



Music is as old as man's first heartbeat, and transcends time and cultures. Cats have also transcended time and cultures, becoming a part of societies' art, mythology, literature and music. Music has been inspired by cats, written about cats, written for cats and even played by cool cats. The role of cats in music may be playful, humorous or a snapshot of daily life.

Cats were an integral part of culture long before they ruled supreme on the internet, as evidenced in music popular today as well as over the centuries. Some of the popular tracks over recent decades referencing cats are a bit saucy, for example, "Puss 'N Boots" by Adam Ant; full of swagger, "Stray Cat Strut" by the band Stray Cats; and overtly sexual, "Cat Scratch Fever", by Ted Nugent. Other songs focus on different feline attributes such as slinky, sleek, stealthy and sophisticated with a touch of wit, for example, "The Pink Panther."

Ian Anderson, musician, composer, well-known singer and flautist for Jethro

Tull and an unabashed cat lover, released a solo album in 2003 entitled, "Rupi's Dance", named after his black cat, Rupi. The album has a cut by the same name in which the music and lyrics perfectly capture the feline essence and the playful Rupi's kitty antics. ("Rupi's Dance" www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnXbhLaRxs4)

"There have been three or four songs that I've written about cats. I'm close to cats and have been since childhood, they're my favorite animal," says Mr. Anderson.

"Old Black Cat", also from "Rupi's Dance", offers another slice of life with his cats, written the morning his old black cat passed away. (Tissue alert!) "I wanted to mark the occasion with something. He wasn't a particularly remarkable cat, pretty low key, minded his own business, kept out of the way most of the time; perfectly affable and friendly. He just wasn't one of those characters that made him the popular guy. Somehow it felt appropriate to mark his time with us in a song. I bought him a collar for Christmas but he didn't live long enough to get his present, that was the sad thing. I've only performed it a very few times live because when I start singing I start crying. That doesn't look too good on stage," says Mr. Anderson. ("Old Black Cat" www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sl8mlasQjUM)

On the Jethro Tull album, "Heavy Horses," released in 1978, is a song, "And the Mouse Police Never Sleeps" about his cats dutifully keeping vermin at bay while occasionally, perhaps, dropping partially eaten remnants around their home, yard, and everywhere. ("And the Mouse Police Never Sleeps" www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnXbhLaRxs4)

"Composers have long used cats and the word cat as a source of inspiration for their music," says Bryan Johanson, musician, composer and professor of music at Portland State University, in Portland, OR. "In ancient Egypt, music was predominantly used for sacred purposes; while there is no existing written music from this early advanced culture, it is not a big leap to imagine composers incorporated cats into their music," he says.

In her book, "The Ancient Egyptian Prayerbook," Tamara L. Suida does cite "Hymn to Bast-Ra as the Great Cat" with the opening line: "Praise the Great Cat, kissing the ground before Ra the Great God!" It is a beautiful hymn speaking of peace, light, and forgiveness, closing with, "May You give me life, prosperity and health."

Cats in music aren't unique to music in today's pop culture - there are scores of classical compositions evocative of felines.

In the Romantic era, Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) wrote Waltz in F Major, Op. 34, No. 3, which he called "The Cat Waltz." The story goes that Chopin was inspired by George Sand's cat, Valdeck, who would flit across the piano keyboard. Dr. Johanson says about one minute into the piece is a riff that sounds very similar to a feline scampering across the keys. "The actual musical moment is very reminiscent of the now famous cat, Nora. The YouTube video of her caressing the keys of a piano, seemingly listening and thinking musically, is both amusing and interesting. Nora seems to understand the cause and effect of her actions—that her paw and forearm are responsible for the sounds being produced," says Dr. Johanson. (Christian

Ihle Hadland plays Chopin's Waltz in F Major, Op. 34, No. 3 at International Chamber Music Festival 2010: www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8ZzHnW14bs)

Before the Meow Mix jingle with "meow" as the only word, there was "Duetto buffo di due gatti" better known as "The Funny Duet For Two Cats," attributed to Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868). With pieces from Rossini's "Otello" and a sampling of C.E.F. Weyse's "Cat Cavatina", the authenticity may be a musical game of cat and mouse, but the comedic genius is genuine. The performance by Hyacinthe de Moulins and Regis Mengus, members of the Les Petit Chanteurs A La Croix De Bois, a boys' choir in Paris, France, is a perennial favorite. (www.youtube.com/watch?t=8&v=PFLF57vDYcQ)

Domenico Scarlatti's (1685-1757) Baroque composition, Fugue in G Minor, was later called the "Cat's Fugue" by Muzio Clementi. According to Dr. Johanson, the fugue "was so named because of the unusual nature of the fugue subject. It is an ascending series of pitches outlining a diminished chord and was thought to have been inspired by a cat walking on the keyboard of Scarlatti's harpsichord, stepping on what was considered an unorthodox sequence of notes, especially for a fugue subject." (Elaine Comparone plays Scarlatti's Fugue in G Minor here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbW1nNBqVnI)

Sources

Ian Anderson, musician, composer, singer, flautist of the band, Jethro Tull
The interview was arranged by Anne Leighton
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Professor of Music at Portland State University
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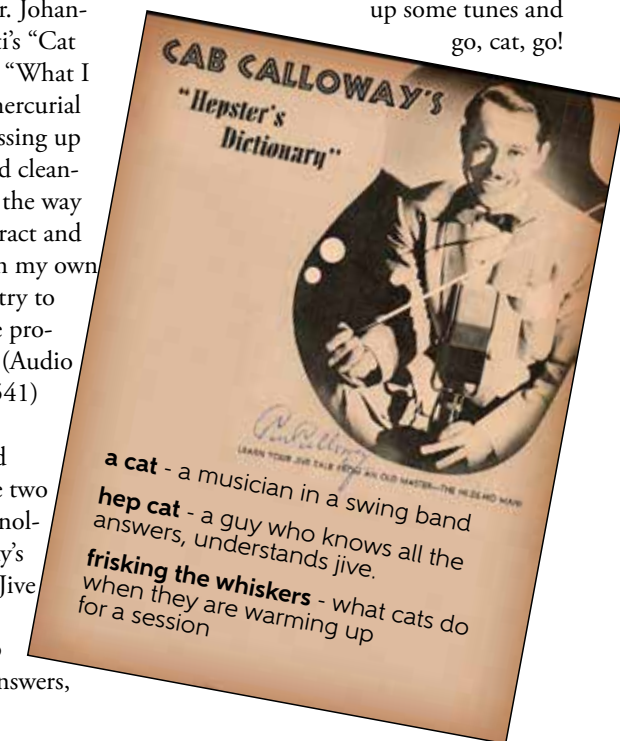
If you want a compilation of classic cats, look for the album, "Purrfectly Classical" (Centaur CRC 2511), released in 2001, which contains not only music but also readings of cat-centric pieces. You may be surprised at the three dozen selections. Featured are Noel Lester, piano; Edward Crafts, baritone; Deidra Palmour, soprano; and Nancy Roldan, piano. Crafts and Palmour also do the readings.

Speaking of his own work from guitar and harpsichord, "Two Cats Fugue", Dr. Johanson said he was inspired by Scarlatti's "Cat Fugue" as well as his own two cats. "What I loved most about them was their mercurial nature — that they could be tear-assing up and down the stairs one minute and cleaning themselves the next. I also love the way cats play with each other; they interact and ignore seemingly simultaneously. In my own work I change character often and try to reflect the many moods that can be produced by two cats living together." (Audio link: wfm.org/playlists/shows/61541)

Cats have inspired music-associated slang, too. Cool cat and hep cat are two expressions with roots in jive terminology. According to the Cab Calloway's Hepster's Dictionary: Language of Jive (published in 1939), a cat (n.) is "a musician in a swing band" and hep cat (n.) "a guy who knows all the answers,

understands jive." This is one of my favorites: frisking the whiskers (v.) "what cats do when they are warming up for a session."

Cats continue inspiring creativity in the arts, snuggling their way in music across genres whether their role is symbolic, suggestive or a representation of daily life making Albert Schweitzer's quote a reality for so many of us, "There are two means of refuge from the miseries of life: cats and music." Alright kids, time to lace your blue suedes, cue up some tunes and go, cat, go!



When writing this, I thought of a few pieces of music I'd like to use as examples and discussed the topic with my sister, a music aficionado. The list of music became like eating potato chips; you can't eat just one. Each song begat another and another until we had a whole litter of cat songs. My partial list is here and my sister's list has over 35 songs. Tag your turn! How many cat songs can you name?

1. **Delilah** by Freddy Mercury
2. **Year of the Cat** by Al Stewart
3. **What's New, Pussycat** by Tom Jones
4. **Nashville Cats** by The Lovin' Spoonful
5. **Honky Cat** by Elton John
6. **I've Got a Tiger by the Tail** by Buck Owens & His Buckaroos
7. **Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress** by The Hollies
8. **Tall Cool One** by Robert Plant
9. **Cat's in the Cradle** by Harry Chapin
10. **The Lion Sleeps Tonight** by The Tokens
11. **The Cat and the Mouse** by Aaron Copeland
12. **Sleeping Beauty - Ballet Suite, Op. 66** by Tchaikovsky
(Pas de character, Puss-in-Boots and the White dance at Aurora's wedding)
13. **The Alleycat** by Bent Fabric (Thanks, Bryan Johanson for that memory!)
14. **The Cat** by Jimmy Smith (Thanks, Bryan Johanson)

