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Family Plays

Puss In Boots and Other Cat Tails

By
Stephanie Routman



Puss In Boots and Other Cat Tails

Successfully co-produced and premiered by the Marin Theatre Company Performing Arts Conservatory and TCT (The Children's Theatre) as a touring production in Mill Valley, Calif.

Fairy tale. By Stephanie Routman. Cast: 2m., 2w., with doubling plus percussionist, or up to 22 (7m., 4w., 11 either gender) with roles distributed. International dialects, clever transitions and creative use of percussion accentuate this entertaining set of "cat tails." Comedian MC Cat takes the audience on a world tour of entertaining stories about his relatives. The audience meets Puss from Europe, Wild Cat from West Africa, Li Po from China, and Gatito from Mexico. Each cat demonstrates a range of emotions and cat-like qualities from "cleverness, lovingness, humor, innocence and ingenuity," as the playwright intended to illustrate. Embark on a journey through cultures with MC Cat and his musical friends. Actors and audience alike will enjoy this romp, filled with fun roles for versatile actors. Production notes are available in the script containing details on casting, language and setting. *Flexible staging, suitable for touring. Costume pieces and masks. Approximate running time: 50 minutes. Plays can be performed individually or in a combination with an approximate running time of 10 minutes each. Code: PG6.*

Stories Included:

Puss In Boots, A Renaissance Tail

Wild Cat and Hyena, An African Tail

The Magic Ring, A Chinese Tail

The Cat, the Rooster, and the Lamb, A Mexican Tail

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Puss In Boots
and Other Cat Tails

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STEPHANIE ROUTMAN

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(PUSS IN BOOTS AND OTHER CAT TAILS)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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To Monty, Stephanie's cat, who inspired this work

PUSS IN BOOTS AND OTHER CAT TAILS

PUSS IN BOOTS, A RENAISSANCE TAIL

Puss, Jack, King, Rabbit, Pheasant 1, Pheasant 2, Ogre

WILD CAT AND HYENA, AN AFRICAN TAIL

Wild Cat, Hyena

THE MAGIC RING, A CHINESE TAIL

Li Po, Mao (Li Po's Cat), Shao Ling, Shao Ling's Dog, Carp

THE CAT, THE ROOSTER, AND THE LAMB, A MEXICAN TAIL

Abuela (grandma), Gatito (kitten), Gallito (rooster),
Borreguita (lamb), El Lobo (wolf)

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION CREDIT

PUSS IN BOOTS AND OTHER CAT TAILS premiere was co-produced by the Marin Theatre Company Performing Arts Conservatory and TCT (The Children's Theatre) in Mill Valley, California. The play opened on October 9, 1999 and was directed by Stephanie Routman Leverage.

Original Cast:

MC CAT, SHAO LING JEE DU, ABUELA, EL LOBO	Bill Clemente
TOMCAT JONES, KING, PHEASANT, OGRE, HYENA, MAO, GALLITO	Randal Leigh Wung
MEOW MIX, JACK, RABBIT, WILD CAT, DOG, GATITO	Mariana Eriksson
KITTY TWINKLE-PAWS, PUSS, LI PO HAO REN, SHAO LING'S CAT, BORREGUITA	Mary Lahti
Professional Drumming	Benton Greene
Costume Design	Celestine Ranney-Howes
Masks by	Masque Arrayed, artist Annie Hallat
Set Design	Andrew Scrimger
Props Design	Stephanie Voeltz Bill Clemente
Photography	Hillary Ranney-Howes
Conservatory Director	Jeffrey Draper
Conservatory Assistant	Alison Berka

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MC CAT

Female actress. The Vaudevillian style emcee cat, a comedian, and the leader of the alley cats. Also plays Rabbit, a Pheasant, Ogre (PUSS IN BOOTS), Shao Ling (THE MAGIC RING), Abuela, El Lobo (THE CAT, THE ROOSTER AND THE LAMB)

TOMCAT JONES

Male actor. A lively, energetic, enthusiastic cat, thinks he's a sexy singer like Tom Jones. Also plays King (PUSS IN BOOTS), Hyena (WILD CAT AND HYENA), Li Po (THE MAGIC RING), Gatito (THE CAT, THE ROOSTER, AND THE LAMB)

MEOW MIX

Female actress. A serious, shy, earnest cat. Also plays Puss (PUSS IN BOOTS), Shao Ling's Dog (THE MAGIC RING), Borreguita (THE CAT, THE ROOSTER, AND THE LAMB)

FLUFF DADDY

Male actor. A rapping hip-hop cat, pretends to be tough. Also plays Jack, a Pheasant (PUSS IN BOOTS), Wild Cat (WILD CAT AND HYENA), Mao (THE MAGIC RING), Gallito (THE CAT, THE ROOSTER, AND THE LAMB) It is possible to have this part played by a female (aka KITTY TWINKLE PAWS) if casting restrictions apply. Permission is given by the playwright to change "he" to "she" in the tales. Jack should still be a boy, however.

PERCUSSIONIST

If possible, live drumming and percussion should be used for sound effects and musical accompaniment of the action. The percussionist becomes another character who both comments on and affects the action. The drummer can also be the voice of the carp in THE MAGIC RING. Otherwise, the voice must come from offstage or be pre-recorded. In either case of a live percussionist or sound cues, drumming styles should be representative of the stories' countries of origin.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CASTING FOR 4 ACTORS + PERCUSSIONIST

ACTOR 1: MC CAT, RABBIT, PHEASANT, OGRE, SHAO LING, ABUELA, EL LOBO

ACTOR 2: TOMCAT JONES, KING, HYENA, LI PO, GATITO

ACTOR 3: MEOW MIX, PUSS, SHAO LING'S DOG, BORREGUITA

ACTOR 4: FLUFF DADDY, JACK, PHEASANT, WILD CAT, MAO, GALLITO

ACTOR 5: PERCUSSIONIST, VOICE OF CARP

**EXPANDED CASTING FOR UP TO 22 ACTORS + PERCUSSIONIST
(DOUBLING SUGGESTIONS FROM LIST ABOVE)**

MC CAT, RABBIT, PHEASANT, OGRE, SHAO LING, ABUELA, EL LOBO

TOMCAT JONES, KING, HYENA, LI PO, GATITO

MEOW MIX, PUSS, SHAO LING'S DOG, BORREGUITA

FLUFF DADDY, JACK, PHEASANT, WILD CAT, MAO, GALLITO

PERCUSSIONIST, VOICE OF CARP

PRODUCTION NOTES

Words from French, German, Lonkundo (spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo), and Spanish have been incorporated into the text. Most of the time, the English definition follows the use of the word. At times, the meaning must be relayed through gesture and emphasis. These moments have been noted in the text.

SETTING: A magical alley at night. The alley need not be realistic. It should not be dark or threatening, but instead, filled with moonlight, stars, and magic. Scenic elements could be created as if seen from a cat's perspective. Levels or designated playing areas are helpful for staging the separate tales. Use of props should be kept to a minimum. Illustrations may be used and incorporated into the set to clarify mimed action. Animal characters should be in half-masks and removed for human characters.

TIME: Evening of that day in real time.

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

This project first came about when, as a drama teacher, I noticed the same trickster animals appearing in stories from many different cultures. For example, a trickster rabbit appears in southern United States, African, Cuban and South American stories – in fact, I discovered an ancient Mayan story that closely resembles our Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby! Or there is that favorite lazy trickster, Anansi, who appears in African, Cuban, and Haitian tales. I became excited about the idea of writing a play in which an animal takes the audience on a world tour of stories in which it appears.

I realized that I wanted to write about cats since they have such a range of personalities. When I began my research, I found a wealth of marvelous stories from around the world depicting cats in all their individuality and all their astounding qualities. I had to narrow my choices down to a few cultures – European, West African, Chinese, and Mexican – choosing stories which illustrated the range of emotions cats have. These were a few of the stories that, for me, portrayed cats' loyalty, playfulness, cleverness, lovingness, humor, innocence, and ingenuity. Further revisions led me to add different theatrical styles from each of the cultures, giving each of the stories a separate voice.

Play Script Layout & Design: Randy Blevins, jrbdesign

PUSS IN BOOTS AND OTHER CAT TAILS

by Stephanie Routman

PUSS IN BOOTS - A RENAISSANCE TAIL

(An alley. Cats enter performing in a vaudeville show. Fluff Daddy improvises a rap. Meow Mix mimes "mixing" and "scratching" a record. Tomcat Jones flirts with the audience. MC Cat enters in a rush and begins to perform a stand-up comedy routine, speaking directly to the audience.)

MC CAT: Howdy, folks, and welcome to the show. I hope you're feline ready to have a good time tonight. Get it? Feline? 'Cuz we're all cats, see? *(Laughing as a cat)* Rowr, rowr, rowr. *(The other cats laugh too.)* Hey, did you hear about the cat who swallowed a ball of wool? She had mittens! Meow!

(Cats groan. Cats encourage audience to boo MC.)

MC CAT: Hey, c'mon now! They love my jokes, don't you folks? My name is MC Cat and I'll be your host for tonight's entertainment. Anyone here know why cats don't play cards in the jungle?

(Cats ad lib, "I don't know." "Why?")

MC CAT: Because they're all cheetahs! Rowr, rowr. Hey, how about another joke?

(Cats ad lib, "On with the show!" "Tell a story!")

MC CAT: All right, all right. We came out here tonight to put on a show, cuz we've got lots of great cat tales to tell, or, should I say cat tails to pull! It'll just be a minute for us to get ready. Hope you won't mind a slight paws. *(Holds up paw)* Get it, paws, like pause? Rowr, rowr, rowr.

(Cats groan and exit.)

MC CAT: *(Calls out to exiting cats)* I can't help myself! I'm just funny! *(To audience)* And now, on with the show. Let me tell you the story about my great grandmother, Puss. Grandma Puss lived in France with a miller and his three kids, *Jean Luc Picard Croissant, Jean Claude Van Damme Croissant, and Jack.* Now Jack was a nice boy, but it was Grandma Puss, the smartest cat in France, who came up with the plan to make Jack rich.

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(Enter Jack and Puss. Jack is simple, but sweet. Puss has stylized, elegant, courtly gestures.)

JACK: Oh, gee. A cat? What can I do with a cat? Oh, well, Dad left me Puss, so I'll settle for her instead of a fortune or good prospects.

PUSS: Do not worry yourself so, *mon ami* Jack. I may be able to make your fortune after all. But first, you must dress me in some excellent French boots. Deal? *(They shake hands.) Bien!* After you, *monsieur*.

JACK: Uh, ok, Puss.

(They set off with Puss leading the way. The Percussionist hands Puss some boots.)

PUSS: Ah, Jack. I look *magnifique*, do I not? Pay the man, *mon ami*. *Bien*, Jack. I go to make your fortune. You must trust me, I have a plan! So keep busy until I return.

JACK: Uh, ok, Puss. *(Exits)*

(Puss lays out lettuce in a line and hides. Rabbit enters, sniffing.)

RABBIT: Do I smell a lettuce? *Ja*, I do! Ach, this is good. I will eat it right now. *(Eats the lettuce)*

PUSS: *(Jumps out and ties Rabbit with a rope)* Got you! Ah, little bunny, I am sorry, but you are part of my plan to make the fortune of my friend, Jack, you see. Now, we must go see the king! *(Exits with Rabbit)*

(King enters, plays marbles or jacks.)

PUSS: *(Re-enters with a bag, bows low to King)* Your Majesty.

(King does not notice her as he is playing.)

PUSS: Ahem, your Majesty!

KING: *(Looks at Puss from her feet up)* Eh? What's that? Nice boots!

PUSS: *(Bows low again)* *Merci*.

KING: Oh, I say, is that a cat? Now that is a strange sight – a puss

in boots! Pardon me, my dear cat, did you say something to me?

PUSS: *Oui*, your most *magnifique* majesty, I did. Please accept this very fine little bunny rabbit as a gift. It is a token of my master's greatest esteem. *(Puss hands King the bag.)*

KING: A rabbit, you say? From your master?

PUSS: Yes, sire, a bunny caught from the extraordinary estate of my venerable master, the *Marquis of Carabas*.

KING: Well, I say. Do thank your master. Imagine! A talking kitty in fancy boots! What will they think of next? *(Wanders offstage)*

PUSS: *(Winks to the audience)* The first part of my excellent plan is accomplished. On to section *deux*.

(Puss sets out some grain and plays dead. Two Pheasants enter.)

PHEASANT 1: Oh, look, love! A pile of delicious grains for us to eat!

PHEASANT 2: But, isn't that a cat over there, dear? Do you really think we should chance it?

PHEASANT 1: Oh, that cat is clearly dead. What is there to fear? Come on, love, let's eat!

(Pheasants bend down, and eat. Puss jumps up and grabs them.)

PUSS: Aha! Got you! Oh, my little darlings. You are far too trusting of this clever pussycat! Now, we must go back to the castle to present you to his majesty.

PHEASANT 2: *(Mimicking Pheasant 1)* Oh, that cat is clearly dead.....

PHEASANT 1: *(Interrupting)* But how was I supposed to know the cat was just pretending?

(Puss drags Pheasants off. King enters. Puss re-enters with two bags.)

KING: Well, if it isn't the talking cat again! Back again with more gifts?

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PUSS: *Oui*, Sire. My master, the *Marquis* of *Carabas*, sends these most divine pheasants with his greatest regard. I recommend them *fricasséed!* (*Puss hands King the bags.*)

KING: Pheasants? Oh, well, thank the *Marquis*. I do enjoy a good pheasant dinner, you know. And you'll be welcome back anytime, you know. I really should get myself a talking puss in boots. Something to see, you know. (*Exits*)

PUSS: Am I not the cleverest puss you have ever seen? Section *deux* of my plan is complete. Section *trois* is about to proceed. (*Calling*) Jack, oh Jack. Where are you? It is Puss!

JACK: (*Enters*) Puss? Is that you? I've been keeping myself busy. I counted the beans we have left in our pantry. I'm afraid it's not too much.

PUSS: Never mind, Jack. We are moving on to bigger and better things. Now take off your clothes and jump in the river.

JACK: Now? In the middle of winter! It will be freezing!

PUSS: Trust me, *mon ami*. I promised to make your fortune, did I not?

JACK: All right, Puss, if you say so.

(Jack exits and tosses clothes from offstage. [Sound Cue: Percussionist makes splashing sounds.] Puss hides clothes as King enters in a coach. A cutout of a princess should be drawn or painted in the coach. Puss stops the coach.)

PUSS: Help! Help! Somebody! The *Marquis* of *Carabas* is drowning! Help him, please!

KING: Eh, what's that? The *Marquis*, you say?

PUSS: Ah, your royal highness! Please, you must help my master, the *Marquis* of *Carabas!* He is drowning! Some very bad thieves came, stole all of his gorgeous clothing, and threw him in the river! It is a tragedy!

KING: (*King calls offstage*) You, there! Go help the poor man and give him some new clothes from my own traveling case. The *Marquis* is an important man, you know!

(Jack appears dressed in fancy clothes, shivering. Puss runs offstage.)

KING: Well, *monsieur*. Bad luck, eh? Have a seat in my coach. You must be frozen to death. Don't mind the princess in there. Bit quiet, but quite pleasant. Now where's that amazing talking cat of yours gone?

(Jack and King exit in coach.)

PUSS: *(Puss enters and points to half of audience.)* 'Allo! You, there, farmhands! When the king comes by here in his coach and asks to whom these fields belong, you must tell him the *Marquis of Carabas*, all right? Will you do it, people? *(Ad lib with audience until they agree and understand. PUSS points to other half of audience.)* Excusez moi, goatherds! When the king comes by here and asks to whom these goats belong, please tell him the *Marquis of Carabas*. You will tell him, will you not? *(Get audience to agree. Puss runs to castle.)* *Magnifique!* Now we come to the difficult part of section *trois*. This is the Ogre's castle. He is a terrible monster who will eat anything he can catch and I am very frightened. Ah, well, I must go in and give it my best try. *(Knocks on door. Shivers when hears Ogre's scary voice from offstage)*

OGRE: *(Off)* Who is it?

PUSS: 'Allo, *Monsieur*. It is just a little kitty cat who heard of your fame and wanted to meet you for herself.

OGRE: *(Off)* A cat! Ooh, I love to eat cats and it's just about my dinnertime! *(Ogre comes on stage and mimes opening door.)* Please come in. Nice boots!

PUSS: *Merci*, and greetings to you, your most terrible Ugliness. My name is Puss, and since I happened to be in the neighborhood, I decided I must come and find out if the scary stories about you are true.

OGRE: I'm sure anything scary you heard about me is much understated. I am, in fact, the scariest, most horrible ogre these parts have seen in over two hundred years.

PUSS: Well, you see, this is what I heard, but I just cannot believe it! They say you can change yourself into any animal you like and this seems to me too incredible.

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OGRE: What? You dare to question my powers! First I'll show you what I can do, and then I'll eat you from the tail up! (*Ogre turns into a lion.*) Roar! Do you dare to dispute me now?

PUSS: (*Pretending not to be scared*) Ah, well, this is nothing! Anyone can change himself into a bigger animal. But if you could change yourself into some very tiny animal, like, say, a mouse, then that would really be showing me something.

OGRE: Nothing, you say! It's not at all easy to become a big, ferocious lion. But, just to prove to you that I can, watch a true master at work!

(*Ogre turns into a mouse. Puss pounces and chases the Ogre Mouse offstage. Puss returns, licking her paws.*)

PUSS: Delicious! And now, I must prepare for the king and his entourage to arrive. (*Exits*)

(*The coach with King and Jack enters.*)

KING: Oh, I say, stop the coach! (*Addressing the first half of the audience*) You, there! Farm people! To whom do these lovely fields belong?

(*MC Cat helps the audience say, "The Marquis of Carabas."*)

KING: Did you say the *Marquis of Carabas*? You mean this *Marquis of Carabas*? (*Points to Jack behind him, who is making calf eyes at the princess cutout*) Well, I never! How fortunate! (*They move on.*) Oh, stop the coach! Stop the coach! What very handsome goats! (*King asks the other half of the audience.*) To whom do these wonderful goats belong? (*Audience answers, "Marquis of Carabas."*) What? The *Marquis* again? Oh, better and better. He must be rich! Come to think of it, this *marquis* may not be a bad son-in-law!

(*The King and Jack get out of the coach in front of the palace.*)

KING: Stop the coach right here. What a lovely palace! Such perfect columns! I wonder to whom it can belong.

PUSS: (*Entering*) Your Royal Majesty, may I welcome you to the palace of the most distinguished and honorable *Marquis of Carabas*.