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'Cats' to finish its ninth life in June

NEW YORK (AP) — Tears streamed down Hector Montalvo's cheeks as he waited outside the Winter Garden Theater to see the feline musical "Cats" — yet again.

Before Sunday's matinee, he'd already seen the record-breaking show 670 times. And the show's announced closure in June — after a 7,397 performances — was scratching him up inside.

"When I first heard the news, I was devastated," said Montalvo, a Manhattan computer software salesman.

"This is such a sad thing, but I guess all good things must come to an end."

Marlene Danielle, who plays Bombalurina, was somber, too: Her nine lives — make that more than 7,000 lives — are now winding down.

"When we got the news there were tears, sure, and hugs," said Danielle, who has played the role since the show

began in October 1982.

"And believe it or not, there was lots of laughter. Somehow, everybody knows in their heart that nothing goes forever," she said.

"We brought the show into the new millennium. How much more can you really expect?"

The Andrew Lloyd Webber musical will bring down the final curtain June 25, after a nearly two-decade run on Broadway.

By the end of its run, "Cats" — with its "Now and Forever" slogan — will have played to more than 10 million theatergoers in New York. On Broadway alone, its grosses are estimated to be more than \$380 million.

But its receipts have dwindled in the last two years, at times falling to only 50 percent capacity, particularly in the lean winter months after Christmas.

"When you look at it, we're running into our 18th year, and the houses have been slow," Danielle said. "It's a business, and they have to make their money."

While saddened, cast members said news of the closure will make the remaining shows special.

"It makes people cherish the performances," said Lenny Daniel, who plays the character Alonzo. "Everything sharpens, and you focus on what I can do to do the best and enjoy the time the absolute most. That's the general feeling. Every moment on that stage now, there's a countdown."

Other fans were harder hit. "This is the tenth time I have seen it, and I must admit I'm feeling pretty sad," said Ernie Puglise, a Connecticut music teacher who brought classes to the

show over the years. "I really think it's the best musical ever written."

But fans and cast members were optimistic about a life beyond the show's final rendition of its signature song, "Memories."

"We are all trying to leave with the attitude that this is just another door opening rather than one closing," said performer Lenny Daniel.

Tesha Bess, who has played the

character Rumpel Teaser for one and a half years, said cast members have "all been auditioning for other things because we knew this had to happen at some point."

And Montalvo said life will go on for him, too.

"I've made friends with a lot of the cast," he said, "and I look forward to seeing them in their future projects."



Melanie Falk/DN

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