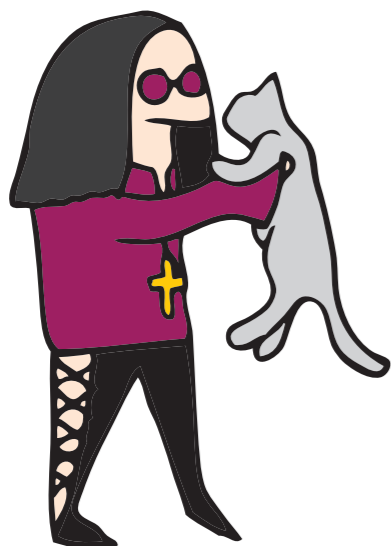


Feline groovy?

Francesca Watson investigates the influence of moggies on music

'Just try calling the likes of Alice Cooper, Ozzy Osbourne and Eddie Van Halen soft and see the claws come out!'



From the dawn chorus of civilisation to the harmonies of today, cats have weaved a terpsichorean magic over musicians, composers and singers alike. Cats running along keyboards inspired Chopin to write *The Cat's Waltz* and Scarlatti to compose *The Cat's Fugue*. Maurice Ravel composed *Cat Duet*, Prokofiev conjured up a cat from a clarinet in *Peter and the Wolf*, Stravinsky soothed felines to sleep with *Lullabies for the Cat* and Tchaikovsky wrote *Puss in Boots*, *The White Cat* and incorporated a pas de deux for two cats in *Sleeping Beauty*. Not to mention the *Duet for Two Cats*, attributed to Rossini, an unforgettable and amusing operatic piece mimicking the cat's cries.

The Jellicle Moon is shining bright

One of the most famous examples of feline influence on music of recent times has to be *Cats*. Poet TS Eliot published *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* in 1939 and, over 40 years later, it inspired composer Andrew Lloyd Webber to produce one of the world's most successful musicals. Since its opening in 1981, *Cats* has been presented in 26 countries and over 300 cities and has been translated into ten languages. Lloyd Webber was encouraged by Eliot's widow, Valerie, who provided the composer with several unpublished poems including *Grizabella the Glamour Cat*. Lloyd Webber's music has ensured that Jellicle Cats get 'to dance by the light of the Jellicle Moon' for many years to come. Incidentally, his own cat accidentally wiped his *Phantom of the Opera* sequel score from a computer keyboard while taking a stroll. "I think he was right, though," Lloyd Webber concedes, "the score I'd written up to that time was rubbish."

It seems perfectly natural to have such a regal and intelligent animal as your muse while composing a symphony or cadenza, but it's not exactly rock 'n' roll to go all sentimental and cutesy over a small ball of fluff, is it?

Just try calling the likes of Alice Cooper, Ozzy Osbourne and Eddie Van Halen soft and see the claws come out! These wild men of rock have cats and share their feline passion with a number of other musical greats.

Tabby Road

John Lennon lived with his Aunt Mimi for most of his childhood and it was she who instilled in him a great love of cats. As a boy he was said to have cycled to his local fishmonger to buy pieces of hake for his pets and when on tour with *The Beatles*, he would phone Mimi to ask after his cats. John and his first wife Cynthia had a number of cats, including one he named after his aunt.

According to May Pang, a one-time girlfriend of John's, he could never resist cats. "One day while John was recording, the studio receptionist brought in a litter of kittens. I picked up a black one and put him over my shoulder. John rolled his eyes and said 'Now you've done it! Well, I guess we have to have a cat.'

"At the end of the day when we were leaving the studio, John asked if there were any left. Only one remained – a white one that no one wanted because she was so loud – so we took them both home. John called them Major and Minor."

Lennon was also a prolific artist and cats often figured prominently in his sketches, most notably in the book he dedicated to his son, *Real Love – the Drawings for Sean*.

Second wife Yoko Ono remembers, "I began to find John and Sean drawing together. John would draw something and explain to Sean what it was: 'This is a cat, catnapping, Sean.' John's titles were very short and succinct with great wit and humour, and made Sean laugh. This is how Sean learnt the fun of drawing, the fun of doing things together with his dad, and the fun of life".

Crazy Little Thing Called Love

Freddie Mercury, lead singer of the band *Queen*, made no secret of his love of cats. He dedicated his solo album *Mr Bad Guy* to all cat lovers and Delilah, one of his favourite tom cats had a song written and dedicated to him on *Queen's* album *Innuendo*. Freddie may have gently castigated him when singing: "you make me slightly mad when you pee all over my Chippendale suite, you take over my house and home, you even try to answer my telephone," but there can be no doubt that this song truly shows his affection and love for his favourite feline. "You make me smile when I'm just about to cry, you bring me hope, you make me laugh – and I like it... Delilah, you're the apple of my eye." A friend of Freddie's had a waistcoat made with pictures of all his cats painted onto the silk. He was seen to wear it in his final official portrait in 1991. It was said that while on tour he would spend hours on the phone talking to them and in the last days of his life he appeared to gain great solace from his beloved cats.



From classic soul to Celtic kits

Dusty Springfield adored cats. "I think that [cats] are amazingly beautiful and sensuous. They get up in the morning and they look great. They're comic and affectionate, and they can spot a phoney straight away," she was once quoted as saying. She even went as far as making a provision in her will for her cat, Nicholas, to be taken care of and 'married' to another cat belonging to a friend. In March 2008, a Dusty Springfield fan club, *Let's Talk Dusty* donated £250 to Cats Protection in honour of the late singer.

Few stars are as public with their cat obsession as *Jethro Tull's* lead singer, Ian Anderson. Not only does his official website give updates on his band and music, but cat and kitten care advice as well. He is a committed ailurophile and has pages dedicated to felines, describing them as "one of nature's minor miracles".

Justin Hawkins, best known for being the cat suit-wearing lead singer of *The Darkness*, has had troubled times of late battling drug and alcohol addiction, but after successfully coming out of rehab he has discovered a new and far more potent interest – his three Bengal kittens. "They look like leopards but are more friendly and cuddly. I called them Barnaby, Troy and Cully after characters in *Midsomer Murders*," he says.

Little-known Texas-based musician Marc Gunn adores his cats so much that he has recently released a CD of *Irish Drinking Songs for Cat Lovers*, with notable tracks such as *What Shall we do with the Catnipped Kitty?*, *When Kitty Eyes are Smiling*, and who could forget that classic, *Lord of the Pounce*. Marc's second album, *Whiskers in the Jar* is due out later this year.

As the composer Albert Schweitzer once said, "there are two means of refuge from the miseries of life: music and cats." Whether they are the passive observer of music in creation or a central inspiration, cats will continue to cast their feline spell over musicians and their music, holding them in their sway. Let the music play on... ●