to three shrimps per week is not fun at all! These people should eat only obesity-management cat food to understand what we feel! Thus speaks Zarathustra the cat."

—Svetlana Petrova of St. Petersburg, Russia, via email. Her cat, Zarathustra, 14 years old, recently slimmed down to 20 pounds and appears regularly in Ms. Petrova's Instagram art @FatCatArt.



Jackson Galaxy and his cat Pishi. PHOTO: ANDREW MARTTILA

This Movie Could Change Lives

"I feel like if Nala were in the movie, she would have been the one who is chosen for the better life. That's exactly what happened to her. When we adopted Nala, she was sick and in the shelter, and she was sleeping on newspaper. We changed her life and she changed ours."



Svetlana Petrova and her cat Zarathustra. PHOTO: ALIONA KUZMINA/SOBAKA RU

—Shannon Ellis of Lake Elsinore, Calif. Her cat Nala has 4.3 million followers on Instagram.

Don't Treat a Real Cat Like a 'Cats' Cat.

"I have no interest in seeing the movie. Will it do more in terms of anthropomorphizing cats? Yes. But let me tell you, I've worn my share of cat ears, and we have to draw the line between what is really healthy for the animal's psyche and their well-being. I think we often do cross the line in good



Shannon Ellis, left, and partner Varisiri Methachittiphan with their cat Nala. PHOTO: MEG RAELEE PHOTOGRAPHY

fun.”



Layla Morgan Wilde and her cat Odin. PHOTO: LAYLA MORGAN WILDE

—*Layla Morgan Wilde of Pleasantville, N.Y., founder of the blog Cat Wisdom 101.*

Time to Shut Down the ‘Crazy Cat Lady’ Talk

“If you don’t like it, you don’t have to see it. I think it looks really neat. Very stylized. It’s a little dark and magical at times, and that’s kind of a cat’s domain. I think it’s going to be pretty big for cat people. We’re trying to challenge those stereotypes about cat people. Cat people are not crazy. Cats are very popular. I hear they’re

more popular than dogs. We’re just

crazy about cats, but we’re not crazy.”

—*Chase Holiday, of Los Angeles, a content creator for the website Furball Fables, and owner of Merlin Sage.*

Write to Ellen Gamerman at ellen.gamerman@wsj.com



Chase Holiday and her cat Merlin Sage. PHOTO: CHASE HOLIDAY

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

What are your honest opinions of the movie "Cats"? Join the discussion below.

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