Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber explains how T.S. Eliot's "Jellicle Cats" inspired his musical "Cats," and recites the verse wrote about Grizabella, the Glamour Cat.

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**Transcript**

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JANE PAULEY, anchor:

This is Andrew Lloyd Webber, a composer, the composer of “Jesus Christ, Superstar”, of “Evita”, and now, joining Evita, still running in London and more cities around the world than I can mention, is the toughest ticket in town next to the royal wedding itself, “Cats.” One critic writing, rather favorably, of course, pointed out that T.S. Eliot poems, upon which “Cats” is based, is about as unlikely a subject for a musical as the life of Eva Peron and the life of Jesus Christ.

ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER (Composer, “Cats”): Too true.

PAULEY: You can be a little more perverse in your choice of subject matter, but you make it work. Why the T.S. Eliot poems?

WEBBER: They’re marvelous, marvelous poems. They’re really about us. They’re about human beings, except that he fills us with cat analogies and Eliot was obsessed by cats. In some of his most famous poems, you find there are little cat references. In Prufrock, the fog becomes a cat.

PAULEY: Could you recite one of them for us? It’s called - It’s about Grizabella, the glamour cat who is now much past her time and this was not published because -

WEBBER: Well, Grizabella the grandmother cat, he thought was too sad for children. He never published that one. It’s “She haunted many a low resort She haunted many a low resort near the grimy road of Tottenham Court; She flitted about the No Man’s Land from the rising Sun to the friend at hand and the postman sighed, as he scratched his head and said: ‘She
really ought to be dead’ and who would ever suppose that that was Grizabella, the Glamour Cat!” It’s a phenomenal verse.
PAULEY: Yes, it is very, very sad. You say that Walt Disney, the Walt Disney Studios, tried to secure these poems.
WEBBER: Many years ago, I understand, from his widow who’s still alive, that Walt Disney wanted to make them as a film. I think 1947, 1948, but he didn’t want to do it then because he felt they would become too pretty. I remember when I first went to see her. I was terrified because I thought no way would she let me have the rights and she said to me all the things that I wanted to hear about how he really thought they were street cats. Like I said, well, that’s how they should be. That’s why we have to do them and it’s - she’s been a phenomenal help because she’s produced many unpublished letters and sort of illusions to cats in other writings of his that I don’t think we would have ever found without her.
PAULEY: Some people might ask if American audiences will understand “Cats”.
WEBBER: Well, they might, but then remember really it was American.
PAULEY: He started as American.
WEBBER: Yes.
PAULEY: In Missouri.
WEBBER: That’s right. He came to England when he was 22, 3, I think, quite old and a lot of his poems were written in America because he published a lot of them quite late. He came, then he worked a number of times as a bank clerk.
PAULEY: The Jellicle Cats are clearly British street cats, not New Yorkers.
WEBBER: Yes, except the interesting thing is you can tell he’s an American because of the rhythm of the language there. A lot of them are lyrics as the Rum Tum Tugger, who’s a real rock and roll cat, and he has like “you will do as you do do and there’s no doing anything about it.” That’s as American as you make it.
PAULEY: It’s utterly understandable, believe me. Andrew Lloyd Webber. Wishing you the greatest success and look forward to seeing it in a year or so when it comes across the Atlantic. Thanks so much.
WEBBER: Thank you very much.