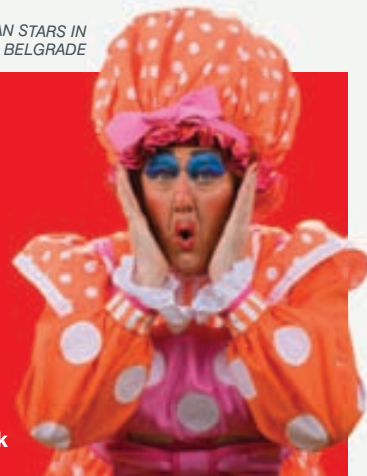


Coventry & Warwickshire

ISSUE 396 DECEMBER 2018

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warwick arts centre

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by week listings guide

A YULETIDE TALE

David Edgar's A Christmas Carol returns to the RSC



ELF: A CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR

shows at Genting Arena



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Sat 15 Dec

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Sun 16 Dec, 2pm – 5pm. Last entry 4pm

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Family fun front-and-centre in Belgrade's new season

First-class family entertainment is the name of the game at Coventry's Belgrade Theatre in early 2019.

Included in the venue's programme of shows are Billionaire Boy The Musical - based on David Walliams' hugely popular novel - the Romeo & Juliet-inspired Noughts And Crosses, and an adaptation of Jill Murphy's classic story, The Worst Witch.

Engine House Theatre bring to life Benji Davies' award-winning Grandad's Island - a touching tale of love and loss - while the wild and wacky Oddsocks make a welcome return to present an easy-to-follow reimagining of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

For more information about the shows and the rest of the Belgrade's spring-season line-up, visit belgrade.co.uk

Green light for university extension plans



The University of Warwick has had a massive expansion project worth £400million approved. The university has won permission from Coventry City Council for nine schemes, included among which are the addition of 1,000 student bedrooms, an £80million Faculty of Arts building and a £54.3million Interdisciplinary Biomedical Research Building.

Photography project captures Stratford words

A small team of photography students are collaborating with the Stratford Literary Festival to capture six months of the town's relationship to words, with the resulting images then being posted to Instagram.

In the lead-up to the 2019 edition of the literary festival, second-year photography students from Stratford College have been tasked with the responsibility of producing

an exhibition entitled Stratford In Words, charting the seasonal changes of the town through the words that feature around its streets, rivers and shops. At the end of the project, a selection of the best images will be displayed in an exhibition at the festival, which runs from 28 April to 5 May. For further information, visit stratlitfest.co.uk



Arts Council funding for Midlands venues

The Arts Council is to invest more than £1.5million in providing arts and cultural venues in the West Midlands with buildings and equipment. The investment will support capital projects at The Courtyard in Hereford, Compton Verney in Warwickshire, Coventry's Herbert Art Gallery & Museum and Ikon in Birmingham. It will also finance an instrument truck for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

Commenting on the news, Peter Knott, Area Director for Arts Council England, said: "This is fantastic news for the West Midlands. Arts and culture plays a vital role in making the

area a great place to live, and we're pleased to be investing in projects which will benefit local people and their communities."

Sunrise at the Cathedral

A sound and lights experience 'the like of which the city has never before seen' will welcome in the new year in Coventry this month.

Sunrise is a family-friendly experience hosted by Coventry Cathedral that will take its audience 'through the transition from darkness to light as the beginning of 2019 approaches'.

The event will see the Cathedral Ruins bathed in waves of graduating colours that change over the duration of the performance. The show is the finale of Plumb Line Festival, a year-long event celebrating 100 years of the Diocese and Coventry Cathedral. It will run on New Year's Eve at 6pm, 9pm and midnight. Tickets are £6 for over-16s and free for younger visitors.



And the Strictly judges are...

All four of Strictly Come Dancing's television judges will take part in the 2019 live UK arena tour of the show. Craig Revel Horwood, Darcey Bussell and Bruno Tonioli will star alongside head TV judge Shirley Ballas in 29 supersized shows at the start of the new year.

The 2019 tour kicks off at Arena Birmingham, from Friday 18 to Monday 21 January. For more information and tickets, visit strictlycomedancinglive.com



Romance and magic with the King of Waltz

Violin superstar André Rieu visits Birmingham this month to present a concert featuring a selection of Christmas carols. Andre will be performing with his Johann Strauss Orchestra and promises 'a grand show including romantic moments and witty twists'. He appears at Arena Birmingham on Thursday 13 December. For more information, visit the venue's website.



Sir Ian McKellen celebrates 80th birthday in the Midlands

Sir Ian McKellen is to celebrate his 80th birthday next year by presenting a new solo show on 80 stages across the UK, including four in Warwickshire.

The Lord Of The Rings star, who is touring his production to raise money for theatres, will perform at the Coventry Belgrade on Saturday 20 April, Warwick Arts Centre on Sunday 19 May, and at both the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the RSC's Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon on Sunday 21 July. Commenting on the news, Sir Ian said: "I'm touring this new show to theatres I know well and a few that I don't. The show starts with Gandalf and will probably end with an invitation to act with me on stage. In between, there will be anecdotes and acting. I open at my local arts centre in January and end up by August in Orkney."

Festival set to light up town



Bromsgrove is this month hosting a free-to-attend celebration of 'togetherness, light and the winter season'.

The Worcestershire town's Festival Of Light takes place on Sunday 9 December and features music, a candlelit procession and award-winning carnival. For more information, visit artrix.co.uk

Coventry composer celebrated in Brum

The work of Coventry-born composer Brian Ferneyhough is this month being celebrated by Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMG) and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

Taking place at the Conservatoire on Sunday 9 December and held in honour of Brian's 75th birthday, Ferneyhough Day includes two concerts and a talk with the composer.

Commenting on the event, Stephan Meier, Artistic Director of BCMG,

explains: "Ferneyhough's music is known for its complexity, but we shouldn't forget its humanity and diversity: the pieces we perform in our Ferneyhough Day include a conjuring of Icarus's stunning achievement of flight. As Icarus sought to soar ever higher, we push the boundaries of what's possible - involving the next generation of musicians in partnership with the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire to pay tribute to this extraordinary figure in contemporary music."





Dance into a family-friendly season at Coventry arts centre

A dance production inspired by Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and a stage adaptation of a popular children's book by the award-winning team of Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler are among the spring-season highlights at Warwick Arts Centre in Coventry.

Fagin's Twist, presented by Avant Garde Dance on Wednesday 13 & Thursday 14 March, and Zog - a collaboration between Freckle Productions and Rose Theatre Kingston, showing from Friday 24 to Sunday 26 May - are just two of a host of sure-to-be-popular theatre works being presented by the venue during the first half of 2019... For more information about the new season, visit warwickartscentre.co.uk

RSC on lookout for summer shows

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) is now welcoming applications for its 2019 summer season of outdoor performances at the Dell in Avonbank Gardens. Now in its 13th season, the scheme provides a stage for student, community and semi-professional groups to put on their own Shakespeare productions during weekends between June and August. Shortlisted applications will be decided by a panel of judges shortly after the closing date on 3 February. An application form and guidelines can be downloaded from rsc.org.uk

40 glorious years of The Specials

The Specials will next spring perform in Birmingham as part of their 40th anniversary tour. The Coventry-formed English 2 Tone and ska revival band stop off in the city during a 31-date trek around Europe in support of soon-to-be-released album *Encore* - their first collection of new music in 37 years. The boys play the O2 Academy on Friday 26 April.

Alice In Wonderland escape room opens

A new Alice In Wonderland-themed escape room has opened in Coventry's Broadgate.

Down The Rabbit Hole follows the same format as other escape rooms, with groups having one hour to get out by successfully solving a series of challenges. The Alice addition to Broadgate features alongside a new Pirates Of The Caribbean-inspired room, meaning the city now boasts a total of eight escape experiences. For more information and to book, visit escapereality.com

Marvel-ous event returns to the NEC

Comic book superheroes including Spider-Man, Iron Man, Thor, Black Panther, the Hulk, Black Widow and Doctor Strange will be smashing their way into Birmingham late next year when Marvel Universe LIVE! returns to the city with a brand new show.

Taking place at Arena Birmingham from 5 to 8 December 2019, the production will feature cutting-edge special effects, pyrotechnics, 3D video projection, aerial stunts, martial arts and daring motorcycle displays... For more information, visit marvel.com



Camper Calling 2019 diary date...

After enjoying another successful year at Warwickshire's Ragley Hall, family-friendly music festival Camper Calling will return to the venue next summer, from 23 to 25 August.

This year's event featured music from Melanie C, Feeder, Scouting For Girls and Artful Dodger. The 2019 line-up will be announced in due course. Early Bird tickets are now available at campercalling.com



Refurb funding for the Belgrade

The Belgrade Theatre has secured government funding for a refurbishment of its auditorium and upgrading of its catering facilities. The cash is part of an £8.5million package promised to Coventry ahead of its year as the UK's City of Culture in 2021.

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TOWN HALL



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 THU 20 DECEMBER 2018
 7:30PM
SYMPHONY HALL



**JOOLS HOLLAND
 AND HIS RHYTHM
 AND BLUES ORCHESTRA**
 WED 5 – THU 6 DECEMBER 2018
 7:30PM
SYMPHONY HALL



**A CHRISTMAS
 CAROL BY
 CHARLES DICKENS**
 SUN 23 DECEMBER 2018
 8PM
TOWN HALL



**THE BOOTLEG
 BEATLES 2018**
 TUE 11 DECEMBER 2018
 7:30PM
SYMPHONY HALL



**THE TIGER WHO
 CAME TO TEA –
 LIVE!**
 WED 26 DEC 2018 –
 SUN 13 JAN 2019
 VARIOUS TIMES
TOWN HALL



**CHRISTMAS
 SPECTACULAR
 WITH SPECIAL GUEST
 KIMBERLEY WALSH**
 SAT 15 DECEMBER 2018
 2:30PM & 7:30PM
SYMPHONY HALL



**PIANO LEGENDS
 WITH
 MARK READ**
 SUN 30 DECEMBER 2018
 7:30PM
SYMPHONY HALL



**CHOIR OF
 KING'S COLLEGE
 CAMBRIDGE –
 A CHORAL
 CHRISTMAS**
 MON 17 DECEMBER 2018
 7:30PM
SYMPHONY HALL



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Wilde about Christmas

Award-winning theatre company Tall Stories bring a celebration of Oscar Wilde's lesser-known work to Coventry's Warwick Arts Centre this festive season...

Oscar Wilde is best known as a playwright - thanks to such enduring fare as *The Importance Of Being Earnest*, *An Ideal Husband* and *Lady Windermere's Fan* - but he also penned a number of fantastic fairy stories, all of which have been overshadowed by his frequently performed stage plays.

"The fairytales are not very well known," says actor Tom Jude, who's presently working on two Wilde productions for theatre company Tall Stories. "I think he's just thought of as an adult author - and in fact, many of his fairytales were indeed written for adults. He wrote them to tell to his friends at parties. They're moral lessons and are quite unflinching."

Tall Stories' acclaimed productions - *Wilde Creatures* and *The Canterville Ghost* - are the latest in a long line of shows by one of the UK's most successful and predominantly family-focused theatre companies. Formed in 1997, their biggest hit has been their phenomenal adaptation of Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler's *The Gruffalo*. They've since turned several other Donaldson & Scheffler picture books into plays (*The Gruffalo's Child*, *Room On The Broom* and *The Snail And The Whale*), as well as creating productions based on stories by Edward Lear (*The Owl And The Pussycat*), the Brothers Grimm (*Car And No Mouse*), David McKee (*Mr Benn*) and Lemony Snicket (*Latke Who Couldn't Stop Screaming*). Meanwhile, their own original productions have been inspired by everything from artificial intelligence to time travel.

Despite their association with Donaldson & Scheffler, it was Wilde who gave the company their first hit, when they debuted *The Happy Prince And Other Stories* at the 1997 Edinburgh Fringe. And it's to this princely tale that the company have returned for *Wilde Creatures*.

"The story of *The Happy Prince* ends with the townsfolk arguing over who should be the next statue in the town square, who's the most important person - and we've taken that as our starting point," explains Tom, who was raised in Rugby and has worked with

Birmingham Rep, Birmingham Theatre Company and the RSC. "Our story starts with a band of musicians arriving in town. The mayor appears, and he's planned to put up a statue of himself. He talks about this empty space in the town square where *The Happy Prince* statue used to stand. When it had lost all of its jewels, they pulled it down, and in its place the mayor's going to put up a statue of himself, as he thinks he's very important."

The travelling musicians - played by Tom, Matt Jopling, Steve McCourt and Lauren Silver - discover that there could be other potential candidates for the honour. Suggesting friendship as the first of several admirable qualities worthy of a civic monument, the cast recount Wilde's *The Devoted Friend*, featuring a miller who believes he's the perfect friend.

Great knowledge is proposed as another honourable trait, so the story of the learned student from *The Nightingale And The Rose* is also retold. Perceptions of beauty are then explored in the tale of the attractive young princess from *The Birthday Of The Infanta*.

"These people are suggested as candidates for the statue," says Tom, "then, at the end, we ask the audience to decide."

Of course, these being fairy stories, Wilde presents a seemingly positive attribute but then flips the notion to reveal a very different story: a character can be beautiful yet also cruel; friendly yet inherently selfish and inconsiderate; knowledgeable yet unworldly.

"The stories start with us being told who we should admire, but those people are really shallow and there's always somebody else, usually a victim, usually the moral character, who is more admirable - and quite young children absolutely get that," says Tom, who first performed the play to school audiences and was surprised by responses during post-performance Q&As. Recalling chatting to young pupils, he explains: "In terms of who they admired, it was the usual movie stars, pop stars, superheroes; they admired people because they were good singers or strong athletes. But without any prompting, some would just say the names of their friends -

which was really nice - or their parents, or other adults they admired from clubs they attended, like their karate teacher."

Published in 1888 and 1891 in the collections *The Happy Prince And Other Tales* and *A House Of Pomegranates*, Wilde's fairy stories have failed to enter the popular imagination in the same way as other traditional tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella* and *Hansel And Gretel*.

"To be honest, I don't know why they're not better known," says Tom. "*The Selfish Prince* and others are very, very strong and clear stories, quite easy to tell. There's a lot in them. We should tell them to our children more."

Alongside *Wilde Creatures* (aimed at youngsters aged five-plus), the same cast turn their attention to Wilde's comic fantasy, *The Canterville Ghost* - a rare Tall Stories production for older and adult audiences. Telling the story of an American family who move into a haunted house and proceed to give the resident phantom more than he bargained for, Tall Stories once again take a unique approach to presenting Wilde's work.

"We've framed it as a night at a Victorian music hall," explains Tom. "The four of us play musical performers; one of us plays piano, one is a compere, Lauren is a psychic and I'm an illusionist. And each of us plays one of the characters in *The Canterville Ghost* too, and between the chapters we do our acts."

For Tom, visiting Wilde's worlds has been an inspiring experience, revealing inventive stories peppered with colourful characters both real and fantastic, tempered with darkness and light, a strange otherworldliness and comedy aplenty: "I just think they're beautiful," he says, "utterly beautiful and moving. They have a great richness, moral depth and heart."

Tall Stories present *Wilde Creatures* at Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, until Sunday 30 December, and *The Canterville Ghost* at the same venue from Tuesday 18 to Sunday 30 December.



Look for the ★ to save 20% off the cost of your full price tickets when you book equivalent amounts for two or more participating shows at the same time.
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*Ticket prices include a £1.50 booking fee. No booking fee applies if booked online.

Coventry shaken and stirred as popular cocktail bar & restaurant The Botanist opens

Popular cocktail bar & restaurant chain The Botanist has opened premises in Coventry. Situated in the recently developed Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre, the new venue showcases a unique and quirky style, in keeping with its sister outlets across the UK. Cocktail favourites include The Botanist Pornstar, packing a punch with sugar snap peas and passion fruit with rose sugar syrup, strawberry purée, pineapple and lemon juice with Ketel One Vodka and passion fruit liqueur, served with a shot of Prosecco and half a passion fruit. Check it out... then try another!



REVIEW: Tailors Tailor-made for a great food experience

Caramac, boiled egg & soldiers, and fish & chips with curry sauce might sound more tuck shop than fine dining experience, but pay a visit to Tailors in Warwick and you'll see all of the above in a whole new light.

All feature - sort of - on the brilliantly imaginative tasting menu at this compact restaurant (and one-time tailors) in the town's Market Place. The venue has been dazzling diners with its inventive food and wonderful service for over a decade now.

It might not (yet) have a Michelin star, but it does have two AA Rosettes and is lauded by a loyal clientele - it was voted Best Restaurant In Warwickshire in our 2016 Readers' Awards.

Owner-chefs Dan Cavell and Mark Fry continue to develop new creations, even at the ex-

pense of old favourites. Their unique take on Black Forest gateau is much mourned, and my heart sank when I saw that Marathon - Snickers to our younger readers - is no longer among the desserts.

Mercifully its egg & soldiers replacement more than compensates - a splendid concoction of homemade Jersey milk yoghurt (the egg white), mango puree (the yolk) and a shortbread soldier, all presented in an egg shell on a bed of straw. It tastes every bit as great as it looks, which is par for the six courses on the taster menu - £50 to £55 a head, a bargain £40 on Tuesdays, and definitely the best way to experience this wonderful restaurant. You can also add an (ahem) Tailor-ed flight of wine, with glasses to match each dish, for an extra £40. Half measures

are also available for those who need to be up for work the following morning.

After a lovely portion of sour-dough bread with handmade cultured butter, the six courses kicked off with cauliflower soup with black truffle. The dish was served in a dainty mug and looked like an inverted coffee, the rich, dark truffle dotted in the middle of a delightfully smooth white soup.

The combination was divine, and relatively minimalist compared to the following dish of courgette with hay smoked goats curd, basil, agave, sunflower seeds and the most delicate, delicious parmesan crisps. It was a fabulous mix of flavours, textures and colours, with the goats curd and basil an inspired way to liven up the chilled-out courgette slices. The parmesan took it to another level.

The main courses continued in the same trajectory, starting with a wonderfully constructed dumpling dish of melt-in-the-mouth pork shoulder and turnip shavings in a lovely honey & grapefruit faux-vinaigrette (it's made with pork dripping rather than oil, revealed Mark). Somehow managing to be rich and sharp at the same time, it proved to be a truly stunning experience.

The fish & chips with curry sauce - in the form of stone bass, spiced mussel puree, potato

scraps (which looked like rice crispies), apple chunks and sea herbs - was another feast for the senses, mixing wonderful textures (the fish was cooked to perfection), vivid colours and the familiar intoxicating smell of chip shop-style curry sauce.

I've already mentioned the fantastic egg & soldier dessert (a definite highlight), which was followed by a lemon drizzle cake with white chocolate mousse, ice cream and a homemade version of the aforementioned caramac. The dish contained a bit too much fennel for my taste - it's by no means a favourite ingredient - but the delicate cake had a lovely moist texture and the caramac tasted as good as anything I remembered from my youth.

But as much as a visit to Tailors is a cheeky nostalgia trip in terms of quirky dishes and ingredients, the stellar flavour combinations are of the very highest order, and make for a sublime contemporary fine dining experience. And at prices that won't stitch you up... *Steve Adams*

Food:	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Service:	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Ambience:	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Overall value	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
OVERALL	■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Tailors
22 Market Place
Warwick
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50 years in the business

Set and costume designer Terry Parsons talks about his life behind the scenes...



Celebrated designer Terry Parsons has had an incredible career, working extensively in the UK and across Europe for over half a century. During that time, he's lent his exceptional talents to more than 50 pantos. He's now back where it all began in the late 1960s, working on the Coventry Belgrade Theatre's festive production of Sleeping Beauty.

What's On recently caught up with Terry to find out more about his time in the industry...

Tell us about your very first foray into panto design at the Belgrade 50 years ago.

I started on 9 September 1968 as a 'bucket boy', which was a job I won through the Arts Council. I used to arrive at 7am to mix all the paints for the designer/scenic artists, using a thing called 'size' - the most disgusting animal-based glue! Part of the prize was that I had to be given a show to design - and that went so well, they gave me another. The next year I designed the costumes for Cinderella, then the following year I worked on my first full panto - Mother Goose.

What does it mean to you to be revisiting the theatre with Sleeping Beauty in 2018?

It's lovely, and it really is a genuine coincidence that it's 50 years. I couldn't say no, really, could I?!

Does the process you'll follow to take Sleeping Beauty from page to stage always follow the same format?

It's slightly different to how I normally work because on the bigger shows I don't get very involved. I feed it all into the system and don't even necessarily see it because I use trustworthy people who I've been working with for donkey's years. I normally do at least three pantos a year, so there isn't time to be everywhere. It's nice at the Belgrade because it's an in-house team. It's just a question of getting to know them and them getting to know my style.

How has the profession changed during your time in the industry?

Pantomime used to be much bigger, so although I was young and thrown in at the deep end, doing, for example, a Stanley Baxter pantomime in Scotland was as big as it got. Everything was extremely lavish and extremely large! People would come to see Stanley in coachloads because they knew what to expect. The show ran from early December to April and filled all the seats. I think a lot of that was due to star quality but also huge visual expectation. But on the flip side, I designed pantomimes at the Theatre Royal Richmond which were bijoux but beautifully put together. The detail was still there, so they had a huge following.

Whose costumes have you most enjoyed designing?

Probably Danny La Rue's and Stanley Baxter's. Danny and Stanley were both extremely nice but very demanding!

Is the starting point always the same?

It can be very one-to-one - like at the Belgrade - where you chat a lot before you put pen to paper. I then get given a list of scenes and a quick phone call to say what's needed in each scene. That's normally it until costume fittings. Fingers crossed it's usually wow, wow, wow! On a Stanley Baxter panto, the curtain rises in December and your first meeting is in the previous January. The whole of January and February you're going back and forth to Scotland to discuss it, and then you start.

In terms of collaboration, where does the director's influence end and yours begin?

With the smaller regional shows, like this one, it's more personable, and we talked a lot more before I started. This is my first show with director Iain Lauchlan. There's more discussion because the scale means the content is busier. In a bigger panto, you change scenes every four or five minutes, but here, the opening scene is perhaps 15 minutes. It's more about the small details than just setting the scene.

You've spent a lot of time working in Europe. Is there a noticeable difference in the approach to design compared to here in the UK?

Yes, their budgets are huge! As I'm 73, I've had to start saying no to some jobs around Europe. At the start of the year, I was asked to do a production of The Sound Of Music in Norway but said no. It was an 18-month commitment, and with all the commuting, that takes its toll. Those days are gone sadly.

What's been the highlight of your career and who have you enjoyed working with the most?

I've had about five highlights! The first thing is that I've always been in the right place at the right time, so I've never stopped working. I've had a West End career designing 37 shows, I have a foreign career, and two

regional theatres jump out as highlights: the old Leicester Haymarket and the Theatre Royal Plymouth. For many years I also worked for the British Airways Playhouse, run by actor Derek Nimmo. We used to build theatres in ballrooms all over the world, presenting plays as dinner theatre. I travelled the world for 25 to 30 years doing that. So a series of wonderful things linked together. I learned my trade through Stanley Baxter and those like him. I worked with George Lacy when I was 18 - he was my first dame. Also Billy Dainty and Reg Dixon - they're monumental in pantomime. I learned every trick in the book from them. I then went on to work with Les Dawson, Frankie Howerd, Danny La Rue etc. I just sat there and soaked it all in.

What single piece of advice would you offer someone thinking of entering the industry?

I wouldn't want to start now because there are an awful lot of clever people around! I'm very old-school - I still use a pencil and a ruler! Because I was so lucky, I didn't have to struggle, but you just have to get in there and somehow do it. People are coming out of the colleges in large numbers who're hugely talented, so it's extremely competitive. I think designers are underestimated, so I'm very blessed to have one of my models featuring in an exhibition at the new V&A Museum in Dundee. It's the first time I've felt that other people view what I do as an art form.

Did you ever consider moving on from the profession?

No, I've known this is what I wanted to do since I was 11. I joined the amateurs at 13 and somehow I managed to find the college I wanted to go to - Central School of Art, now called Central St Martins. I got in on the spot because of my portfolio of amateur work. I was there for three years and then won the Arts Council bursary at the end, which brought me here. As I'm winding down a little, I want to spend more time with my grandchildren and have plenty of holidays!

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Sleeping Beauty shows at Coventry's Belgrade Theatre until Sat 5 January

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Jools Holland And His Rhythm & Blues Orchestra

Symphony Hall, Birmingham,
Wed 5 - Thurs 6 December

Jools Holland and his acclaimed Rhythm & Blues Orchestra return to Symphony Hall for Christmas, this time alongside Marc Almond (pictured).

Ex-Soft Cell frontman Almond has sold over 30 million records worldwide during his 36-year career, enjoying hits with, among other songs, Touch, Say Hello, Wave Goodbye and the ever-popular Tainted Love.

Jools Holland's well-established BBC TV series has long been an eclectic mixture of styles and genres, showcasing music from across the world. His own ability on the piano is nothing short of immense.

Also performing on this annual UK tour are supremely talented vocalists Ruby Turner and Louise Marshall. Original Squeeze member Gilson Lavis is on drums for the Rhythm & Blues Orchestra.



Def Leppard

Arena Birmingham, Mon 17 December

Forming in Sheffield in 1977, Def Leppard have sold more than 100 million albums worldwide and become one of rock's most influential bands.

Their Birmingham show sees them play much-loved album Hysteria in its entirety, with various other hits thrown in for good measure.



Craig Charles

The Empire, Coventry, Fri 14 December

Popular television actor and DJ Craig Charles is visiting Warwickshire this month with his highly rated Funk & Soul Club. The Coronation Street, Robot Wars and Red Dwarf star has captivated crowds through-

out the UK and Europe, playing at festivals including Glastonbury, Love Box, Park Life, Festival No 6 and Mostly Jazz Funk & Soul, to name but a few.

Gig-goers can expect a mixture of tracks which have usually been covered and remixed by current leading bands and DJs.

Alabama 3

The Assembly, Leamington Spa,
Sun 2 December

Alabama 3 were formed in Brixton in the mid-1990s and achieved international fame with Woke Up This Morning, the title track of smash-hit TV series The Sopranos.

Describing their sound as 'sweet pretty muthaf**kin country acid house music', they leave nobody in any doubt that their fire continues to burn brightly, 21 years after the release of iconic debut album Exile On Coldharbour Lane.

Calan

Huntingdon Hall, Worcester, Sat 15 December

Calan have certainly found their musical niche, showcasing a unique instrumental blend of accordion, fiddle, guitar, Welsh pipes, Welsh harp and the percussive sound of the Welsh clogs. Taking a contemporary approach, they breathe new life into old traditions... Expect a fast-paced and uplifting show from this fresh and vibrant five-piece.

Dreadzone

The Marr's Bar, Worcester, Fri 14 December

Presenting an eclectic fusion of dub, reggae, techno, folk and rock music, Dreadzone formed in 1993, during their early years employing backing vocalists who included Melanie Blatt, Denise van Outen and Alison Goldfrapp.

One of the most energetic, exciting and powerful live bands to emerge from the post-rave scene, they last year released the album Dread Times, tracks from which will feature in this gig.





Izzy Wizzy...

Sooty gets ready to weave his magic
in Wolverhampton

Sooty loves Christmas. Well, at least that's what we think he said. Catching up with the iconic bear and his friend & 'owner', Richard Cadell, What's On finds out what lies in store for audiences at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre this panto season.

In a salubrious hotel room on the outskirts of Wolverhampton sits entertainment entrepreneur Richard Cadell, the man charged with bringing the iconic Sooty to life both on stage and TV.

Regarded by his legion of fans as a national treasure, Sooty this year celebrates 70 years in showbusiness, during which time he's entertained generations of youngsters with mischievous antics, magic spells and not a little assistance from his sidekick Sweep and long-term love interest Soo.

As is perhaps to be expected with someone of such advancing years, Sooty was having an afternoon nap when we arrived at the hotel, leaving it to the affable Mr Cadell to enlighten us about the duo's much-anticipated appearance in *Sleeping Beauty* at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre this Christmas.

"Sooty is of course a very magical teddy bear," explains Richard. "He's also very mischievous and naughty, which gets him lots of laughs from the audience. He'll be using his magic wand and casting his famous Izzy Wizzy spell to help the good fairy - the Lovely Debbie McGee - as she fights her battles with Carabosse and saves *Sleeping Beauty* from the wicked fate that Carabosse has planned for her. He'll certainly have a pivotal role in the story, and we really can't wait to get started."

Produced by panto specialists Qdos, *Sleeping Beauty* promises to be another spectacular success story for the Grand, and although the Qdos team will be responsible for the majority of the content, there's also an opportunity for Richard to showcase his writing talent.

"What's been lovely is that Qdos have given me the chance to make sure Sooty is well served within the story, so we've been able to rubber-stamp all the Sooty things. The Sooty Show is the longest-running TV series in the world, and what's great is that it hasn't changed a bit. People who remember watch-

ing it when they were kids acknowledge this, and what Qdos has allowed me to do is take the traditional stuff that everybody knows and loves and work it into the story so that it makes sense and has a place.

"A lot of people will be coming to the panto just to see Sooty, so it's going to be fun for us to do stuff they remember from their childhood, and hopefully to help them re-live a bit of their youth."

As well as the Lovely Debbie McGee, Sooty is appearing alongside Doreen 'Lazy Cow' Tipton, stalwart pantomime Dame Ian Adams, and the ever-reliable Julie Paton, who'll be showing her dark side as Carabosse.

West End star Oliver Ormson and Bethan-Wyn-Davies play the Prince and Princess *Beauty* respectively - but there's no mention of Sweep and Soo. Does this mean Sooty will have to go it alone on this occasion?

"There's been a great deal of interest in whether Sweep and Soo will be in the show," says Richard, "but panto is full of surprises, and I can guarantee that there'll be millions of surprises in this production. I can't tell you whether or not they'll be there, but wouldn't it be great if they were - and I'm sure the audience would love it. I'll have to speak to Sooty, and to Sweep and Soo's agent, to see whether they're working and what their contractual agreements are over the Christmas period!"

With Sooty's sidekicks at the forefront of our conversation, I ask Richard if he can enlighten us about the relationship between Sooty and Soo.

"People always wonder if something's going on between Sooty and Soo, but they never ask if anything's going on between Sooty and Sweep. What we have to remember is that all three of them are blessed with the same magic as Peter Pan - they never grow old. Sooty is eternally five, Soo is six and Sweep is forever four. So in the way that a five-year-old

and six-year-old could be boyfriend and girlfriend, Sooty and Soo are forever that; an innocent pairing who love each other very much. I must add that Soo can't stand Sweep, although she's very patient and does tolerate him."

Magic is a game-changer in panto, and with Magic Circle member McGee on board, audiences are promised a real spectacle of a show - as Richard points out: "I don't think you can have too much magic in panto, and what Qdos have very cleverly done is align Debbie and Sooty so that their magic is very much a joint effort and they won't be competing against each other."

A professional magician himself, Richard reveals that *Sleeping Beauty* features some really big Las Vegas-style illusions - ones which, at the time of our interview, are being prepared in the States by the same people who provide props for David Copperfield.

Although not wishing to give too much away, Richard does reveal one of the tricks which Qdos have up their pantomime sleeve: "With the help of Doreen Tipton - so no guarantees it will happen! - we're going to attempt the classic sawing-in-half trick live on stage. For the first time in the history of magic, we'll be sawing audience members in half on stage without the aid of boxes or covers. I'm not going to spoil the ending, but with Doreen in tow, anything could happen. This really will be something that you need to see to believe..."

All this talk of magic is the cue for Sooty to wake from his box - just in time for a quick photo before we head off in search of the Lovely Debbie McGee.

.....

Sleeping Beauty shows at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre from Sat 8 December until Sunday 13 January.

A full-page photograph of actress Debbie McGee dressed as the character The Lovely Fairy Crystal. She is wearing a white, off-the-shoulder, ruffled gown with intricate silver embroidery and a matching tiara. She holds a large, ornate silver wand with a starburst top. The background is a vibrant purple with a bokeh effect of white and yellow stars. The text 'Bringing the magic to Wolverhampton' is overlaid in large white font at the bottom left.

Bringing the magic to Wolverhampton

Debbie McGee stars as The Lovely Fairy Crystal alongside Sooty and Doreen 'Lazy Cow' Tipton in the Grand Theatre panto production of Sleeping Beauty

What keeps drawing you back to pantomime, Debbie?

I just love it; it makes me feel happy. I love Christmas, the kids and the families all being out together, having a good time. It really makes me sparkle. There's really something special about walking out on stage in panto - I'm immediately uplifted and have energy. It doesn't matter how tired I am, I can just pull it out of the bag. I love every second.

What's your earliest memory of panto?

I was about five or maybe younger. My dad worked in a factory and for Christmas all of the kids were taken to the Palladium panto. Danny La Rue was the star and I just fell in love with it.

And you've been performing in panto yourself since the mid-'70s...

I think the first one I did was in 1976 at the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury where I played a fairy. It was Sleeping Beauty, the same as we're doing this year.

Have you seen the artform and the audience's expectations change in that time?

Yes, I have. In those days, everyone who was in a panto was a theatre performer. But now, because it sells seats - and there's nothing wrong with it - there will be people from TOWIE or something like on the bill. People who don't necessarily understand theatre and performing and the tradition of panto. It's changed a lot, but I wouldn't say for the worse because people go to see who they like watching on television. I think when I was young, you didn't need to have a name in panto; people just took their kids anyway.

Is pantomime more popular or less popular than it used to be?

I don't know whether more people go, but I know that pantomimes were much bigger when my mother was a kid back in the 1950s and '60s. There were big companies - like Qdos, the one I'm working for in Wolverhampton this year and who really are one of the only ones that do big pantomimes now. I'm delighted to be working for them because it reminds me of what my mum told me about the pantos she went to see as a girl. They were huge.

Do you have a favourite performance moment?

In panto I giggle a lot, so I have lots of those moments that I can look back on and laugh about, but the most memorable moment was about two years before I married Paul (Daniels, the magician). In those days he didn't do panto, and I was playing Maid Marion in Babes In The Wood at the Theatre Royal in Norwich. He told me that he was at a magic convention in Germany, but actually it had snowed and his

plane couldn't take off, so he drove to Norwich. The babes were actually putting a magic-illusion big box, like a wardrobe, in the middle of the stage, and then, as Maid Marion, I would open it and say, "Oh look, the babes have gone!" Paul knew the stage manager well, so he went up and hid in the box side-stage for an hour-and-a-half to play a joke on me! I'd been standing by it talking, and then it was moved on stage with him in it. In the middle of the scene in the second act, I went to open the door to say the babes had gone, and out came Paul. Apparently I jumped about six feet in the air and laughed so much I couldn't get my next line out. Paul just said, "Oh, I'm in the wrong place!" and walked off. Robin Hood then came on with his Merry Men and said my lines for me!

The standard advice for performers is never work with children or animals - but what about puppets?

Well yes, we've done many shows where we've had puppet acts on, but I actually wasn't involved with them, so this is going to be a first for me. But I've worked with Sooty before, and I know we get on very well.

You come across as a very hard-working, conscientious person - so what are your thoughts about working with Doreen 'Lazy Cow' Tipton in this panto?

I'm sure that Doreen and I are going to get on very well because she's already shown me that she's got a great sense of humour. I love laughter and a bit of fun, so I think we'll hit it off brilliantly.

Your panto character is always nice and pure. If you could move over to 'the dark side', is there a particular character you'd like to play?

I don't think I would make a good baddie - I'm not suited to it. I've played fairies, the Slave of the Ring and, when I was younger, Maid Marion or Cinderella. One of the things I love about playing the fairy is that although I have to keep the story going, I can go off-script quite a lot without losing the plot and have my giggly moments with the audience. I'm very much an off-the-cuff performer, so I know that's going to happen here, and it makes it more exciting for me as a role.

Will we see some 'Strictly moments'?

Yes, there will be some dancey moments, let's just say that!

Did the Strictly experience change you in any way?

Strictly changed me in lots of different ways. It's given me a lot more confidence. For such a long time, people thought of me as an assistant, just walking on and off stage. If they saw Paul and me live, they'd realise there was a lot more to me than just that - I became

much more a part of the team in later years. When we did the series on television, it was up to the director, and they would want me a bit in the background. I've had a radio show and presented lots of corporate things, but unless people had been at those events, the image they would've had of me was as an assistant on The Paul Daniels Show. Strictly Come Dancing let the public and everyone else know that there's a little bit more to me than that. They've gotten to know me better now, so that's given me confidence because they can see that there's more talent there than they thought.

You've done a few celebrity things in the past, including MasterChef. Is there anything you wouldn't do?

I like to do things where you're not just sitting around doing nothing, which is why I loved Strictly and enjoyed MasterChef enormously. I'm not a person who sits around at home. I'm good at talking, but I really like getting out and exercising and doing stuff. I think when you're confined in reality shows, in houses etc, it's hard to have any kind of routine.

Are you watching this year's Strictly?

I'm watching it because I'm still in touch with all of them, and I've danced on and off with Giovanni over the year, dipping in and out of his tour, so they're all my mates now. Also I've got a podcast for the Telegraph, which I do every week. I go and record that on Mondays, so I have to know what I'm talking about. I'm absolutely loving watching it.

Do you have any favourites this year, or anyone you feel will go the distance?

I really feel I can't say because they're all my friends - and obviously I'm biased towards Giovanni because we're such good friends now. I just want him to do so well, but I think from the beginning this year there have been so many contestants who've been so good. You've got to entertain the public and keep up a standard of dance, which is why so many like the dark horse that takes over at the last furlong to win. So I think it's really difficult this year. There are so many who're good.

What would be your top tip for this year's celebrity contestants, having gone through the experience yourself?

Just enjoy it. Do your best, put in the hours, and when you go out there on a Saturday night, love every minute of it. It's your one opportunity, and if you have a good time, the audience has a good time too.

.....

**Sleeping Beauty shows at
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Ex Cathedra: Christmas Music By Candlelight

Hereford Cathedral, Wed 5 December; St John's Church, Hagley, Birmingham, Tues 11 December; St Paul's Church, Birmingham, Tues 18 - Sat 22 December

What better way to get into the Christmas spirit than by enjoying an evening in the company of one of the country's finest choral music ensembles?

Under the directorship of its founder, Jeffrey Skidmore, Ex Cathedra is this month presenting its annual and atmospheric Christmas Music By Candlelight event, an evening that features festive favourites from around the globe and across the ages, interspersed with a variety of seasonal readings.

Michael Collins Plays Mozart

Stratford Playhouse, Tuesday 4 December

Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A major really couldn't be in a safer pair of hands than those of Michael Collins (pictured). One of the most complete musicians of his generation, Michael here displays his phenomenal talent in an Orchestra of the Swan concert that also features two of Stravinsky's most engaging American compositions - the Brandenburg-inspired Dumbarton Oaks for chamber orchestra and his Concerto in D for strings. Mozart's Symphony No40 and a new short work by a Conservatoire Composition student complete the programme.



Armonico Consort: The Advent Of Christmas

St Mark's Church, Leamington Spa, Fri 7 December; Malvern Theatres, Fri 21 December



Founded by organist and conductor Christopher Monks in 2001, Armonico are one of the largest organisations of their kind in the UK. Using authentic period instruments, the baroque consort regularly perform with some of the best solo musicians in the world.

This latest concert sees them presenting a programme featuring 'the majesty of Bach and the exuberance of Charpentier' - the perfect way, say Armonico, to begin the festive celebrations.

Sirinu: From Candlemas To Epiphany

St Mary's Church, Warwick, Tues 11 December

Performing early and ethnic music and song, Sirinu have established a reputation for lively and communicative performances.

This Warwick concert sees them getting into the festive spirit by presenting a programme of Christmas music from medieval times, performed on instruments including the flute, gittern, harp, hurdy-gurdy, lute and positive organ.

Mince pies, mulled wine and more recent yuletide music, such as the Coventry Carol, also play a part in creating what promises to be a truly convivial festive atmosphere.

Tenors Un Limited Christmas Show

Artrix, Bromsgrove, Tues 11 December

If you enjoy the classical crossover genre, these fellas pretty much guarantee you an evening to remember. With their sophisticated style and unquestionable singing talent calling to mind the long-ago Vegas days of Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr, Tenors Un Limited are widely known as 'The Rat Pack' of opera. The group was formed in 2002, since which time they've acquired a global fanbase and appeared alongside such Grade A superstars as Sting, Beyonce and Lionel Richie.

This Artrix show finds them turning their attention to the festive season, performing a selection of Christmas songs that includes plenty of firm family favourites.





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David O'Doherty

Birmingham Town Hall, Thurs 6 December

"Unhook your mindbras," says David O'Doherty. "I'm back on tour with a brand new show made up of talking and songs played on a crappy keyboard from 1986." David's jokes include: "I like the Ten Commandments but have a problem with the ninth. It should be: 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's ox - except in Scrabble'."

The Harry & Chris Show

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre,
Thurs 13 December

Family-friendly fellas Harry Baker and Chris Read combine 'humour, melody, poetry and best-matery' to excellent effect.

Presenting what they refer to as comedy-jazz-rap, the pair blend catchy tunes and clever wordplay to sing songs about subjects ranging from panda repopulation to television's Robot Wars.



Tamsyn Kelly

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry,
Fri 7 December

She may not be the finished article, but Tamsyn Kelly is certainly one to watch - as this currently touring show ably illustrates. Entitled Tamsyn Kelly: You're Welcome, it features the Cornish comedian appearing as all manner of quirky characters, including an East European performance artist and a mouthy cockney estate agent.

The show scored a major hit at this summer's Edinburgh Fringe.

Tamsyn's jokes include: "I'm from Cornwall - like, way out in the sticks. Which is convenient as that's also our currency."

Fellow comedian Sukh Ojla is the other half of the double bill for this Coventry gig.



COBO: Live & Unleashed

The Glee Club, Birmingham, Tues 18 December

Now here's a show that should help get you in the Christmas spirit. COBO, standing for Comedy Of Black Origin, makes a welcome return to the Glee Club with a special festive-

season edition. Taking to the stage on this occasion are Dane Baptiste (pictured), Lateef Lovejoy, Mickey Sharma and Marion Davis.

Barbara Nice's Christmas Cracker

Artrix, Bromsgrove, Tues 4 December;
MAC, Birmingham, Sat 15 - Sun 16 December



Everybody's favourite Kings Heath housewife makes a welcome return to light up the festive season. As well as containing more jokes than you'd find in an oversized yuletide gag-bag (does such a thing actually exist?), Barbara's festive shows usually feature a tombola and raffle, no shortage of mince pies, and even the odd special guest or two.

Tom Wrigglesworth

Henry Tudor House, Shrewsbury,
Wed 5 December

Whimsical storytelling and twisted logic, stylishly wrapped in some elegant flourishes of language, are the lifeblood of Tom Wrigglesworth's highly rated act.

Yorkshire-born Tom made a big splash at the Edinburgh Fringe a few years back, since which time he's been ploughing all the usual comedy furrows, particularly those available on BBC

Radio Four. Likened by the Guardian to Mark Thomas in the way he crusades for social justice, 'albeit in a more homely fashion', Tom is here sharing the bill with Dana Alexander.





The Nutcracker

Sir Peter Wright's festive classic returns to the Hippodrome

Created in 1990, Sir Peter Wright's production of The Nutcracker is considered by many to be the finest ever interpretation of Tchaikovsky's magnificent and mesmerising score.

In true Christmas spirit, the story follows a young girl named Clara as she's swept up in a fantasy of soldiers, giant rats, snow fairies, magic and mystery, before finally being transformed into a beautiful ballerina.

What's On recently caught up with three of the dancers playing the ballet's main characters to find out more...

Karla Doorbar from Stoke alternates between playing Clara and the Sugar Plum Fairy...

As a young dancer growing up in Stoke, did you ever dream that you would one day perform a principal role for BRB?

The very first ballet I saw was Sir Peter Wright's production of The Nutcracker at the Hippodrome. A friend of mine was dancing as one of the young children in the party scene, and I remember so badly wanting to be on that stage too. I didn't even know it was possible. It was magical back then, and now here I am trying to recreate the same magic myself... Whilst at

the Royal Ballet School, I was involved in its production of The Nutcracker at the Royal Opera House. Every performance was just as magical as the previous one, and Clara quickly became one of my dream roles. I found everything happening in the ballet just as magical as she does, and that's the same feeling I get every time I return to the role.

Which is your favourite scene?

Act One, the pas de deux between Clara and her prince. There's a lot of drama on stage before this moment, with the tree growing and King Rat appearing from the fireplace. The battle scene between the rats and soldiers creates a lot of tension. Then suddenly the stage is empty and Clara is left alone with the Prince. Everything is quiet, and at this point in the ballet I always feel overcome with emotion. The music for pas de deux is gorgeous.

During the run, you play both Clara and the Sugar Plum Fairy - obviously on different nights. What are the main differences between these two roles?

Whereas for Clara I would very much put the story first, for Sugar Plum your technique has to be flawless. Sugar Plum doesn't actually appear until nearly the end of Act Two, and so that in itself adds to the

pressure. At this point in the ballet, it's Clara's first chance to rest. Clara is on stage for the entirety of the ballet and only disappears when she 'turns into' the Sugar Plum Fairy. Each of the roles comes with its own challenges. Clara has to maintain the energy and sense of wonder for the whole show, and Sugar Plum must appear out of nowhere near the end and deliver a highly demanding pas de deux. The tutu for Sugar Plum is possibly the prettiest costume I've ever worn. It's stunning.

Do you watch or speak to other dancers performing Clara or the Sugar Plum Fairy to get inspiration for your interpretation?

When I first danced these roles, I did of course take inspiration from the other dancers in the company. They're all amazing! I also noticed how different everybody is. Apart from getting the steps right, I think it's important to find your own way of telling the story.

What's your favourite Christmas tradition?

Winter time and Christmas is my favourite time of year! The Christmas lights and trees make everywhere look beautiful. And like most people, I like to spend Christmas with my family.



Principal Momoko Hirata plays the Sugar Plum Fairy on the nights that Karla Doorbar is playing Clara

What's your biggest challenge when dancing the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy?

I would say The Nutcracker is not like any other full-length ballet. In The Nutcracker, you go straight into the pas de deux, which is normally the technical peak, without

having had the rest of the ballet to build up to it. It's very physically demanding, even though it's short.

You've been performing this role for several years. How has your approach changed over time?

It's always different, especially with different partners, but the one thing that hasn't changed is that it never gets easier. There's always something technical to work on, but I try to add to the character each year. It's impossible to reach perfection - it's still a work in progress, even though I've danced it so many times.

What's your pre-show routine like, from doing your make-up to warming up and putting on the costume?

I don't really have a routine, but I do like to feel the stage before the show, so I warm up on stage even if I'm not on until Act Two, like in The Nutcracker. As soon as I put my costume on, I feel like I become the character, and that's where the concentration starts to become more focused.

The Nutcracker is the first ballet many people see, especially children. What's the audience reaction like during the show? Is it important to you to inspire future generations of dancers and ballet lovers?

The audience feels more involved for The Nutcracker, just because of the time of year. People like to celebrate Christmas together, and I can feel that from the audience, as well as from my fellow dancers on stage. A video of this version of The Nutcracker was the first ballet I ever saw, and that really inspired me to become a ballet dancer, so I would be happy if some of the audience who come to watch the show here feel the same way I did.

What's your favourite Christmas tradition?

I'm from Japan, where we don't really have a Christmas tradition, but I like it when they start to play Christmas music on the television and in shops. Sometimes you hear some music from The Nutcracker and that makes me happy.

“ I remember so badly wanting to be on that stage too. I didn't even know it was possible. It was magical back then, and now here I am trying to recreate the same magic myself ” **Karla Doorbar**



Principal César Morales is the Nutcracker Prince

What was your first experience of dancing The Nutcracker Prince like, and how does that compare to your experiences now, after dancing the role many times?

The first time I danced the Nutcracker Prince I was very excited to perform this famous role from the ballet repertoire. Even now, after I've done different versions of the ballet, it's always nice to get back to it.

What's your favourite part of The Nutcracker?

In this version, my favourite part is the first entrance of the Nutcracker Prince after the battle. You are alone with just Clara on stage, with this beautiful music, and all the magic starts to happen.

The Nutcracker Prince dances with Clara and the Sugar Plum Fairy. What's it like dancing with these two characters? What are the main differences between each pas de deux?

It's very different. Clara is a human, discovering many exciting things. The Sugar Plum Fairy is more mature; she's a fairy, so she's beautiful, effortless and magic.

That's the difficult part of the role because technically it's very demanding.

Why do you think audiences love The Nutcracker so much?

I think audiences must love the beautiful dancing, beautiful music and costumes. And also, when The Nutcracker is on, it means that Christmas is coming.

What's your favourite thing about Christmas?

Well, I love to be with my family, but because that's not possible this year, I would say that my favourite thing is to be with my closest friends, my dogs, having lovely food and being by the fire.

.....
The Nutcracker continues to show at Birmingham Hippodrome until Thursday 13 December





Peter Pan

Birmingham Hippodrome, Wed 19 December - Sun 27 January; Albany Theatre, Coventry, Mon 10 - Sat 22 December

Birmingham Hippodrome audiences get the chance to fly away with the boy who wouldn't grow up this Christmas.

Jimmy Osmond takes top billing as wicked pirate Captain Hook in a show that promises plenty of festive cheer and dazzling spectacle. He's joined by the West Midlands' very own Meera Syal, who's making her pantomime debut as the Magical Mermaid, and Union J star Jaymi Hensley in the role of Peter Pan.

One man who's most definitely not wet behind the ears when it comes to treading the festive boards is Hippodrome favourite Matt Slack, who'll be bringing his own special brand of comedy gold to proceedings in the role of Smee.

Britain's Got Talent semi-finalist Sascha Williams also stars, while The Timbuktu

Tumblers will be burning off any festive mince pies with some high-energy acrobatics...

Over in Coventry, the Albany hosts an altogether different version of JM Barrie's classic story, with the highly rated Ceridwen Theatre presenting 'an action-packed festive family treat' that features 'exquisite puppetry, an unforgettable original music score and heroic swordplay'.



Dick Whittington: The Rock And Roll Panto

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Fri 7 December - Sun 6 January

They've done it before and now they're doing it again. Yep, Stafford Gatehouse's oft-used strategy of imbuing their annual pantomime with a real rock'n'roll flavour has proved so popular in previous years that the venue is giving the exact same treatment to its 2018 production. So... they've taken the story of Dick Whittington, stirred in a few time-honoured pantomime favourites and then seasoned liberally with all manner of chart-busting hits. A recipe for success if ever

there was one - so brace yourself for a fabulous festive feast of fun and frivolity.

Cinderella

The Place, Oakengates Theatre, Telford, Tues 11 December - Sun 6 January; Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, Tues 4 - Sat 8 December

Oakengates Theatre is certainly giving Telford's 50th anniversary celebrations a fairytale ending this Christmas. The venue's panto version of Cinderella features CBeebies star Joe Chambers, '90s pop singer Anna Kumble, and EastEnders actor Tony Discipline in the role of Prince Charming...

Birmingham's Blue Orange Theatre is also going to the Ball this festive season, promising a show packed to the yuletide rafters with comedy, music, dancing and audience participation.



Dick Whittington

Lichfield Garrick, Thurs 29 November - Sat 5 January; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sat 1 - Sun 30 December; The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Sat 1 December - Sat 5 January; Prince Of Wales Centre, Cannock, Sat 22 - Sun 30 December

Dick Whittington undertakes his legendary journey to London this Christmas, but not before he's stopped off en route at a number of Midlands theatre venues. These include Leamington's Royal Spa Centre (pictured right), where he'll have to keep his wits about him to steer clear of the evil Queen Rat...

Dick's in danger at Lichfield Garrick too, in a show that finds CBeebies favourite Katrina Bryan co-starring alongside returning panto favourites Sam Rabone and Ben Thornton (main image).

Cannock's Prince of Wales Centre and Tewkesbury's Roses Theatre also play host to the young Mr Whittington this Christmas. Both venues are presenting versions of the story that come complete with all the usual pantomime trimmings.





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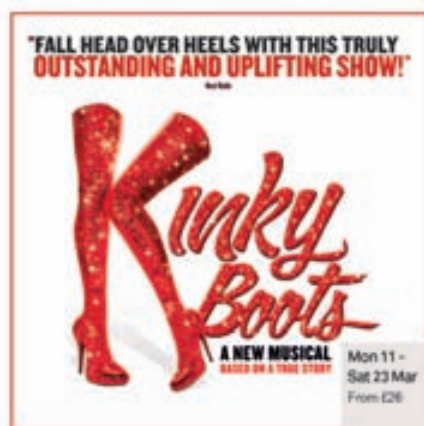
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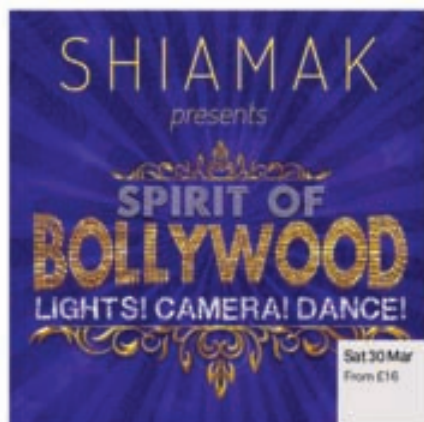
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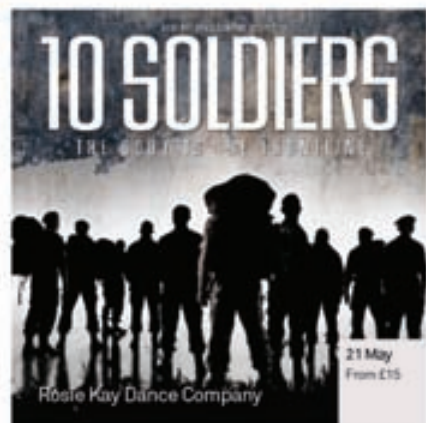
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BENIDORM IN BRUM

British sitcom Benidorm has been enjoyed by TV audiences for over ten years. Featuring a cast of holidaymakers and staff at the Solana all-inclusive hotel, Benidorm received two National Television Awards for Most Popular Comedy Programme in 2008 and 2011 before sadly ending after its tenth series in May earlier this year. However, series creator and writer Derren Litten has adapted his much-loved TV show for stage which is currently touring the UK until April 2019. Ahead of its Christmas run at the Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham, Litten talks to us about the success of the TV show and what audiences can expect from the stage show.



What inspired you to pen the original series of Benidorm?

I never had any aspirations to write and hadn't written before when I was approached to write some material for Catherine Tate's Edinburgh show, who was my best mate at drama school. Following this, I went on to write and perform in Catherine's TV show. It was after the second series that legendary comedy producer Geoffrey Perkins asked me to write my own sitcom. I definitely didn't want to do 'The Derren Litten Show' but he asked me to pen a comedy narrative...I didn't really know what that meant at the time but I started writing a sketch about two middle-aged swingers from Middlesbrough. It was funny but a bit dull basing them in their living room in an obscure suburban house having their swingers AGM so I thought I'd better set it somewhere a bit more exotic. It shows you how my mind works that I didn't set it somewhere like Barbados! I originally set it round a swimming pool - not in Benidorm - just a generic all-inclusive package holiday location. I had not been to Benidorm at this point but had heard lots about it. I also like the single word 'Benidorm' with the number of syllables so that's the reason I called it as such. I wrote two episodes and then when ITV commissioned it, I thought I'd better go and see what it's all about!

Who was the first character/family that you created?

Donald and Jacqueline. I told Geoffrey (Perkins) about them and he asked me to imagine who else would be around the pool so I thought back to some rubbish holidays we'd had as kids and went from there. The next characters I created were the posh couple, Martin and Kate, who had come to the wrong place for their holiday. I thought they would be most horrified by this grubby pair of middle-aged swingers!

Why do you think the series remained so popular for so long?

I don't know. If I knew the secret, I'd write another one! Well I'm trying to actually at the moment. I'll tell you what I thought the secret was and I was completely wrong. If the show ran for more than one series, I thought I'd change the characters; stick with the one family perhaps but change all the others. However after the first series, I found out the characters were so popular that in the end, we just brought them all back! For ten years, we kept most of the same characters and not one person has ever questioned why the characters return for their holiday in the same week each year. As long as they are having fun watching, they don't seem to mind.

What's the reason behind bringing it to the stage?

It seemed a natural progression. A lot of shows historically have done it including Dad's Army, Are You Being Served? and Hi-De-Hi and have had very successful summer seasons. We have been trying for five or six years to bring it to the stage. In series three, we were first asked but the producers wanted to play in arenas and I wasn't keen on that idea. People have watched the show on TV for ten years so why sit at the back of an aircraft hangar and watch it on the TV again!

And what's been the most challenging aspect of bringing it to the stage?

I didn't really think of it as a challenge initially but once I'd finished the script, a lot of people asked how on earth we were going to do it. People who have seen the show said that before it started, they never imagined how it would work but it just does. I have made a living as a writer for the last ten years - one show is luck but ten is a bit more than that. I don't deny the success of the show but I don't know how it all happened!

Is there a particular character with whom you empathise most?

It's got to be Pauline, who is Johnny Vegas' character's sister. When I created her, I got completely obsessed! I once drove to a garage and found some chocolate brazil nuts and I remember thinking Pauline would love these. So I went home with a load, opened a bottle of vodka and started watching a true crime channel thinking of her doing the same thing! I've never been method in acting or writing but I did get a little obsessed with her. She says very inappropriate things, mainly fuelled by alcohol and regret!

Just how close is the stage show to the screen?

It's very close, having six of the main characters taking part. One of the key things that I was worried about was the design. I needn't have though because our designer, Mark Walters, has created the most ingenious set. When you watch a touring show, you don't expect revolves etc but we have one! One minute you're in reception, characters come on dancing with beach balls and towels, they disperse and you're in the hairdressers, Blow'n'Go. It's seamless and so slick.

And how much persuading was needed to get the stars from the show to pack their cases and head out on the road?

Very little. I drew up a list of people I wanted to be in it and I knew vaguely what the story was going to be about but was ready to adapt if they weren't available. However, they all

accepted. We didn't just work together in Benidorm, we lived together so we're very close. Like any other family, we love and hate each other. It's very sad to think that at the end of the tour in Canterbury, that will be it.

Is there any possibility of ITV bosses having a re-think and us seeing a new series of Benidorm on our TV screens anytime soon?

I don't know. The thing is, television loves a comeback. Birds of a Feather came back after ten years or so but if I wait that long, some of this lot will be dead! I'd never say never but I doubt it. It would be lovely to say that the DVD box set is out now with ten series displayed in a lovely suitcase. For the stage show, I specifically didn't want the production to be filmed because part of the enjoyment is that it is a theatre show, not a television show and you would lose about 50% of being in the theatre within touching distance of the cast and enjoying it in the way it was intended. I think it probably might be the end but don't cry that it's ended, smile because it happened.

Tell us about your cameo appearance in the show?

I play Derek Pickles, also known as gay Derek, who has been mentioned in the show throughout the years. Jacqueline always spoke about Big Donna and Gay Derek, characters you don't see like Captain Mainwaring's wife in Dad's Army. I like the idea of characters who you form a picture of in your own mind. Big Donna's ashes were brought to Benidorm for Donald and Jacqueline to scatter but we've never seen Gay Derek and he's quite an important role throughout the show.

Where's your favourite holiday destination?

Well, obviously Benidorm! I've got a house about 15 minutes away and I go there a lot. I bought it about five years in to writing the series and I love it. I enjoy being close to the madness but also a short taxi ride away! However, Benidorm is like my second home so my favourite holiday destination is probably New York. I've always felt I could live there but if I spent as much money as I usually do there on holiday, I'd be bankrupt within a month!

.....

Benidorm Live runs at the Alexandra Theatre from Monday 3 - Saturday 29 December



Pinocchio comes to life for Christmas!

Academy students join professionals in a new festive-season production

Birmingham's Old Rep Theatre was created to foster new talent - and now, more than 100 years after it opened, the historic venue is showcasing a Christmas production by local performing-arts students.

Birmingham Ormiston Academy's (BOA) fourth festive-season show at the Old Rep is a new musical adaptation of classic children's tale Pinocchio. Opening on 17 November and running until 30 December, the production features 24 students, five professional actors and a team of production staff.

BOA's Christmas shows - they've previously produced *Treasure Island*, *Wind In The Willows* and *Alice In Wonderland* - are a key component of the Academy's strategy for giving young people opportunities to be on stage and experience live theatre. And where better to present their productions than in one of the UK's most revered theatres?

Formerly managed by Birmingham City Council, the Old Rep was opened in 1913 by Sir Barry Jackson as the home for Birmingham Repertory Company. The venue came under BOA's management four years ago and is providing students with the chance to tread the same boards as Peter Brook, Laurence Olivier and Peggy Ashcroft.

"When we took over the running of the Old Rep in 2014, the theatre was dark most of the year but did have a Christmas show," says BOA's executive principal and CEO, Gaynor Cheshire. "We really wanted to make it a vibrant space and introduce young people to the theatre, both on stage and in audiences.

"Our four Christmas shows have given our students the opportunity to be involved in productions with 60 to 70 performances, and in a theatre which is a real gem in the city."

Students double up on roles, with two people playing each part but in different casts. They also have opportunities to contribute to the technical elements of the show, and to gain experience in marketing and social media.

"What's important is that youngsters have the chance to work with professional actors, a professional director, a professional choreographer, a professional musical director and other professional roles," says Gaynor. "This is an opportunity offered by BOA each Christmas, but it's also about giving the wider community the opportunity to see good-quality theatre. More than 45,000 young people have come to see our Christmas shows over the past three years, so these productions are about the audience and community as well.

"We hold workshops for schools which have bought tickets, so their children get to learn

at least one of the songs and some of the movements - our 'armography', as we call it. I remember when we did *Treasure Island*, so many of the schoolchildren came dressed as pirates. They will be able to get involved and dance along to *Pinocchio* - but I'm not sure what they'll be wearing!"

Launched in 2011, BOA is an independent state-funded academy which specialises in creative, digital and performing arts. Sponsored by the Ormiston Trust and Birmingham City University, it runs courses for around 1,000 students from across Birmingham and the West Midlands.

"Our work with the Old Rep is a process," explains Gaynor. "We've done a five-year development plan and we're reaching the fifth year, so we will now revisit that plan. We're definitely on a journey, and would like to look at opportunities for involving more young people in live performances at the Old Rep."

The venue also holds a special place in the heart of *Pinocchio* director Alec Fellows-Bennett: "I go back 25 years, if not more, with the Old Rep, back to the days when the main Rep Theatre ran its stage school there. I attended from about the age of 11. As soon as I learned the venue was back in the hands of a producing theatre company, ie BOA, I wanted to come back.

"The link with the Academy chimes with the ethos of the Old Rep. When Barry Jackson built the theatre, he built it as a training ground for young talent, so a large educational establishment using the Old Rep as a place where new students and performers can learn from professionals makes for a perfect match."

Alec is determined to ensure that the students are at the heart of his production of *Pinocchio*: "The young people are integral to the show - they're not simply a chorus. Every single actor has at least one character they're following all the way through. They aren't there just to support the professional cast; they're part of the cast.

"There's no other organisation I know of that does what BOA is doing in such a fully integrated way, where the students form part of the company. I know there are lots of shows where they have children or young people in the cast, but it's not to the same level as this show."

And the youngsters also gain valuable experience from being involved in a run of nearly eight weeks...

"It's a professional run," says Alec. "You learn an awful lot when you put on a show in

your school for a week, but you learn something very different when you're putting on a show for weeks and weeks. That's when you learn about stamina and commitment - and you need that if you want to work in theatre. Most of the students are in their first year, and this really sets them up for the future. This will probably be the first long run they'll have done."

Alec played Ratty in the BOA production of *Wind In The Willows*, and the Mad Hatter in *Alice In Wonderland*.

"I hop between acting and directing," he says. "If there's a character who would be fun to play, then I act, but if there's a story that I think I would really like to tell, I step back and direct."

Pinocchio is one such story - the tale of a wooden puppet who wants to be a real child.

"To me, *Pinocchio* is the perfect story for this theatre," says Alec. "If you asked a young child to draw a theatre, they would pretty much draw the Old Rep's auditorium. The idea of a story where toys come to life and it's all make-believe is the perfect story for a classic theatre like this one."

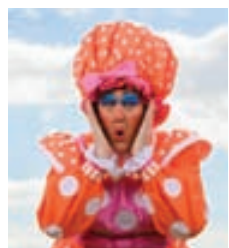
And, he adds, if audiences are coming expecting the famous Disney movie on stage, they're in for a real surprise.

"The show treads the line between a 'Disneyfication' of *Pinocchio* and a 'pantofication' of the story. It's not silly, but it's also not had the harder bits taken out. It keeps the story and its moral. What we really wanted to do was pick out the key things that emphasise the moral journey that *Pinocchio* goes on in this story - ideas about free will, making your own decisions, blindly following others, being overly cynical. There are characters to represent all of these things, and they take *Pinocchio* off on a definite moral journey."

While Alec is proud to be working with BOA students, he has this message for potential audiences.

"What I would say to audience members is not to think of this *Pinocchio* as a 'student performance'. It's a professional show, in the centre of the city, in a very well-respected theatre, and there's nothing going on to that stage that says 'school' or 'college' show. As far as we're all concerned, this is a professional show where many of the cast happen to be students. And it's a Christmas musical which audiences will enjoy."

.....
Pinocchio shows at the Old Rep, Birmingham, until Sunday 30 December.



Sleeping Beauty

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, until Sat 5 January; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Sat 8 December - Sun 13 January; The Core, Solihull, Fri 14 December - Sun 6 January

The Belgrade's exemplary reputation when it comes to presenting top-notch panto magic is sure to be further enhanced by their 2018 production - written and directed by Iain Lauchlan (bottom left). Indeed, we're so confident you'll be wide-eyed with excitement that we'll even wager our best antique spinning-wheel that the only person in the auditorium who *won't* be wide awake will be the ever-so-sleepy title character herself!... And joining Sleeping Beauty in the land of nod is most definitely *not* an option at the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre (main image) either, with the venue's 2018 pantomime pro-

duction looking set to be every bit as energised and entertaining as any of its illustrious predecessors.

Strictly Come Dancing favourite Debbie McGee leads the cast as the Good Fairy, with Richard Cadell and Sooty ensuring the laughter count is suitably high for younger audience members. Also getting back in the Grand Theatre panto saddle is 'queen of the Black Country' Doreen Tipton, who's this year playing herself, and pantomime favourite Ian Adams, slapping on the rouge to star as The Queen...

Meanwhile, if daring duels, doting dragons, lavish sets and bucketloads of comedy are on your festive wish list, then saddle up your reindeer and head for The Core (pictured right), where we're assured that all of the aforementioned will be in plentiful supply.

Mother Goose

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, until Sun 6 January

It may not be one of the most frequently performed pantos, but Mother Goose nonetheless has plenty going for it, including the opportunity to make all manner of eggstravagantly funny and eggcruciatingly unfunny egg-related jokes. The show stars Theatre Severn's favourite panto Dame, Brad Fitt, in the role of Mother Goose. BBC Radio Shropshire's Eric Smith also features in the cast.



Jack And The Beanstalk

Artrix, Bromsgrove, Sat 15 - Sun 23 December

Jack and his mam are hard-up and have no choice but to take their cow to market to raise some cash. However, Jack being Jack, he decides to trade her in (the cow, that is, not his mam) for a handful of magic beans, which then grow into a real ogre of a beanstalk... If you're up for a bit of fe-fi-fo-fumming this fabulous festive season, a trip to Artrix should be right up your beanstalk, with the hugely popular All & Sundry ensuring that not every encounter with a grumpy cash-counting ogre need end in tears.

Robin Hood

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 14 December - Sun 6 January



'Son of the Potteries' Jonathan Wilkes dons the tights to star as Sherwood Forest's most famous outlaw in this ever-popular panto tale. Homecoming hero Jonathan's a festive fixture at the Regent Theatre nowadays, and is set to play an inevitably significant part in making Robin Hood one of the region's must-see pantomimes this Christmas. He's joined by big pal and fellow Regent panto regular Christian Patterson, who'll be giving his usual larger-than-life performance in the role of Friar Tuck.

Expect all the usual panto elements in the Malvern Theatres offering, including oodles of hearty thigh-slapping, super-singalongs aplenty and slapstick comedy galore. Su Polard heads the cast as the Wicked Queen... Stratford Playhouse's version, meanwhile, promises mayhem, malarkey, comedy capers and audience participation in abundance... Sound good? Then, heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it's off to the panto you go...

Aladdin

Bedworth Civic Hall, Sat 1 - Sat 29 December; Palace Theatre, Redditch, Mon 10 December - Sun 6 January

A perfect story for an evening of family entertainment finds street youth Aladdin trying against all odds to win the hand of the beautiful princess - and being helped in his endeavours by the mystical genie of the lamp... In Redditch, Strictly Come Dancing favourite Robin Windsor (pictured below) plays the genie. The dashing handsome Michael Auger, from Britain's Got Talent singing group Collabro, takes the title role. Magic carpets at the ready...



Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs

Malvern Theatres, Thurs 13 December - Sun 6 January; Stratford Playhouse, Fri 21 - Mon 31 December

The fact that Snow White is a 24-carat classic of a fairytale means that a pantomime version is always a surefire winner - and there are a couple of Christmas crackers to enjoy in the Midlands this festive season.



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Elf - A Christmas Spectacular

Genting Arena, Birmingham,
Thurs 20 - Mon 24 December

This stage adaptation of Will Ferrell's hit festive movie stars pop legend David Essex and Love Actually favourite Martine McCutcheon. The original stage version of the show played to record-breaking audiences at London's Dominion Theatre in 2015/16.

"The big special effects that we have lined up are incredible," reveals David Essex. "They include a giant sleigh that will fly across the arena, an indoor snow blizzard and lots of skating, which all adds to this perfect Christmas story."

Nativity! The Musical

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent,
Wed 5 - Sat 8 December



The Regent gets into the Christmas spirit with this hit stage musical based on the popular film franchise.

The show is written and directed by Debbie Isitt, who also created the movies. "I've always believed that Nativity! would make a fantastic stage musical," says Debbie. "It's so full of joy, the children are so sweet and funny and the songs so catchy that it lends itself to being the perfect Christmas musical. The songs really do change the dynamic. It gives you much more insight into the characters and their backstories. And the emotions are more intense, like with the love story between Mr Maddens and Jennifer - it feels even bigger now because they're singing duets."

Beauty And The Beast

Sutton Coldfield Town Hall,
Tues 11 - Mon 31 December

As handsome princes go, the Beast is an ugly one. So he imprisons the stunningly gorgeous Beauty and hopes that she'll fall in love with him, despite his shockingly grumpy ways and frightfully furry features.

But help is at hand for Beauty - and this being a pantomime, it not surprisingly comes in the shape of a rouged-up Dame with a ridiculous name...

A Christmas Carol

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon,
Tues 4 December - Sun 20 January

The RSC's version of this yuletide tale proved so popular last year that the Company is wisely giving it another outing. Of all Charles Dickens' festive stories, A Christmas Carol reigns supreme. The covetous sinning of the miserly Scrooge, the eternal hope offered by Tiny Tim, and the eerie visions of redemption - visiting Ebenezer in the shape of three seasonal ghosts - all combine to give the tale a real olde worlde charm. The RSC production has been penned by David Edgar, whose previous work for the Company includes an award-winning adaptation of Dickens' Nicholas Nickleby.



Maid Marian And The Merry Men

Swan Theatre, Worcester, Mon 3 December -
Sun 6 January

With Robin Hood being too much of a soppy romantic to take on the evil Sheriff of Nottingham and thwart her dastardly plans, it falls to the seriously feisty Maid Marian to save the day... Worcester Repertory Company present their cleverly reimagined version of the ever-popular Sherwood Forest legend - and even throw in a pantomime Dame for good measure!



Wind In The Willows

New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme,
until Sat 26 January

Artistic Director Theresa Heskins' stage adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's much-loved riverside tale ably demonstrates the way in which one life can command the full attention of three others! Mole, Badger and Ratty simply don't have time for any of their own interests - they're far too busy having to look after their reckless and irrepressible friend, Toad...



The Wizard Of Oz

The REP, Birmingham,
until Sun 13 January

This classic story from the pen of L Frank Baum has been delighting children for over a century. A marvellous mix of magic, mayhem and munchkins, it tells the story of Dorothy Gale and her unexpected trip over the rainbow to the wonderful land of Oz. There, she meets the scarecrow, the tin man and a cowardly lion, heads off on a journey along the yellow brick road to find the Emerald City, and has more than one unpleasant encounter with the Wicked Witch of the West. If ever a ruby-slipped girl was in need of a wizard...

The Tiger Who Came To Tea

Birmingham Town Hall,
Wed 26 December - Sun 13 January

The tea-guzzling tiger is back in town, dropping in on Sophie and her mum just as they're settling down for an afternoon cuppa... Adapted by David Wood OBE from Judith Kerr's 1968 book, this 55-minute show features singalong songs and boasts plenty of magic - not to mention a big, stripey tiger, of course! Suitable for youngsters aged three and older.



Rudolf

MAC, Birmingham, until Mon 31 December

Puppetry, songs, laughter and fun are among the family-friendly ingredients being promised by Pins And Needles as they return to MAC to offer up another festive feast of theatrical magic. Having previously scored yuletide hits with their productions of Raymond Brigg's Father Christmas and The Bear, the talented company this year turn their attention to Santa's most famous reindeer. Rudolf has landed in a zoo, and her big red

nose and flashy antlers are making her less than popular with the other reindeer. And as if that's not bad enough, she also can't quite shake the feeling that she really should be somewhere else, on some kind of big snowy adventure... Expect your children to be suitably enchanted.



Emily Brown And The Thing

Birmingham Hippodrome,
Mon 17 December - Sat 6 January

When young Emily Brown and her best pal - toy rabbit Stanley - discover a Thing crying outside their bedroom window, they can't help but try to assist him... Adapted from the book of the same name by Cressida Cowell, the author behind the famous How To Train Your Dragon series, this witty and heartwarming children's show is presented by the ever-magical Tall Stories theatre company.



Pinocchio

Old Rep, Birmingham, until Sun 30 December

The legendary tale of the wooden boy with a disappointing propensity for telling porky pies - to the detriment of his fast-growing proboscis - is here presented as the Old Rep's Christmas treat for families. Carved by lonely toymaker Geppetto, Pinocchio - accompanied by his trusty Cricket companion - heads out on an exciting journey, eager to discover what it will require of him to become a real boy. But there's plenty of danger lurking in wait for the adventurous friends, not least in the shape of the less-than-entirely-pleasant puppet master, Mangiafuoco...

Wilde Creatures

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry,
until Sun 30 December

"Wilde Creatures has four acting-musicians who're extremely talented and manage to bring Oscar Wilde's stories to life in a very imaginative and modern way."

So says Toby Mitchell, the co-founder of Tall Stories, the theatre company bringing this high-energy celebration of Wilde's classic fairytales to Coventry this Christmas.


"There's a seamlessness to the productions. Although the stories are complex and there are lots of scene changes and props, we make it flow so that it doesn't seem clunky. But that doesn't mean it's simple to achieve... We may look like swans from the front, but you don't realise how much furious paddling is going on behind the scenes!"

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more festive favourites from around the region

Theatre



Benidorm Live

Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham,
Mon 3 - Sat 29 December

Set aside the holly and the ivy in favour of soaking up sunshine and sinking down sangria!

Jetting back into the Midlands region this month, Darren Litten's currently touring stage show is based on the hit ITV1 comedy series that's been delighting viewers for more than a decade now.

Benidorm regulars Jake Canuso (Mateo), Janine Duvitski (Jacqueline), Adam Gillen (Liam) and Sherrie Hewson (Joyce Temple-Savage) are all present and correct, in a production that promises to bring plenty of sizzling summer fun to the frost-bitten festive season.

Crimes Of The Christmas Pudding

Lichfield Garrick,
Wed 5 December - Sat 5 January

An alternative festive-season comedy for adults, Crimes Of The Christmas Pudding takes its inspiration from sources as diverse as Agatha Christie and the Jason Bourne movies. The show features a talented cast of four who between them play an impressively wide range of thoroughly quirky characters. Award-winning theatre company New Old Friends present the production, making a welcome return to the Garrick following a sell-out success at the venue last Christmas.



It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play

Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham,
Thurs 6 - Mon 24 December

Telling the story of how the well-meaning but down-on-his-luck George Bailey finally finds out that life is worth living - thanks to the timely intervention of a guardian angel - Frank Capra's fabulous festive film, It's A Wonderful Life, is widely considered to be one of the greatest Christmas movies ever

made. The story is here staged as a live radio play taking place on Christmas Eve 1946. Five actors gather together in a studio for the broadcast, ready to take on the challenge of playing dozens of characters and vividly bringing to life the sleepy American town of Bedford Falls.

The Canterville Ghost

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Tues 18 - Sun
23 December & Thurs 27 - Sun 30 December

Oscar Wilde's creepy comedy about ghostly goings-on in a horribly haunted house is here given the Tall Stories treatment, and comes complete with vaudevilian performers and magical illusions.

"We did a preview of the show in London," recalls Tall Stories' Toby Mitchell, "to what we thought was going to be a very tough crowd of South London school kids. But because we took them seriously, they were completely on board. It was joyous to watch because we thought they were going to be quite a demanding audience - and actually they were a demanding audience - but what they were demanding was a good story, which we like to think is what we gave them."



The Nightingales

Malvern Theatres, Mon 3 - Sat 8 December

Royal Shakespeare Company associate artist Christopher Luscombe directs Gavin & Stacey star Ruth Jones in a bittersweet comedy from the pen of William Gaminara. When a motley crew of acapella singers meet Maggie, their lives are changed forever. Before too long, the new arrival is urging them to try their luck auditioning for Britain's Got Talent. But reaching for the stars is no walk in the park, and life-changing experiences don't always work out in the way that's expected...



Alice In Wonderland

Crescent Theatre, Birmingham,
Tues 4 - Sat 15 December

A timeless classic telling the magical and decidedly topsy-turvy story of a little girl who falls down a rabbit hole and discovers a weird world, Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures In Wonderland first made its way onto the stage in 1886. Since that time it's been adapted for the theatre on countless occasions and in all manner of ways, including as a ballet, a musical, an opera and a traditional pantomime. With its cast of nonsensical and amusing characters, including the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, it invariably makes for a great Christmas show.

Let's hear it

As preparations for the festive season continue, we take a look at some of the lovely ladies who'll be gracing Midlands theatres in the region's Christmas productions...



VICTORIA McCABE

as Jill in Mother Goose at Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, until Sun 6 January

Victoria is thrilled to be returning to Shrewsbury this Christmas to play Jill in Mother Goose. Her previous pantomimes at Theatre Severn saw her starring as Cinderella and Snow White.

MEERA SYAL

as Magical Mermaid in Peter Pan at Birmingham Hippodrome, Wed 19 December - Sun 27 January

Meera is sooo looking forward to performing alongside her teenage idol when she makes her panto debut at the Hippodrome this month. Reflecting on her formative years growing up in Wolverhampton, Meera admits to having been a fan of Jimmy Osmond, who'll be playing Hook alongside her Magical Mermaid in Peter Pan. "He's probably sick of people telling him that they had him on their wall, but I did," says Meera. "Sadly I never got to see one of The Osmonds' concerts. Unless you were lining up the day before, you didn't really have a chance. It was crazy! I wasn't anywhere near getting tickets, but now I'm performing with him! How bizarre is that?" Meera's also glad that she's playing a nice character in her first panto, rather than a villain: "I want the kids to love me. Being a villain requires an awful lot of shouting and energy. I want to be the nice one." Her only reservation is how she's going to navigate visits to the loo with her mermaid tail in tow - but we reckon that's nothing more than a wee problem to contend with...



DEBBIE McGEE

as The Lovely Fairy Crystal in Sleeping Beauty at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, from Sat 8 December to Sun 13 January

The Lovely Debbie McGee is no stranger to pantomime, or to playing the good fairy in Sleeping Beauty. In fact, she made her panto debut in the role at Canterbury's Marlowe Theatre back in 1976. Since then, Debbie's been a regular on our TV screens, and last year impressed Strictly viewers with her dancing prowess. This latest panto outing will see her swishing her wand and sprinkling her fairy dust to help a certain yellow bear with his magic tricks - and we're pretty sure you'll get to see her twinkle toes in action too!



for the girls!



CHISARA AGOR

as Dorothy Gale in *The Wizard Of Oz* at The REP, Birmingham, until Sun 13 January

London-born actress, singer and theatre maker Chisara is the person charged with taking REP audiences on a journey along the yellow brick road to the Emerald City this Christmas. As farm girl Dorothy Gale, Chisara will introduce us to a scarecrow needing a brain, a tin man looking for a heart and a lion lacking in courage. "I can't wait to follow the yellow brick road to The REP this Christmas," she says. "It's exciting to be part of such a bold reimagining of what we know of the 1939 film of *The Wizard Of Oz*. Being here at The REP and having a role like this says there's no rulebook - anyone can dream big and be Dorothy."

LORNA LAIDLAW

as Wicked Witch in *The Wizard Of Oz* at The REP, Birmingham, until Sun 13 January

Probably best known as Mrs Tembe in *Doctors*, Birmingham-born actress Lorna can't wait to play The Wizard/Professor Marvel in this new staging of L Frank Baum's classic story. "This is so exciting!" says Lorna. "I can say with my hand on my heart, 'There's no place like home'! And for me, The REP is home, and has been for well over 30 years."



DOREEN TIPTON

as Nurse Doreen in *Sleeping Beauty* at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Sat 8 December to Sun 13 January

Returning to the Grand for a third year, Doreen 'Lazy Cow' Tipton needs no introduction to Black Country audiences. Regarded as a 'regional treasure', Doreen's accolades include Best Newcomer at the Great British Panto Awards and Midlands Personality of the Year, as voted for by What's On readers. Her perpetual malapropisms and local references are always a good source of entertainment, and we have it on good authority that as Nurse Doreen she'll be taking part in a major feat of magic on the Grand Theatre stage. Now *that's* something we can't wait to see...

For a full list of pantos and festive shows across the Midlands, visit whatsonlive.co.uk

LISA DAVINA PHILLIP

as Fairy Goodfeather in *Mother Goose* at Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, until Sun 6 January

With a string of credits to her name - Oda Mae Brown (*Ghost The Musical*), Mrs Phelps (*Matilda*) and Rafiki (*The Lion King*), to name but a few - Lisa Davina Phillip here returns to the familiar role of Fairy Goodfeather, having made her debut in the part last year at Sheffield's Lyceum Theatre. We're hoping Lisa can conjure up sufficient fairy magic to counteract the evil intentions of Demon Vanity, in what promises to be another egg-cel-lent pantomime offering from Evolution Productions.



Let's hear it for the girls...



ISABEL GAMBLE

as Cinderella at The Place, Oakengates Theatre, Telford, Tues 11 December - Sun 6 January

A graduate of the Guildford School of Acting, Isabel is 'very excited' to be playing her favourite Disney princess in Telford. A real all-rounder, her credits include Babe in The Pyjama Game, backing vocalist on ITV's Britain's Got Talent, and a stint as a backing dancer on BBC's Strictly Come Dancing.

MELISSA BROWN-TAYLOR

as Princess Belle in Sleeping Beauty at The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, until Sat 5 January

Having previously appeared in All Or Nothing - The Mod Musical at the Belgrade, Melissa is looking forward to returning to the theatre to play her first ever princess. "It's been fun trying out a new role. In the past I've played the Genie in Aladdin, which is obviously a very different part, so it's been really interesting getting used to the conventions of playing principal girl."



ANNA KUMBLE

as Fairy Godmother in Cinderella at The Place, Oakengates Theatre, Telford, Tues 11 December - Sun 6 January

Best known as pop singer Lolly, Sutton Coldfield-born Anna has been performing since the age of five - and although she's got numerous West End credits under her belt (including Starlight Express), it's pantomime that's her favourite discipline. This year taking part in her 20th festive show, Anna not only acts but also choreographs, and on occasion works as associate director.



FINLEY GUY

as Maid Marion in Robin Hood at the Regent Theatre, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 14 December - Sun 6 January

A graduate of the Wilkes Academy of Performing Arts, Finley's credits include dancing for Little Mix on The X Factor and at the Brit Awards. Previous panto appearances include Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs in Middlesbrough and Cinderella at the Regent Theatre in 2016, in which she played the title role.

KELLY AARON

as Alice in Dick Whittington (below) at the Prince Of Wales Centre, Cannock, Sat 22 - Sun 30 December

Kelly graduated from London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in 2006, since which time she's amassed an impressive CV. Credits include a UK tour of Hobson's Choice, the role of Julia Matthews in an Italian tour of New York Mystery, and Perdita in Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale at Cornwall's Minack Theatre.



GEORGINA NEWTON

as Alice in Dick Whittington (left) at the Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sat 1 - Sun 30 December

Georgina recently tweeted: "So excited to be playing Alice in Dick Whittington at the @spacentre, and to be playing alongside two Leamington pantomime legends! What an honour. Here's to the most magical Christmas yet."





MARTINE MCCUTCHEON

as Jovie in *Elf - A Christmas Spectacular*
at Genting Arena, Birmingham,
Thurs 20 - Mon 24 December

Best known as Tiffany in *EastEnders* and Natalie in *Love Actually*, Martine McCutcheon is overjoyed to be out on tour with this hit West End and Broadway musical version of the blockbuster festive film. "I'm absolutely delighted to be appearing in this wonderful show," says Martine. "Elf is without doubt one of the all-time great Christmas movies, so I hope audiences in Birmingham will love this production just as much as the film!"



SHERRIE HEWSON

as Joyce Temple-Savage in *Benidorm*
Live at Alexandra Theatre,
Birmingham, Mon 3 - Sat 29 December

Bringing more than a ray of sunshine to the Alexandra stage this Christmas, Sherrie Hewson and her *Benidorm* co-stars promise to camp it up and have fans of the hit TV show grinning from ear to ear.

KATRINA BRYAN

as Fairy Bowbells in *Dick Whittington*
at Lichfield Garrick until Sat 5 January

Recognised by younger audiences for playing Nina in hit CBeebies series *Nina And The Neurons*, Katrina Bryan's no stranger to pantomime, having played Alice Fitzwarren in a previous production of *Dick Whittington*. On playing Fairy Bowbells this time round, Katrina says: "I suppose it's a natural progression to go from leading lady to playing the fairy godmother. I've loved panto ever since I left drama school, and I'm very much looking forward to appearing in *Dick Whittington* after such a long time."



EVA CRAWFORD

as Princess Rose in *Sleeping Beauty*
at The Core, Solihull,
Fri 14 Dec - Sun 6 January

In addition to having numerous panto credits under her belt, Laine Theatre Arts-trained Eva is developing an impressive film career, including an appearance in *Demi*, a movie being sponsored by Raindance Film Festival.



NIC LAMONT

as Carabosse in *Sleeping Beauty*
at The Core, Solihull, Fri 14 Dec - Sun 6 January

One half of comedy duo *The Twins Macabre*, Nic Lamont certainly prefers life on the dark side. Credits include the West End run of comedy parody *Graeme Of Thrones* and the lead role in comedy horror film *Egomaniac*. Nic also created the role of Nation McKinley in the highly acclaimed *Shock Treatment*, the sequel to *The Rocky Horror Show*.



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Mary Poppins Returns CERT PG

Starring **Emily Blunt, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Ben Whishaw, Emily Mortimer, Julie Walters, Dick Van Dyke, Colin Firth, Meryl Streep, Angela Lansbury**
Directed by **Rob Marshall (USA)**

You get one musical sequel with Colin Firth, Julie Walters and Meryl Streep and another comes along five months later. Here, the musical numbers have been penned by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman (of *Hairspray* fame) and the film jumps forward 25 years to 1935. Jane and Michael Banks are now grown-up and when a family tragedy strikes, Mary Poppins floats back into their lives to lend a spoonful of sugar. Emily Blunt replaces Julie Andrews in the role and, following her turn as the Baker's Wife in Rob Marshall's *Into The Woods* (2014), has shown that she can belt out a tune along with the best of them. Marshall is perhaps the best musical director alive, earning his stripes on the Oscar-winning *Chicago*, as well as the underrated *Nine* (2009) and the exuberant *Into The Woods*. We expect great things.

Released Fri 21 Dec

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Film highlights released in December...

Creed II CERT tbc

Starring **Michael B Jordan, Sylvester Stallone, Tessa Thompson, Florian Munteanu, Dolph Lundgren, Brigitte Nielsen**
Directed by **Steven Caple Jr (USA)**

You just can't beat nostalgia. Now that Adonis Creed, the son of Apollo Creed, is crowned light heavyweight champion - thanks to the guidance of Rocky Balboa - he finds himself defending his title against Viktor Drago, the son of Ivan Drago (Dolph Lundgren), who killed his father. This is the eighth instalment in the *Rocky* franchise.

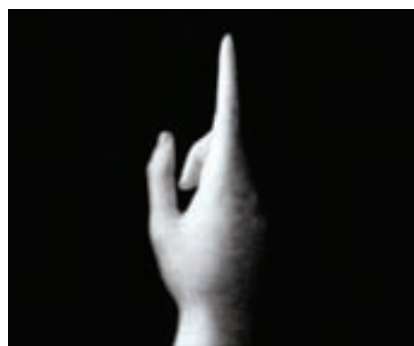
Now showing



The Image Book

CERT 15 (84 mins)

Directed by **Jean-Luc Godard (Switzerland)**



In his day, Jean-Luc Godard was the enfant terrible of the French New Wave and a critics' darling. Now 87, the director is as experimental as ever and his new film, an examination of the modern Arabic world, won the Special Palme d'Or at this year's Cannes festival.

Released Sun 2 Dec

The Old Man & The Gun

CERT 12a (93 mins)

Starring **Robert Redford, Casey Affleck, Danny Glover, Tika Sumpter, Tom Waits, Sissy Spacek, Elisabeth Moss**
Directed by **David Lowery (USA)**

In his final role, Robert Redford plays the real-life escape artist and career criminal Forrest Tucker who, at the age of 70, broke out of San Quentin and embarked on a series of heists. Following *King Of Thieves*, it's been quite a year for true-life geriatric lawlessness.

Released Fri 7 Dec



Return Of The Hero

CERT 12a (90 mins)

Starring Jean Dujardin, Mélanie Laurent, Noémie Merlant, Christophe Montenez, Féodor Atkine

Directed by Laurent Tirard (France/Belgium)

The heartbroken fiancée of a Napoleonic officer is given some solace by the letters she receives, although they're actually written by her sister... This historical comedy is in exceptionally good hands, as the writer-director Laurent Tirard previously brought us the innovative and most amusing Molière (2007) and Up For Love (2016), among others.

Released Fri 7 Dec



Sorry To Bother You

CERT 15 (111 mins)

Starring Lakeith Stanfield, Tessa Thompson, Jermaine Fowler, Danny Glover, Armie Hammer, and the voice of Lily James

Directed by Boots Riley (USA)

Get ready to blow your mind. In a parallel universe, or just another version of Oakland, California, an African-American telemarketer finds new-found success when he starts to use a 'white voice' over the phone. The sci-fi comedy marks the directorial debut of Boots Riley.

Released Fri 7 Dec



Tides

(99 mins)

Starring Jon Foster, Robyn Isaac, Simon Meacock, Jamie Zubairi

Directed by Tupaq Felber (UK)

Shot in black-and-white on the canals of Southern England, Tupaq Felber's debut-drama focuses on four fortysomething

friends who gather for a boozy reunion. But beneath the cheeky banter, a darker mood begins to surface...

Released Fri 7 Dec

White Boy Rick

CERT 15 (111 mins)

Starring Matthew McConaughey, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jonathan Majors, Bruce Dern, Piper Laurie, Richie Merritt, Bel Powley

Directed by Yann Demange (USA)

Incredible but true: In 1980s' Detroit, Richard 'Rick' Wershe Jr (Merritt) was a street hustler, an undercover police informant and a drug tsar. And all before he turned sixteen... From the Paris-born director of the authoritative and uncompromising Northern Ireland thriller '71 (2014).

Released Fri 7 Dec



Aquaman

CERT tbc

Starring Jason Momoa, Amber Heard, Willem Dafoe, Patrick Wilson, Dolph Lundgren, Nicole Kidman

Directed by James Wan (USA)

The sixth instalment in the so-called DC Extended Universe, this big-budget superhero fantasy gives the eponymous amphibian hunk centre stage for the first time. He previously appeared in Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice (2016) and Justice League (2017) and is now taking his rightful place as lord of Atlantis. But he's got a struggle on his hands...

Released Fri 14 Dec



Free Solo

CERT 12a (100 mins)

Directed by Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin (USA)

El Capitan is a notorious rock face, a 3,200-foot granite monolith on the north side of Yosemite Valley in California. This award-winning documentary chronicles the attempt by Alex Honnold to climb it - without a rope. Expect vertigo.

Released Fri 14 Dec

Mortal Engines

CERT tbc

Starring Hugo Weaving, Hera Hilmar, Robert Sheehan, Jihae, Ronan Raftery, Stephen Lang

Directed by Christian Rivers (New Zealand/USA)

The first fictional film from Peter Jackson since his last Hobbit outing, this is a big-

budget adaptation of Philip Reeve's 2001 novel (the first of a quartet). The post-apocalyptic fantasy was scripted by Jackson along with his regular collaborators Philippa Boyens and Fran Walsh.

Released Fri 14 Dec



The House That Jack Built

CERT 18 (152 mins)

Starring **Matt Dillon, Bruno Ganz, Uma Thurman, Siobhan Fallon Hogan, Sofie Gråbøl, Riley Keough** Directed by **Lars von Trier** (Denmark/France/Germany/Sweden)

A brutal analysis of the modus operandi of a serial killer over the course of 12 years, this really divided the critics. Over a hundred of them walked out of the premiere at Cannes this year, while those remaining gave the film a 10-minute standing ovation. To use the new parlance, this really sounds sick.

Released Fri 14 Dec

Lizzie

CERT 15 (105 mins)

Starring **Chloë Sevigny, Kristen Stewart, Jay Huguley, Jamey Sheridan, Fiona Shaw, Kim Dickens** Directed by **Craig William Macneill** (USA)

That's Lizzie as in Lizzie Borden, the notorious spinster who, in 1892, was accused of axing her father and stepmother to death. Whereas the famous nursery rhyme claimed she "gave her mother 40 whacks," the film sets the record straight.

Released Fri 14 Dec

Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse

CERT tbc

With the voices of **Shameik Moore, Hailee Steinfeld, Mahershala Ali, Jake Johnson, Liev Schreiber, Lily Tomlin** Directed by **Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey and Rodney Rothman** (USA)

If you haven't had enough of Spider-Man or big-screen cartoons of late, you're in luck as the new Spider-Man film is computer-animated. However, this Spider-Man ain't Peter Parker, but a whole new alter ego called Miles Morales, a half-Puerto Rican/half-African-American kid from Brooklyn. You see, in the Spider-Verse, there can be more than one Spider-Man. Enjoy.

Released Fri 14 Dec



CRITIC'S CHOICE

Disobedience

CERT 15 (114 mins)

Starring **Rachel Weisz, Rachel McAdams, Alessandro Nivola, Anton Lesser, Bernice Stegers, Allan Corduner** Directed by **Sebastián Lelio** (UK/Ireland/USA)

Ronit Krushka (Rachel Weisz) is the daughter of a rabbi in a North London Orthodox Jewish community. However, having been shunned by her family, she now works as a photographer in New York. Then, when her father dies, she returns to London to attend

his funeral and finds a number of ghosts from her past catching up with her, including her childhood confidante Esti (Rachel McAdams) who is now married to a mutual friend. Based on the award-winning novel by Naomi Alderman, who grew up in an Orthodox Jewish environment herself, the film received glowing reviews from the critics, who particularly praised the performances of Weisz and McAdams.

Now in cinemas

Papillon

CERT 15 (133 mins)

Starring **Charlie Hunnam, Rami Malek, Yorick van Wageningen, Eve Hewson, Roland Møller, Tommy Flanagan** Directed by **Michael Noer** (Malta/Montenegro/Serbia/USA)

When the Parisian safecracker Henri Charriere was framed for murder, he was imprisoned on the notorious penal colony of Devil's Island in French Guiana. His self-penned book, *Papillon* (1969), became an instant bestseller and was previously filmed in 1973 with Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman.

Released Fri 21 Dec

Bumblebee

CERT tbc

Starring **Hailee Steinfeld, John Cena, Jorge Lendeborg Jr, John Ortiz, Jason Drucker** Directed by **Travis Knight** (USA)

A prequel to *Transformers* (2007), this is the sixth chapter in the sci-fi series and centres on the robotic superhero of the title. It's 1987 and the iron giant finds refuge in a Californian junkyard and in the friendship of a teenage girl (Steinfeld).

Released Fri 26 Dec

Holmes And Watson

CERT tbc

Starring **Will Ferrell, John C Reilly, Rebecca Hall, Rob Brydon, Kelly Macdonald, Ralph Fiennes, Noah Jupe** Directed by **Etan Cohen** (USA)

Yes, of course we are talking about the celebrated residents of 221B Baker Street, Sherlock. This angle on the brilliant sleuths takes a more comic approach as they attempt to thwart the assassination of the queen (Victoria, played by Pam Ferris).

Released Fri 26 Dec



Jimmy Osmond

*Hooked on panto and enjoying being
One Bad Apple in Peter Pan!*



If you're 50 or older, your earliest memory of Jimmy Osmond will probably be when he appeared on television screens in the early 1970s, a chubby-faced nine-year-old belting out the chart-topping number for which he remains most famous, the classic Long Haired Lover From Liverpool. Thirty-six years later and with a varied career behind him - including reality TV show appearances on series including I'm A Celebrity - he's reaching for the stick-on moustache to star as Captain Hook in Birmingham Hippodrome's pantomime production of Peter Pan. What's On caught up with him to find out more...

You have a reputation for being a really nice guy, Jimmy, so what's the appeal of playing a villainous character like Captain Hook in pantomime?

Oh, I love it. This is my eighth panto. It took me a while to convince them that I really wanted to be a baddie. This is my third time being a baddie, and my favourite baddie is this, Captain Hook. I put in the teeth, put on the moustache, and you don't even recognise me when I'm done.

What's your favourite Hook moment?

I haven't seen the actual script yet, but I know about some amazing effects that we're going to do. My favourite moments are singing my hit records, but we twist them a bit. Instead of Crazy Horses, it's Crazy Pirates etc. I think part of pantomime is learning to make fun of yourself a bit, to have a laugh and to push yourself - it's a very physical show, this one.

How does prepping for panto differ from any of your other stage roles?

I've done a lot of musical theatre, so I'm used to learning scripts. I grew up doing these slapstick comedy bits on the Andy Williams television series. There was a lot of music and tap dancing and all that stuff, and that's what panto is, so that's why I think I'm one of the only Americans who gets it.

What's the general American consensus on this very British tradition?

I tried panto in America, just as a test, and wow, we had to tell them that they had to boo when the baddie comes out and stuff. That's what the amazing thing about playing Birmingham is - it's the biggest panto in the world really, and you guys, and me too, were raised on panto, so we get it. It's in our DNA, and you can't force that. There's been a few of my American friends who get it, like David Hasselhoff and The Fonz, Henry Winkler - he was Captain Hook a couple of times - but not

many have really understood it. I just love it. I'm here about six months a year, so I feel like I'm British.

Can you recall your first pantomime?

I'd just got out of the jungle - I hadn't known anything about the jungle, so that was quite an experience! - and the next thing I knew I was getting thrown into my first pantomime. It was in Northampton, it was Cinderella, and I played Buttons - it was a great production. I thought, wow, I really like this. I love being booed - you wouldn't think that, but being booed is like the greatest compliment of them all. When you look out into an audience and you see a cross-section of people and they're all having fun, it's great. These pantomimes are written so intelligently that they speak to every demographic, and the effects are amazing too. It's great fun just to be a part of it. People forget their troubles for a couple of hours. It's not a job, it's just great fun. Two shows a day, 70-something shows here in Birmingham - it's a lot, and you can't fake it; you have to love it, and I really do.

You've appeared on numerous reality TV shows, including, as you mentioned, I'm A Celebrity... Which show best revealed the real you, and did you learn anything about yourself in the process?

People ask me why I take those chances, and you know what - I've learned something every time I've done them. They've all been different. Pop Star To Opera Star, I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here! and Masterchef - they were the top three for me. During every one of those, I made friendships that have lasted. The rule I have is that you never go on one of those shows with anything to sell. I think if you do, you compromise who you are. It's been great for me because when I do a concert tour, like I'm doing now before the panto, I get touch points from people of all ages. Somebody may have watched me on Masterchef, someone else may have watched

me grow up on the old variety shows, but when you hit the stage, if you have any touch points with people, you make instant friends. It's a really special thing that you can only do after being around a long time - like an old penny like me who keeps showing up, right?

What's your all-time favourite panto, and if you could play any other character, which would you choose?

My favourite panto character is what I'm doing, by far. My favourite panto is the biggest panto of all, which is also what we're doing, right here at Birmingham Hippodrome! I've been here before. I've done Chicago and Grease and I've done my own concerts here. This is such a pro theatre - they really care about the community, and when you see the set and the effects, they really blow your mind. I just have to keep pinching myself with my hook that I'm going to be eaten by a crocodile the size of Mount Rushmore! That's pretty cool. Qdos do such an amazing job producing these shows along with Birmingham Hippodrome. It really is an honour to be a part of the biggest pantomime in the UK. How did that happen?!

What are your plans for the future?

Some more of my '70s jukebox shows - they're great fun. I'm a '70s guy and I can't seem to shake it - nor do I want to, because I love all that music. People come along and they're dressed all fancy. I own a theatre in America - it's a 2,100-seat theatre, the Andy Williams Theatre - and I produce around 400 shows a year. I'm in around 100 to 150 of them. It's a lot, but I love what I do! I never thought showbiz would last for me. I started when I was three and here I still am, doing new, fresh, fun things. I think I'm hooked...

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Peter Pan shows at Birmingham Hippodrome from Wed 19 December to Sun 27 January

OFF TO NEVERLAND!



Yes, it's that time of year again... when Birmingham Hippodrome outdoes itself by presenting a 'bigger and better than ever' pantomime production! On this occasion, the theatre's festive offering is based around JM Barrie's classic story of Peter Pan. What's On caught up with the show's director, Michael Harrison, and panto favourite Matt Slack to find out more....

The boy who never grew up and his pesky pixie sidekick, Tinkerbell, make a welcome return to Birmingham Hippodrome this Christmas. Audiences can expect to be whisked off to Neverland with Wendy, John and Michael Darling, to share in adventures awash with pirates and liberally sprinkled with fairy dust.

"A panto has to be like a great big glossy variety show," explains Peter Pan's director, Michael Harrison. "We have to put on a production we know the audience will want to see. They want to laugh, be wowed by special effects and dazzled by scenery. This does mean bending and crafting the story - there's not a magical mermaid in the original, for instance. There was no acrobatic troop in Neverland either, but in our show we have the Timbaktu Tumblers. There might have been a drunken pirate somewhere on board Captain Hook's ship, but he wasn't doing acrobatics on the deck like Sascha Williams - who was a Britain's Got Talent semi-finalist - will be."

Michael freely admits that when it comes to producing a pantomime, he's not the biggest fan of JM Barrie's classic adventure: "I've put off doing Peter Pan because I've never really liked the story. I don't like the section starting off in the nursery because it always seemed a bit like a school play. Instead, we've done the whole nursery section on film. It's all projections that show going through the nursery window and seeing the children. Then we set the story on the roof, and that's where Peter Pan comes in with Tinkerbell to meet the kids before they fly off to Neverland."

Another key aspect of any pantomime's success is choosing the right performers. This year sees the return of Hippodrome favourite Matt Slack alongside comedy writer and actress Meera Syal, Union J star Jaymi Hensley, and the legendary Jimmy Osmond.

"The best people in pantomime are those who're funny by just being an extension of themselves," says Michael. "If you put on a funny voice or do a naff walk, it never really works. Funny is at its best when it's real. Performing in a panto is an art form - it's no different to being an opera singer or ballet dancer. For example, Mark Rylance is brilliant at what he does at the Globe; that's the

same as Matt Slack being brilliant at what *he* does. They're no different talent-wise, it's just that they operate in different ways."

Michael also believes it's essential that the show's comedy stars, like Matt, have the opportunity to contribute to the creative process: "It's vitally important that Matt is involved every step of the way because a panto is about two things: magic and comedy. I can take care of the magic with planning the special effects, sets and lighting. But the comedy has to come from the performers, so it's vital that their input is there. I have to look at the overall structure of the performance, but Matt will come to me with new routines or changes and I see what we can do with placement."

Some of pantomime's finest moments are born out of the rehearsal process and added to the show at the eleventh hour - as Matt Slack explains: "That kind of adrenaline-fuelled pressure does sometimes make the best stuff. Interesting ideas can pop into my head at any point, whether it be September during rehearsals or the start of December in the dress runs. Like last year, when I did the dance-off with Danny Mack - which proved to be a massive hit with the audience - it took a long time to really 'feel' it. You can't really put performances like that on paper. They come from bouncing off each other in rehearsals."

This year, Matt plays Captain Hook's right-hand man, Smee - but Matt's version of the character comes with a twist: "Smee is always Captain Hook's sidekick. In our version, Mr Smee happens to work for the Darlings and follows them to Neverland to watch over them. It just so happens that when he lands there, the first person he meets is Captain Hook, but he spends the show going back and checking the kids are okay. For my status here at the Hippodrome, I've got to be the good guy. What's really exciting about Smee is that he's a swashbuckling adventurer, and I slot into that role very well. It's almost like Smee is partly just me and partly a performance, so that's fun."

Matt is thrilled that he's able to return to Birmingham Hippodrome year after year: "It's a lovely venue for comedy. There are always many more adults in the audience than

you'd expect, and they want to laugh properly too. That's why it's not just cheesy old pantomime here. We like to keep it modern and fresh for everyone. I think this is the number-one venue for pantomime, and I hope I keep coming back for many more years. It's incredible that I've had the opportunity to create the following that I've got here, and from my point of view, what's not to like? I come out and whatever I do, they love! That kind of popularity is just a great privilege - I'm very lucky."

Matt also doesn't mind working over Christmas: "Some people would say it's unfortunate that our busiest time is the festive period, but personally speaking, it allows me to have time off in the summer. I'd rather be working hard in the theatre when it's cold weather to make families' Christmases extra special. I like being a part of their traditions."

Birmingham Hippodrome makes the magic of pantomime suitable for all when it hosts a relaxed performance on Wednesday 23 January. On this particular day, the show will be specially adapted to cater for people with an Autism Spectrum Condition, sensory and communication disorders or a learning disability.

"It means a lot to me because I have an autistic nephew," says Matt. "I know how hard it is for a family to bring an autistic child to the theatre. It's great that we create a space where they won't be frowned upon for shouting out or moving around. We don't adapt that much of the performance. We just get on with it and let the audience members do what they have to do. It's important that the performance isn't patronising; they're not stupid, they just need that space to feel comfortable in the theatre. All we do really is just change lighting, maybe remove some sound here and there, or add some extra explanation in the performances. They do it so well here, and it's so successful. I think it's the nicest day of the whole run and, certainly for me, the most rewarding."

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Peter Pan shows at Birmingham Hippodrome from Wednesday 19 December to Sunday 27 January.

Haroon Mirza

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham,
until Sun 24 February

"I don't wish to place any demands on someone present with the work," says Haroon Mirza of his Ikon show, an exhibition which fills the gallery space with moving imagery, sculptural installation and electronic sound. "If one spends time, they will hear and see more. If one thinks and delves, then ideas, concepts, methodology, points of reference and narrative will hopefully emerge, but that's not something I wish to control."



Amy Sharrocks

Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum,
until Sun 24 February

Live pieces and sonic artworks exploring Leamington Spa as a site of water are the focal point of this first major survey of Amy Sharrocks' artistic output.

The Camden-born, Sorbonne-educated sculptor, photographer and artist creates works which investigate the architecture of a moment; ephemeral and intangible pieces that evaporate or are 'just barely there'.

The exhibition brings together photographs of Amy's numerous live works with her own photos of water. It also includes a number of previously unseen drawings and prints, a series of works looking at the making of clouds and the movement of air, and a number of pieces exploring, among other subjects, risk, daring and shame.

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In the Wings: New Perspective
Moments captured by two Birmingham Royal Ballet dancers turned photographers.
© Tyrone Singleton
The Face of Suffrage
Photographs from the suffrage movement. Complementing an installation at New St.
Co-produced by GRAIN, Maud Arncliffe-Sennett c.1908. From the LSE Library.
Once Upon A Time - A Visual History of Pantomime
Artists Craig Earp and Danny Lloyd respond to and rework the pantomime archive.
Credit: Craig Earp, Danny Lloyd @Attuned.
birminghamhippodrome.com/visualarts
Birmingham Hippodrome, Hurst St, Southside, B5 4TB

Women Power Protest

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, until Sunday 31 March

An exhibition marking a century since women won the right to vote, Women Power Protest brings together modern and contemporary art to celebrate female artists whose works have explored themes of protest, social commentary and identity. Comprising pieces drawn largely from the Arts Council Collection, the exhibition aims to raise awareness, provoke debate and prompt viewers to reflect on the changes which have happened for women during the last 100 years...



Visions In Stone: Gilbert Ledward RA

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, Sat 8 December - Sun 31 March

Award-winning sculptor and Royal Academy trustee Gilbert Ledward was seconded to the Ministry of Information as a war artist in 1918 - a fact which makes this much-heralded celebration of his work particularly relevant, taking place as it does in the centenary year of the First World War armistice. The show is being presented as part of the Royal Academy's 250th anniversary celebrations.



Looking At Animals

The Barber Institute, Birmingham, until Sun 10 February



Subtitled Perspectives On The Natural World, the Barber's Looking At Animals exhibition features works of art from the 16th to the 20th century, including pieces by artists as diverse as Rubens, Gericault, Delacroix and Franz Marc. As well as exploring a wide range of representations of animals, the display also acts as a starting point for a new gallery trail, encouraging visitors to check out 'the other creatures that lurk within the Barber's collection!'.

Hand Drawn Action Packed

Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Sat 15 December - Sun 3 March

The work of 10 international artists is featured in this brand new exhibition, exploring the ways in which drawings can tell complex stories via the simplest of means. Contributing artists include Marcel van Eeden, Rinus Van de Velde and Otobong Nkanga, all of whom have created works specifically for the show. The featured pieces, which contemplate subjects such as human relationships, geography, politics and mythology, showcase a range of media, from traditional pencil and charcoal to modern methods of animation.



Marcel Dzama_A Time Will Come or Delilah and Goliath

Cézanne: Montagne Sainte-Victoire

Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, until Sun 20 January

Paul Cézanne's Montagne Sainte-Victoire With Large Pine is a masterpiece of the Post-Impressionist era.

The painting was produced during the late 1870s and brilliantly showcases how Cézanne's approach was changing the way in which people were thinking about art.

The Aix-en-Provence-born painter is nowadays viewed as the artist whose work formed a bridge between Impressionism and Modernism, with both Matisse and Picasso having acknowledged the profound effect which his output had on their own creativity. Cézanne painted Montagne Sainte-Victoire on numerous occasions throughout his career, very much viewing the mountain as a symbol of home. The painting is on loan to the Herbert from the Courtauld Gallery in London.



Have yourself a very merry Christmas at Selfridges Birmingham

If Christmas sparkle means splashing out on luxurious presents for family and friends, then Selfridges Birmingham is the one-stop destination for extraordinary gifts.

From decadent diamonds and exquisite timepieces to sumptuous hampers and exclusive pieces that can't be found anywhere else, well-heeled and generous spenders can go to town on their loved ones this festive season.

For the foodies

Personalisation is a great way to show that you've put some care and attention into selecting a gift for your loved one. Selfridges is the exclusive destination for personalised Veuve Clicquot Champagne gifts (£56.99). Bearing the famous Clicquot Yellow label, it comes in a signature arrow gift tin, which can be personalised with the recipient's hometown, a special city or a name.



For the ultimate foodie gift, Selfridges Birmingham luxury gift boxes and hampers are a must. The limited-edition Wolseley Christmas Hamper (£349) is a memorable gift that brings a taste of the legendary cafe-restaurant to your home. Enjoy a bottle of The Wolseley Medoc 2011, The Wolseley Sancerre 2016, as well as teas with silver-plated tea strainer and caddy, jam, marmalade, hot chocolate, truffles and a copy of *Breakfast At The Wolseley* by AA Gill.

For her

Who wouldn't love a designer bag this Christmas? This gorgeous glitter Harlow satchel by Mulberry (£1,195) adds sparkle to any outfit.



This special edition Chopard Happy Sport watch (£8,850) - which celebrates its 25th anniversary - is a Selfridges exclusive. The stainless steel case has a contrasting 18ct rose-gold bezel, while mobile diamonds and sapphires float around the blue mother-of-pearl dial. It's finished with a glossy alligator leather strap.

This stunning Valentino flared cuff sequin dress (£6,700) will ensure the recipient is red carpet ready for any VIP occasion - perfect for any festive or New Year's Eve party.



For the home

Know someone who's burning the candle at both ends? Give them a reason to relax at home and buy them a gorgeous home fragrance. Diptyque's trio of candles has three scents in limited edition designs (from £30) - or for a real treat, buy its luxury advent calendar (£320).



For the beauty obsessed

From skincare that will provide TLC after a night out to dramatic make-up for the ultimate party, Selfridges Birmingham's renowned beauty hall on Level 3 is the place to head to for the best selection - and there's plenty of exclusive products and limited editions to choose from. If you're not sure what brands your beauty lover would love to open on Christmas Day, why not treat them to the first Selfridges Beauty Lovers Selection Box (£70), filled with full-sized and travel-sized products from unique and new brands from its Beauty Workshop.



For him

For those who like a bit more bling, this Valentino sequin-embellished satin bomber jacket (£5,290) will ensure he stands out in a crowd this Christmas.



This Dark Lord eau de parfum by Kilian (£285) is exclusive to Selfridges and comes in a gorgeous box. It has notes of leather, vetiver, jasmine, rum, bergamot and pepper, creating an unmistakable fragrance.



For the little ones

Why should mum and dad have the best accessories? This Monster faux-shearling and vintage check satchel by Burberry (£450) doubles up as a rucksack and has adjustable shoulder straps.



Unicorns are still big news - and this year they're joined by more fantasy creatures. Think mermaids and fairies in all shapes and sizes, with prices from just £1 to £3,600. Exclusive highlights include Jellycat's swan princess (£18 and £30 for the large) and Hansa's animatronic Pegasus, which has a 5'7" wingspan (£900).



Smartway's officially licensed Range Rover Sport ride-on electric car (£550) has working lights, a horn at the steering wheel and MP3 player, and can be driven using the pedal and wheel.



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Magical Lantern Festival
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Birmingham Museums



Ice Skate Birmingham

Eastside City Park, Birmingham,
until Sun 6 January

Ice, ice, baby! Ice Skate Birmingham is back. Voted one of the best outdoor facilities of its kind in the UK, the ice rink attracts thousands of skaters across the festive period. Visitors will

be able to skate whatever the weather, as the rink is covered with a weatherproof roof. For those who aren't so keen to take to the ice, the nearby Ice Lounge offers a wide selection of food & drink to enjoy. Also on site is the Birmingham Big Wheel and a children's four-storey fun factory to keep the whole family entertained.

Magical Lantern Festival

Birmingham Botanical Gardens,
until Tues 1 January

Returning to the grounds of Birmingham Botanical Gardens, the Magical Lantern Festival is bigger and better this festive season. The popular event is not only a celebration of Christmas but also of Chinese culture and heritage, with an array of larger-than-life hand-sculpted lanterns on display throughout the gardens. Street food & drink, plus a merchandise marquee where you can buy yourself a souvenir, also feature.



Santa's Winter Wonderland

The Snowdome, Tamworth,
until Monday 31st December

Real snow? Check. Real animals? Check. The big bearded man himself? Check. Santa's Winter Wonderland brings festive fun to families for a 14th magical year. Visitors can explore Santa's Christmas snow trail, take a walk through the enchanted forest, enjoy a game of snowballs and hitch a ride on a sledge. The less-adventurous can watch all the fun and games from the promenade walkway - whilst over in the animal village, there's a chance to get 'up close and personal' with Santa's reindeer and other furry friends.

Toy Collectors Fair

NEC, Birmingham,
Thurs 27 December



Britain's biggest toy fair makes its way to Birmingham this month to showcase a huge array of collectables. From diecast models by Corgi and Dinky through to numerous TV and film-related items, this one-day event offers plenty of interest for enthusiasts. Expert toy valuers are on hand to assess visitors' items for free. So if you have a particular piece that you'd like to know a bit more about - or that you're maybe intending to sell - why not take it along and get it valued? Who knows, you may be pleasantly surprised...

Children's Victorian Christmas Santa Trail

Tamworth Castle, Sat 8 - Sun 9,
Sat 15 - Sun 16, Sat 22 - Sun 23
December

The Victorian household of Tamworth Castle is readying itself for the arrival of a very special guest... Visitors can take part in a series of seasonal activities, including making Christmas pudding with the castle's cook, decorating the tree with the mistress of the house, and joining the stablehand to find carrots for the reindeer. There's also the chance to track down Santa in his grotto.





Victorian Christmas

Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge, Sat 8 - Sun 9 and Sat 15 - Sun 16 December

Plenty of Victorian festive cheer is on offer at Shropshire's Blists Hill Victorian Town this month, as residents busy themselves with preparations for Christmas. Visitors to the award-winning site can enjoy seasonal music from bands and choirs, experience

some festive-style entertainment - including a singalong with carol singers - and partake in a spot of Christmas shopping in the town's retail outlet. And just in case all of the above isn't quite enough to ensure your kids are happily entertained, Father Christmas himself - together with his reindeer - will be on hand to hear younger visitors' last-minute gift requests.

Lichfield Winter Wonderland

Beacon Park, Lichfield, Fri 14 December - Fri 4 January

Lichfield's first Christmas market promises plenty to keep visitors engaged and entertained. Taking centre stage is the wonderland ice rink - open every day for anybody who fancies getting their skates on - and a host of food & drink traders selling traditional festive treats. Music from DJs, family discos, a comedy festival, cinema screenings and the chance to enjoy a reading of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol also feature in an impressive debut line-up.



Christmas in the Home

Black Country Living Museum, Dudley, Sat 1 - Sun 2, Sat 8 - Sun 9, Sat 15 - Sun 16, and Wed 19 - Mon 24 December

Step back in time to experience Christmases past - from the Victorian era through to a wartime festive season - as you explore the Black Country Living Museum's 26 acres of shops and houses. Visitors can take part in a variety of traditional Christmas activities - including creating paper decorations and penning their very own Christmas card - as well as enjoying a classic movie or two in the venue's 1920s Limelight Cinema.

Thinktank Elf Hunt

Thinktank Science Museum, Birmingham, Sat 1 - Sun 23 December

The elves are hiding around Thinktank Science Museum this month, making sure that visitors to the venue behave themselves over the festive period. So why not grab yourself a finder's sheet and see if you can locate the elusive little creatures as you make your way around the museum? If you're successful, you'll receive a special prize!



Ebenezer's Christmas Carol

Tudor World, Stratford-upon-Avon, Wed 5 - Fri 21 and Mon 24 December

Back by popular demand, Dickens' classic seasonal story, A Christmas Carol, is here told in the author's own inimitable words on a lantern-lit journey through a haunted house. Meet the miserly Scrooge, the haunting Jacob Marley, the entire Cratchit family, Mr & Mrs Fezziwig and a whole host of memorable characters (not forgetting the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future), all magically brought to life by genial ghost guide Ebenezer Crouch.





Meet Santa

National Sea Life Centre, Birmingham,
until Sun 23 December

In an experience unique to Birmingham this festive season, the National Sea Life Centre is bringing the North Pole to the city's Brindleyplace.

Visit the Antarctic Ice Cave, take your little ones to meet Santa and receive a free gift from him, and check out a family of cheeky Gentoo Penguins in the exclusive setting of the Ice Adventure area. Families can also pay a visit to the 4D cinema to enjoy a screening of classic festive movie The Polar Express.

Visit Santa! Vintage Sleigh Ride

Coventry Transport Museum,
until Sun 23 December



Enjoy a sleigh ride with a vintage twist this Christmas, as Coventry Transport Museum brings a touch of nostalgia to festivities.

The original mechanics and fixtures of the sleigh have been maintained but unchanged since the 1960s, making it a truly authentic experience.

Once families have made their magical journey to Lapland, they'll have the chance to meet Santa, tell him their Christmas wishes and take receipt of a special gift.

Santa Safari

Hawkstone Park Follies,
Shropshire, until Sun 23 December



Little ones can enjoy a magical adventure and meet Santa at Hawkstone Park Follies this Christmas. Jump into one of the park's Land Rovers to enjoy a journey through the illuminated woodland to Santa's spectacular network of caves.

The big man's elves will keep you entertained as you wander around the fairy-lit caverns and tunnels, finally arriving at your ultimate destination - the magical grotto itself, where every child will receive a special gift from Santa.

The chance to meet the big man's trusty reindeer and enjoy an 'illuminated woodland fantasy' also feature.

Christmas at Birmingham Museums

Visit birminghammuseums.org.uk
for more details

Birmingham Museums is hosting a variety of events in the lead-up to Christmas. Families can get into the festive spirit at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery courtesy of twinkling lights, piles of snow, a glittering grotto and the chance to meet Santa Claus himself...



Meanwhile, at Soho House, Aston Hall and Blakesley Hall, guests can step back in time by joining special Christmas-themed guided tours...

If you're looking for a unique Christmas gift for a loved one, the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter will be hosting a special winter jewellery fair, whilst over at Sarehole Mill, a variety of adult craft sessions - taking place throughout the month - provide participants with plenty of inspiration for their Christmas decorations.



The Midlands Spectacular Christmas destination



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Winter Wonderland

Stoke-on-Trent

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The Cathedral Illuminated

Lichfield Cathedral, Mon 17 - Sat 22 December

Winner of the 'best event in Staffordshire' title in our What's On Readers' Awards 2018, Cathedral Illuminated is back for another year. Luxmuralis,

the team behind it all, create a bespoke set of illuminations to light up both the inside and outside of Lichfield Cathedral. With the multi-award-winning event now in its fourth year, visitors can expect a mixture of festive light and sound that's sure to get them in the Christmas spirit.

Christmas At The Valley

Sandwell Park Farm, Fri 7 - Sun 9, Fri 14 - Sun 16, Fri 21 - Sun 23 December

Sandwell Park Farm is this month opening its doors for families to visit Santa in his grotto. Not only can little ones say hello to the cheery bearded one himself, they can also meet and greet his trusty reindeer as they prepare for their Christmas duties. Traditional Punch & Judy shows run throughout each day, with other attractions including circus skills workshops and children's crafts. Hot food & drink outlets ensure visitors young and old can keep up their energy levels as they busy themselves getting into the festive spirit.

Birmingham Frankfurt Christmas Market

Birmingham city centre, until Sun 23 December

The largest authentic German Christmas market outside of Germany and Austria, this ever-popular Birmingham attraction comprises 80-plus stalls boasting a wide range of traditional gifts and a mouthwatering selection of food & drink.

The market has been running in the city for more than 15 years, and is the centrepiece of Birmingham's Christmas events package.



Winter Wonderland Stoke-on-Trent

Birch Terrace car park, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, until Sun 6 January

Stoke-on-Trent's very own winter wonderland returns this year to transport visitors into a festive haven filled with all things Christmas. Featuring an ice rink, Santa's grotto and wooden chalets serving up all manner of eats and treats, there's plenty of fun to be had. Other stand-out attractions include a full-size rollercoaster and a 60m sky swing.



European Christmas Market

Southwater, Telford Town Centre, until Sun 23 December

Now in its third year, Telford's European Christmas Market has returned bigger and better. Featuring wooden chalets decked with garlands & lights and selling festive gifts from all around Europe, the market also includes a traditional funfair - complete with carousel and helter skelter - and showcases local choirs, acoustic bands and plenty of seasonal music.



Photo credit: Owen Vincent

JAYMI HENSLEY

Jaymi flies into Birmingham this Christmas to play Peter Pan at the Hippodrome. We caught up with the Union J star to talk about fame, coming out and campaigning for LGBTQ rights...

This is your second outing as Peter Pan. What attracts you to playing the eternally young character?

I think that's it. Being eternally young, trying to cling on to something, trying to cling on to your youth. Plus, I get to fly, which is great, but that harness really is uncomfortable!

Do you share any traits with Peter Pan?

Yes, I think I do. I can be a bit stubborn at times. I want to do well, I'm really determined and I do like to help others, but I sometimes throw my toys out of the pram, if you know what I mean. I have this pride thing, I let my feelings get hurt and I do sometimes overreact, just like he does.

Can we expect any competition on the vocal front between yourself and Jimmy Osmond, who's playing Captain Hook?

Are you joking! He's Jimmy Osmond and I'd be a fool to try and compete. I'm super-excited to be performing alongside him because he's a legend. I wasn't about at the height of Osmond-mania, but I've grown up with that music as my mother loves them. When I met Jimmy at the pre-launch, he was just the nicest guy. I'm super-excited to create a relationship with him.

As well as Peter Pan, you've also had a stint playing Aladdin - two very good and wholesome characters. Do you ever fancy crossing over to the dark side - and if so, who would you choose to play?

As much as I like playing Peter Pan and Aladdin, I think I'd actually prefer to play a darker role because it would be so

different from the real me. Sometimes you really struggle with parts that are quite close to who you are because you can't find the line between what's you and what's your character. I like all Disney films, and in particular characters like Maleficent and Ursula. You never know, one day I might throw my hand in and play the wicked queen. I would definitely like to play a baddie one day.

How old were you when you decided you wanted to make a profession out of performing?

I did my first professional panto when I was eight years old, and I've been on stage since then. I've never really known anything else. I was so determined that it was going to happen for me, it was more a matter of when. I never set my sights on any other profession, so I had to really focus on this.

Which artist or band did you most listen to when growing up?

I was obsessed with Whitney. I was this chubby little gay kid bumbling his way through life trying to fit in. I had this huge ballad-like voice and I loved listening to Whitney and Celine because they were artists who my mum listened to. That's kind of how I trained my voice; singing those big, big songs. When I was 11, I stood in front of the school assembly and belted out My Heart Will Go On. I think that was pretty courageous for someone my age.

Who's your favourite artist at the moment?

I love Ariana. She's a superb pop star - mixing a bit of camp with a bit of

lightheartedness, and she has a great vocal range. I also really love Dua Lipa.

It's been six years since your time on The X Factor. What's the hardest lesson you've learned since then?

Not to get too wrapped up in what you're doing. We were very lucky to come from the show and walk into a record deal, but you have to be careful not to get invincibility syndrome. When everything's going right for you, it's easy to forget that things can, and often do, go wrong. There are going to be hard times. When those hard times happened for us, they hit really hard. That's why you see a lot of celebrities having breakdowns and mental health issues, turning to drink and drugs, because you can have massive highs and then equally big lows. I think you have to take every day as it comes and not have an expectation about tomorrow.

Would you say that's one of the biggest downfalls of fame?

Yes, I would say it probably is. We're all human and it's natural to have lows - days when you wake up and can't be bothered, your personal life has gone wrong or you think your career is slipping away. I've always felt a sense of guilt, because I'm very privileged to do what I do. I'm very lucky to have made a career out of this, and to be doing what I love, so when you do have a bad day, you kind of feel guilty or ungrateful. I think that's the biggest price of fame - you feel guilty about showing emotion because you worry someone's going to think you're being a bit of an idiot.



Ratings for The X Factor continue to decline. Do you think the format of the show, and similar shows, has had its day?

I wouldn't say it's had its day, but it might need a rejig. It's down to how accessible things are. I don't think the buzz around X Factor has necessary gone, but I think people are watching it more on YouTube. Maybe the show does need a revamp, but you can't deny the level of talent it puts out.

Let's talk Celebrity MasterChef. How was that experience?

It was without a shadow of a doubt the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. I was asked to do it the year before, but I said no because I didn't cook and everyone

in my family was laughing at me and saying there was no way I could do it. Also, my diary didn't match up. When I got asked again, I said yes because I felt I needed something a little bit new and I wanted to learn. When you're doing the same job every day, you're not necessarily learning anymore. I wanted to learn a new craft, and I was prepared to rise to the challenge. I was excited, but it was all very stressful and I had lots of sleepless nights. My house is really minimalistic, I don't like clutter, but I suddenly acquired about a million cookbooks and had pots and pans everywhere. It was like Delia Smith had exploded in my kitchen. I loved it, but I was glad when I could put all my stuff back in the cupboard!

Are there any other reality shows you might fancy doing?

I'm open to anything, and I love learning new skills and meeting new people. I think Strictly or Dancing On Ice would be great fun because you'd be learning a completely new skill - that was the most rewarding thing about doing MasterChef. I would've loved to have done something like Big Brother or I'm A Celebrity... but you just sit around and are being voted on your personality, which can be quite a daunting experience.

What single piece of advice would you give to anyone starting out in the industry?

Work your arse off; just work hard. This job is not what it seems. It's not all happy

Peter Pan shows at Birmingham Hippodrome from Wednesday 19 December to Sunday 27 January



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*Your week-
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listings guide*
December 2018

the list



Tony Hadley in Stepback! 80s Christmas Concert at Ricoh Arena, Coventry - Sat 22 December

Music | Comedy | Theatre | Dance | Film | Events | Visual Arts | and more!

What's On

Sat 1 to Sun 9 December



Kate Rusby At Christmas,
Malvern Theatres
Thurs 6 December

Mon 10 to Sun 16 December



Cara Dillon at Artrix,
Bromsgrove
Wed 12 December

Mon 17 to Sun 23 December



A Festive Christmas Evening
at Eastnor Castle
Thurs 20 December

Mon 24 to Mon 31 December



A Christmas Carol at the
Royal Shakespeare Theatre
until Sun 20 January

THROUGHOUT DECEMBER

Visual Arts

Artrix, Bromsgrove

NEW THE CANAL SIDE STUDIOS EXHIBITION This small, busy studio actively engages in community art activities and is passionate about promoting local artists' work, organising art exhibitions at local venues and for local businesses, Tues 4 Dec - Sun 6 Jan

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

FIGHTING FOR OUR HERITAGE Exhibition explores the rich history of amateur boxing clubs and famous boxers from Birmingham, until Sun 2 Dec

WITHIN AND WITHOUT: BODY IMAGE AND THE SELF Exhibition examining how social, historical and cultural factors affect body image, and how this is expressed through objects and artworks, until Fri 1 Feb

WOMEN POWER PROTEST Inspired by the bold work of feminist artists and activists, Women Power Protest aims to raise awareness, provoke debate and assess how much has changed for women, until Sun 31 Mar

COLLECTING BIRMINGHAM: WHO IS BIRMINGHAM? Discover new collections that reflect the experiences of diverse Birmingham people - from working lives to community activists and protest movements, until Sun 27 Oct 2019

Compton Verney Gallery, Warwick

SIX ARTISTS CELEBRATE ENID MARX AND THE BRITISH FOLK ART COLLECTION Collaboration with Coventry University featuring the responses of six artists to Compton Verney's Marx-Lambert collection of popular art, until Sun 16 Dec

WHISTLER AND NATURE Exhibition revealing new research into the influence of industry, the military and historical revivalism on one of the greatest artists of the 19th century, through his depictions of natural and industrial landscapes, until Sun 16 Dec

Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum

AMY SHARROCKS Exhibition by sculptor, filmmaker and live artist Amy Sharrocks, showing works from over a decade of making, collecting and conversations, Fri 30 Nov - Sun 24 Feb

Rugby Art Gallery & Museum

THE EADONS OF HILLMORTON ROAD Collection of photographs from an Ed-

wardian Rugby family providing a snapshot of local life before the First World War, until Sat 12 Jan

NEW RUGBY OPEN EXHIBITION 18 High-quality contemporary art from emerging and established local artists, Mon 17 Dec - Sat 12 Jan

The Herbert Art Gallery & Museum

ARTIST ROOMS PRESENTS ANSELM KIEFER One of Germany's most significant post-war artists, Kiefer's work explores themes of national identity and collective memory, until Sun 27 Jan

THE LEARNED PROTOCOLS OF TRUTH During a three-day workshop this autumn, photographer and filmmaker Jonny Bark worked with 11 students from Bluecoat Church of England School & Music College in Coventry to produce this body of work inspired by the exhibition Artist Rooms: Anselm Kiefer, until Sun 27 Jan

NEW COVENTRY OPEN 2018 The work on display, selected by a panel of judges, is produced in a wide range of media, from painting and drawing to sculpture and textiles, Sat 8 Dec - Sun 24 Feb

Worcester City Museum & Art Gallery

NEW WORCESTER SOCIETY OF ARTISTS 71ST ANNUAL EXHIBITION Eclectic selection of art created by local artists, Sat 1 Dec - Sat 26 Jan

Other VISUAL ARTS

NEVILLE STAPLE - THE ORIGINAL RUDE BOY The exhibition hopes to show many aspects of a man who has done so much for Coventry music, but also so much for other artists, until Sun 2 Dec, Coventry Music Museum

SHAKESPEARIANNE Carrie Reichardt, artist-in-residence at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, presents a radical perspective on Anne Hathaway, William Shakespeare's wife, and demonstrates how consumerism, popular culture and social media are changing the way we view and interpret history, until Fri 21 Dec, Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford Upon Avon

IN MY SHOES: ART & THE SELF SINCE THE 1990S Arts Council Collection national touring exhibition - featuring works by Hayley Newman, Sarah Lucas, Grayson Perry and Tracey Emin - explores the ways in which UK-based artists have included themselves in their work since the 1990s, until Sun 6 Jan, PACCAR Room, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon



Kansas Smitty's House Band - Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

Gigs

THE STYLISTICS 50TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR Sat 1 Dec, Palace Theatre, Redditch

WESLEY FULLET Sat 1 Dec, The Tin Music and Arts, Canal Basin, Coventry

80'S MANIA Sat 1 Dec, The Core Theatre, Solihull

FEAR WITHOUT REASON Sat 1 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

ELECTRIC SWING CIRCUS Sat 1 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

THE HUMAN LEAGUE Sat 1 Dec, Arena B'ham

FRANKIE VALLI & THE FOUR SEASONS Sat 1 Dec, Genting Arena, Birmingham

SOUL II SOUL Sat 1 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

CAST - THE GREATEST HITS TOUR Sat 1 Dec,

O2 Institute, B'ham

THE UPBEAT BEATLES Sat 1 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

RAT PACK Sat 1 Dec, Albany Theatre, Coventry

UK FOO FIGHTERS - BANGING ON THE CEILING TOUR Sat 1 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

PVMNTS Sat 1 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

SWEDE DREAMZ Sat 1 Dec, The River Rooms, Stourbridge

BJORN AGAIN Sat 1 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

THE ALARM Sun 2 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

GEKO Sun 2 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

MYJO CHRISTMAS CONCERT Sun 2 Dec, The Core Theatre, Solihull

ALABAMA 3 Sun 2 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

BOTOWN: THE SOUL OF

BOLLYWOOD Sun 2 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

DARKSIDE OF THE WALL Sun 2 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

BROKEN HANDS Sun 2 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

ROY WOOD'S ROCKMAS 2018 Sun 2 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

FIRST SUNDAY SWING Sun 2 Dec, Albany Theatre, Coventry

ALL SAINTS Mon 3 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

MOLLY BURCH Mon 3 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

THE KENDRICK LAMAR ENSEMBLE Mon 3 Dec, The Glee Club, B'ham

CLAIRE RICHARDS Mon 3 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

DRAHLA/CHASTITY Tues 4 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

MIDLAND Tues 4 Dec,



The Human League - Arena Birmingham

O2 Academy, B'ham

DEACON BLUE Tues 4 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

CYPRESS HILL Tues 4 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

ZEAL & ARDOR Tues 4 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

FIVE STAR SWING AT CHRISTMAS Tues 4 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

CHASE ATLANTIC Wed 5 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

THE CHURCHFITTERS Wed 5 Dec, The Red Lion Folk Club, B'ham

THE WANDERING HEARTS Wed 5 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

NATHAN BALL Wed 5 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

ST AGNES FOUNTAIN Wed 5 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

JOOLS HOLLAND AND HIS RHYTHM & BLUES ORCHESTRA Wed 5 & Thurs 6 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

THE CARDIGANS Thurs 6 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

KATE RUSBY AT CHRISTMAS Thurs 6 Dec, Malvern Theatres

BUFFALO TOM Thurs 6 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

SKINDRED Thurs 6 Dec, Marrs Bar, Worcester

SOWETO KINCH Thurs 6 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

MALCOLM MIDDLETON Thurs 6 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

BLOSSOMS Fri 7 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

KANSAS SMITTY'S HOUSE BAND Fri 7 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

TALON Fri 7 Dec, Malvern Theatres

LEA MICHELE AND DARREN CRISS Fri 7 Dec, Arena Birmingham

HARRIET Fri 7 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

THE DYLAN PROJECT Fri 7 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

LEON VYNEHALL Fri 7 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

THE MAGIC OF MUSIC HALL Fri 7 Dec, Stratford Playhouse

KILLERSTREAM Fri 7 Dec, River Rooms, Stourbridge

THE PRIMITIVES Fri 7 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

NUNS OF THE TUNDRA Fri 7 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

THE UB40 EXPERIENCE Fri 7 Dec, The Marr's Bar, Worcester

LIFE ON MARS - A TRIBUTE TO DAVID BOWIE Fri 7 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

GRAVEYARD Fri 7 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

JOHN COGHAN'S QUO Fri 7 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

RAWDIO - ANDY C / SAXXON / CARASEL / INDIKA / RIGGAMORTIZ SOUNDS Fri 7 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

MEMORIAM/GODTHYRM M/VALAFAR Fri 7 Dec, The Asylum, B'ham

THE SMYTHS - SONGS OF LOVE AND HATE TOUR Sat 8 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

BEARDINGHAM Sat 8 Dec, Scruffy Murphys, Birmingham

SWIM WITH SHARKS Sat 8 Dec, Irish Centre, Birmingham

THE SOUTHMARTINS Sat

8 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

MORTELLICA Sat 8 Dec, The Marr's Bar, Worcester

THE SEARCHERS Sat 8 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

THE OVERTONES Sat 8 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

AUGUST BURNS RED Sat 8 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

BLACK HEART ANGELS + NICK HARPER Sat 8 Dec, Katie Fitzgeralds, Stourbridge

THE DUALERS Sat 8 Dec, Leamington Assembly, Leamington Spa

A FISTFUL OF SPOOKIES Sat 8 Dec, The Fleece Inn, Evesham

GORDON HENDRICKS AS ELVIS Sat 8 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

BLACK WATER FIEND Sat 8 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

DON'T STOP - FLEETWOOD MAC Sat 8 Dec, The River Rooms, Stourbridge

HOOZIER Sun 9 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

A JOURNEY AROUND EUROPE Sun 9 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

CV FOLK SECOND SUNDAY Sun 9 Dec, Albany Theatre, Coventry

CHURCHFITTERS CHRISTMAS CRACKER Sun 9 Dec, The Fleece Inn, Evesham



Kate Rusby - Malvern Theatres

Classical Music

BRITISH POLICE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Annual Proms Night Spectacular, Sat 1 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

EBORACUM BAROQUE: HANDEL'S MESSIAH BY CANDLELIGHT Sat 1 Dec, Great Malvern Priory

ROYAL LEAMINGTON SPA BACH CHOIR Featuring Nigel Stark (conductor), Sat 1 Dec, All Saint's Church, Leamington Spa

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Rupert Jeffcoat & Alexander Mason (organs), Sat 1 Dec, St Paul's Church, Birmingham

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: DREAMS AND VISION Programme comprises Mussorgsky's Pictures At An Exhibition & Handel's Messiah, Sun 2 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

THE MUSIC SOCIETY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Featuring Daniele Rosina (conductor). Programme comprises Vaughan Williams' Symphony No.2 'A London Symphony', Sun 2 Dec, The Bramall, Birmingham

LONDON MYRIAD WIND ENSEMBLE Programme includes works by Bridge, Arnold, Françaix & Villa-Lobos, Sun 2 Dec, Shakespeare Institute, Stratford-upon-Avon

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS ORATORIO Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Paul Bentley-Angell (Evangelist), Elizabeth Adams & Katie Trethewey (sopranos), Harriet Hougham Slade & Martha McLorinan (altos), James Robinson (tenor) & Greg Skidmore (bass), Sun 2 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN: MICHAEL COLLINS PLAYS MOZART Programme also includes 2 works by Stravinsky, Tues 4 Dec, Stratford Playhouse, Stratford-upon-Avon

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Rupert Jeffcoat & Alexander Mason (organs), Wed 5 Dec, Hereford Cathedral

THE MELLSTOCK BAND: THE LEAVES OF LIFE Wed 5 Dec, Lord Leycester Hospital, Warwick

ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN: MICHAEL COLLINS PLAYS MOZART Programme also includes two works by Stravinsky, Wed 5 Dec, The Bradshaw Hall, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM CHOIR - HANDEL'S MESSIAH Also featuring the City of Birmingham Choir, Thomas Trotter (harpsichord), Christopher Allsop (organ), Adrian Lucas (conductor), Julia Doyle (soprano), Anna Huntley (alto), Gwilym Bowen (tenor) & Andrew Greenan (bass), Fri 7 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

ARMONICO CONSORT & ORCHESTRA: THE

ADVENT OF CHRISTMAS Featuring Christopher Monks (director). Programme includes works by Bach & Charpentier, Fri 7 Dec, St Mark's Church, Leamington Spa

TOWN HALL GOSPEL CHOIR: 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY CONCERT Sat 8 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

CHOIR OF ALL SAINTS' PARISH CHURCH: CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT Sat 8 Dec (6pm), All Saints' Church, Leamington Spa

ARMONICO CONSORT: CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Christopher Monks (director), Sat 8 Dec (7pm), All Saints' Church, Leamington Spa

A CLASSICAL CHRISTMAS WITH KARL LOXLEY Sat 8 Dec, Stratford Playhouse, Stratford-upon-Avon

DIVERTIMENTO Music for Christmas and the festive season featuring Sheila Koch (director), Sat 8 Dec, Dale Street Methodist Church, Leamington Spa

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA Featuring Daniele Rosina (conductor). Programme includes works by Peter Levy, Dvorák & Brahms, Sun 9 Dec, The Bramall, University of B'ham

Comedy

DARA O'BRIAIN Thurs 29 Nov - Sat 1 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

CHARLIE BAKER, ROGER MONKHOUSE & EMANUEL SONUBI Fri 30 Nov - Sat 1 Dec, The Comedy Loft, Birmingham

GARY DELANEY Sat 1 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

ANNETTE FAGON, NINIA BENJAMIN, TOJU & LATEEF LOVEJOY Sat 1 Dec, MAC, Birmingham

CHARLIE BAKER, ROGER MONKHOUSE & EMMANUEL SONUBI Sat 1 Dec, The Comedy Loft, Birmingham

CRAIG MURRAY, MIKE WILMOT, JIMMY MCGHIE AND JOSH JONES Sat 1 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

BARBARA NICE'S CHRISTMAS CRACKER Tues 4 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

STAND UP COMEDY SHOWCASE Wed 5 Dec, The Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham

TANYALEE DAVIS Wed 5 Dec, MAC, Birmingham

SPENCER JONES, DAVE JOHNS, SEAN COLLINS AND MARLON DAVIS Wed 5 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

JEREMY HARDY Wed 5 Dec, The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury

DAVID O'DOHERTY Thurs 6 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

SPENCER JONES, DAVE JOHNS, SEAN COLLINS & CAREY MARX Thurs 6 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

TAMSYN KELLY & SUKH OJLA - DOUBLE BILL Fri 7 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre,

Coventry

STEVE HARRIS & ROB ROUSE Fri 7 & Sat 8 Dec, The Comedy Loft, B'ham

DANA ALEXANDER, SPENCER JONES, SEAN COLLINS & DAVE JOHNS Fri 7 - Sun 9 Dec, The Glee Club, B'ham

Theatre

TAMBURLAINE Michael Boyd directs a new staging of Christopher Marlowe's famous play, until Sat 1 Dec, The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

THE WITCHES The Nonentities fuse puppetry & special effects in a new staging of Roald Dahl's much-loved tale, until Sat 1 Dec, The Rose Theatre, Kidderminster

THE HABIT OF ART Matthew Kelly & David Yelland star in a new staging of Alan Bennett's play about a meeting between poet WH Auden and composer Benjamin Britten, until Sat 1 Dec, Malvern Theatres

THE MOUNTAINTOP Award-winning play taking an intimate look at the quieter moments in Dr Martin Luther King's life, until Sat 1 Dec, The REP, Birmingham

WEST SIDE STORY A West Bromwich Operatic Society production, presented to celebrate their 80th anniversary and Leonard Bernstein's centenary, until Sat 1 Dec, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: A MUSICAL PARODY Fat Rascal Theatre explore whether fairytales really do come true - even when the slipper doesn't quite fit the princess, until Sun 2 Dec, Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

THE WIZARD OF OZ Follow the yellow brick road to the Emerald City this Christmas, until Sun 13 Jan, The REP, Birmingham

TARTUFFE New updated version of Moliere's provocative French classic, until Sat 23 Feb, The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

A CHRISTMAS CAROL Patrick Barlow's adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic story of ghoulish ghosts and eleventh-hour redemption, Tues 27 Nov - Sat 1 Dec, Crescent Theatre, Birmingham

GREASE Amateur staging, presented by Stratford Musical Theatre Company, Wed 28 Nov - Sat 1 Dec, Bridge House Theatre, Warwick

GUARDS! GUARDS! Stage adaptation of Terry Pratchett's book, Thurs 29 Nov - Sat 1 Dec, MAC, Birmingham

ENTER STAGE WHITE Transition Stage Company present a Christmas-themed awards night for new screenwriting, Sat 1 Dec, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

LORDS OF STRUT: ABSOLUTE LEGENDS

Join the Street Performance World Champions for a high-octane show combining dance, athletics and humour, Sat 1 & Sun 2 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

WIND IN THE WILLOWS Amateur staging of Alan Bennett's play, adapted from the novel by Kenneth Grahame, Sat 1 - Sat 8 Dec, Criterion Theatre, Coventry

OVER THE TOP The Belgrade's annual alternative to pantomime - 'a heart-stopping, pun-filled adventure overflowing with uplifting Christmassy comedy', Sat 1 - Sat 29 Dec, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

THE NIGHTINGALES Ruth Jones stars in William Gaminara's bittersweet play, Mon 3 - Sat 8 Dec, Malvern Theatres

BENIDORM LIVE Stage version of the popular TV show starring Sherrie Hewson, Adam Gillen, Tony Maudsley, Jake Canuso & Janine Duvitski, Mon 3 - Sat 29 Dec, Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham

JESUS MY BOY Acclaimed one-man play which tells the story of Jesus, as seen through the eyes of Joseph, Tues 4 Dec, Henry Sandon Hall, Worcester

THE LOCK IN CHRISTMAS CAROL Join musicians & dancers for a show that's described as 'half gig, half dance show and half panto'! Tues 4 Dec, The Core Theatre, Solihull

A CHRISTMAS CAROL David Edgar's acclaimed staging of Dickens' festive classic, showing at the RSC for a second year, Tues 4 Dec - Sun 20 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

POP MUSIC A Paines Plough & Birmingham Repertory Theatre production for 'anyone who's ever been a dick on the dancefloor', Wed 5 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

AS YOU LIKE IT Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Theatre Company present a new version of Shakespeare's pastoral comedy, Wed 5 - Fri 7 Dec, The Patrick Centre, Birmingham Hippodrome

HANSEL & GRETEL Youth Onstage present an amateur version of the Brothers Grimm fairytale, Wed 5 - Sat 8 Dec, The Dovehouse Theatre, Solihull

THE TROJAN WOMEN Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Theatre Company present a contemporary staging of Euripides' classic tale, Wed 5 - Sat 8 Dec, Crescent Theatre, Birmingham

BUGSY MALONE Amateur staging presented by Rabble Youth Theatre, Thurs 6 - Sat 8 Dec, Abbey Theatre, Nuneaton, Warwickshire

THE SITCOM EXPERIENCE: DEL BOY & RODNEY An evening of slapstick fun with Peckham's finest entrepreneurs, Thurs 6 - Sat 15 Dec, The REP, Birmingham

ingham

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY Inventive twist on Frank Capra's classic film, bringing to life a story of disaster, redemption and holiday magic, Thurs 6 - Mon 24 Dec, Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

SHOWSTOPPER! THE IMPROVISED MUSICAL Brand new musical comedy, created from scratch at each performance, Fri 7 Dec, Bridge House Theatre, Warwick

TIMON OF ATHENS Simon Godwin directs Kathryn Hunter in Shakespeare's satire on wealth, greed & betrayal, Fri 7 Dec - Fri 22 Feb, The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL: A WARMING TALE FOR WINTER Last Baguette theatre company fuse physical comedy, live music and visual storytelling to shine a light on Hans Christian Andersen's classic tale, Sat 8 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

THE WIZARD OF OZ Amateur staging by Encore Theatre, Sat 8 Dec, Norbury Theatre, Droitwich

A CHRISTMAS CAROL IN CONCERT A unique retelling of Dickens' heart-warming tale by musician-singers Green Matthews, Sat 8 Dec, Albany Theatre, Coventry

BROADWAY TO BETHLEHEM Bromsgrove Operatic Society present a 'magical musical journey for the festive season', Sun 9 Dec, Norbury Theatre, Droitwich

Kids Shows

AWFUL AUNTIE David Walliams' tale of frights, fights & friendship, until Sat 1 Dec, Alexandra Theatre, B'ham

SLEEPYHEAD Little Angel Theatre fuse 'magic, circus, a dollop of silliness and plenty of laughs' in a show for young audiences, until Sun 2 Dec, MAC, Birmingham

WILDE CREATURES Tall Stories bring Oscar Wilde's classic fairytales to life, until Sun 30 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

PINOCCHIO Brand new staging of Carlo Collodi's classic tale about an inquisitive young puppet, until Sun 30 Dec, The Old Rep Theatre, B'ham

RUDOLF Festive treat for younger audiences, fusing puppetry, laughter, song and mischief, until Mon 31 Dec, MAC, Birmingham

SANTA IN LOVE Festive play for very young children that includes sing-along games and a meet-and-greet with Santa, Sat 1 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

SANTA IN LOVE Festive play for very young children, featuring sing-along games and a meet-and-greet with

Santa, Tues 4 - Wed 5 Dec, Malvern Theatres

THE SELFISH GIANT Sea Legs Puppet Theatre present a production for children, based on the much-loved story by Oscar Wilde, Sat 8 Dec, Henry Sandon Hall, Worcester

CHRISTOPHER'S CHRISTMAS Topsy Turvy Theatre present a festive show for children aged two to seven, Sat 8 Dec, The Hive, Worcester

SANTA IN LOVE Festive play for very young children, featuring sing-along games and a meet-and-greet with Santa, Sat 8 Dec, Malvern Theatres

Pantomime

DICK WHITTINGTON Garrick panto favourites Sam Rabone and Ben Thornton are joined by CBeebies star Katrina Bryan, until Sat 5 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

SLEEPING BEAUTY High-energy pantomime fun, written and directed, as usual, by Iain Lauchlan, until Sat 5 Jan, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

DICK WHITTINGTON The classic rags-to-riches tale, starring JP McCue & Sean Dodds, Sat 1 - Sun 30 Dec, Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa

DICK WHITTINGTON Traditional family pantomime, written & directed by Ben Crocker, Sat 1 Dec - Sat 5 Jan, The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury

MAID MARIAN AND THE MERRY MEN Worcester Repertory Company present an 'action-packed' pantomime in which a feisty Maid Marian leads the way in overthrowing the evil Sheriff of Nottingham, Mon 3 Dec - Sun 6 Jan, Swan Theatre, Worcester

SLEEPING BEAUTY Starring Debbie McGee, Richard Cadell & Sooty, Doreen Tipton and Ian Adams, Sat 8 Dec - Sun 13 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

ROBIN HOOD AND THE REVOLTING PEASANTS Zany funsters Oddsocks present their fast-paced take on the legendary tale, Sun 9 Dec, Bridge House Theatre, Warwick

Dance

THIS IS AN ISLAND DanceXchange present Gary Clarke's latest commission, inviting audiences to experience a no-holds-barred version of Brexit through the eyes of Birmingham residents, until Sat 1 Dec, Birmingham School of Art

THE NUTCRACKER Birmingham Royal Ballet presents its annual staging of Peter Wright's world famous festive production, until Thurs 13 Dec, Birmingham

ingham Hippodrome

HANSEL & GRETEL Uchenna Dance present a modern-day retelling of the classic fairytale, combining New York club styles of house, waacking and vogue with African and contemporary dance, Fri 30 Nov - Sat 1 Dec, DanceXchange, Birmingham Hippodrome

THE KNOT Didy Veldman's latest dance creation centres on ritual, doubt, nerves and the sheer magic of weddings - a production where the bride, groom, best man and bridesmaids are all world class dancers, and audience members are the wedding guests, Sat 1 Dec, Malvern Theatres

SWAN LAKE Presented by Russian State Ballet, Sun 2 Dec, Malvern Theatres

Talks

WARWICK CHRISTMAS LECTURE: OUT OF THIS WORLD An evening where scientists from the University of Warwick 'amaze' audiences with experiments and real-life science. Be warned, these evenings involve 'audience participation, head scratching and mind boggling!' Mon 3 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

SIR CHRIS BONINGTON: LIFE & TIMES Wed 5 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

Events

BBC GOOD FOOD SHOW WINTER A food-filled day out, until Sun 2 Dec, NEC, Birmingham

THE WORCESTER VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS FAYRE All the fun of the fayre with plenty of Victorian-themed characters, until Sun 2 Dec, Worcester City Centre

MEET SANTA In an experience unique to Birmingham this festive season, visit the North Pole of the city in the Antarctic Ice Cave, meet the man himself and check out the family of cheeky Gentoo Penguins in the Ice Adventure area, until Sun 23 Dec, National Sea Life Centre, Birmingham

VISIT SANTA! VINTAGE SLEIGH RIDE A magical ride to Lapland on an enchanting vintage sleigh pulled by two trusty reindeer, until Sun 23 Dec, Coventry Transport Museum

ENCHANTED CHRISTMAS KINGDOM until Mon 24 Dec, Hutton Adventure World, Warwickshire

SANTA'S WINTER WONDERLAND until Mon 31 Dec, The Snowdome, Tamworth

CHRISTMAS AT THE CASTLE until Mon

31 Dec, Warwick Castle

MAGICAL LANTERN FESTIVAL 2018 Back at Birmingham Botanical Gardens due to exceptional demand, with all-new lanterns for 2018, until Tues 1 Jan, Birmingham Botanical Gardens

LANTERN MAKING FOR THE BRAVE Sat 1 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

CANDLELIT CHRISTMAS EVENING Enjoy an evening of 'merry music, delicious food and a glass of something warming' as you wander the museum's grounds and historic buildings, Sat 1 Dec, Avoncroft Museum, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove

CHRISTMAS CAROL TRAINS Sing along or just soak up the festive atmosphere as you get Christmas off to a traditional start with an evening of carols & festive songs, Sat 1 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, Kidderminster

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS A festive day out with a chocolatey twist. See Father Christmas in his very own stage show - and there's a gift for every child, Sat 1 - Sun 2 Dec, Cadbury World, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS AT COUGHTON Enjoy festive shopping in the Coach House shop, the house decorated for a traditional Christmas, seasonal food in the cafe and, at weekends, a Christmas market in the stableyard, Sat 1 - Sun 2 Dec, Coughton Court, Warwickshire

LANTERN-MAKING WORKSHOPS Get ready for the famous lantern parade by crafting your very own lantern, Sat 1 - Sun 2 Dec, The Hive, Worcester

UK DRONE & TECHNOLOGY SHOW LIVE Celebrating all things UAV and showcasing the latest products from across the drone, photography, consumer electronics, gadgets and technology industries, Sat 1 - Sun 2 Dec, NEC, Birmingham

RAGLEY BY CANDLELIGHT Sat 1 - Sun 2 Dec, Ragley Hall, Alcester

UPTON MAKES THE HOUSE DESIRABLE THIS CHRISTMAS See the house decorated for a 'modern' 1920s Christmas, Sat 1 - Mon 3 Dec, Upton House & Gardens, Nr Banbury

THINKTANK ELF HUNT Pick up a finders' sheet at the box office to record all the elves you find as you explore the museum, Sat 1 - Sun 23 Dec, Thinktank Science Museum, Birmingham

STEP INTO CHRISTMAS Start your own traditions this year with fun festive talks, performances and workshops suitable for elves of all ages, Sat 1 - Mon 31 Dec, Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford Upon Avon

SPOT SANTA! Take part in a range of Christmas activities, Sun 2 Dec, Compton Verney Gallery, Warwick

NATURAL WONDERS TREE DECORATIONS Make your own decorations out of natural materials found in the



Ragley By Candlelight - Ragley Hall, Alcester

grounds, Sun 2 Dec, Compton Verney Gallery, Warwick

MINI MUSEUM ENGINEERS Get problem-solving and explore the vehicles in this new family session, Wed 5 Dec, Coventry Transport Museum

EBENEZER'S CHRISTMAS CAROL Hear Dickens' story told in his own inimitable words on an hour-long lanternlit journey through a haunted house, Wed 5 - Fri 21 Dec, Tudor World, Stratford-upon-Avon

LANTERN PARADE Take along your own lanterns, Thurs 6 Dec, Cathedral Square, Worcester

CHRISTMAS MADE-TO-MEASURE TRAIL FOR CHILDREN Follow the festive trail, discover how 1920s' children decorated their Christmas tree, and meet a special Christmas guest, Fri 7 - Mon 10 Dec, Upton House & Gardens, Nr Banbury

WILLOW WREATH MAKING CRAFT ACTIVITY Craft yourself a traditional willow wreath to take home, Sat 8 Dec, The Hive, Worcester

MEET THE SNOWMAN Sat 8 Dec, Touchwood Shopping Centre, Solihull

CHRISTMAS CAROLS AT CHARLECOTE Sat 8 Dec, Charlecote Park, Warwickshire

THE MURDER OF MICHAEL O'MALLEY Enjoy an evening of intrigue and mystery at the atmospheric Back to Backs. Follow the clues and question the suspects to discover the truth about the death of Court 15 resident Michael O'Malley, Sat 8 Dec, Birmingham Back to Backs

CHRISTMAS CAROL TRAINS Sing along or just soak up the festive atmosphere as you get Christmas off to a traditional start with an evening of carols & festive songs, Sat 8 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, Kidderminster

SANTA SCRAMBLE Scramble your way over, under and between a series of inflatable obstacles with hundreds of

other Santas, Sat 8 Dec, Stratford Racecourse, Stratford-upon-Avon

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS A festive day out with a chocolatey twist. See Father Christmas in his very own stage show - and there's a gift for every child, Sat 8 - Sun 9 Dec, Cadbury World, Birmingham

RAGLEY BY CANDLELIGHT See Ragley Hall in a brand new light, Sat 8 - Sun 9 Dec, Ragley Hall, Alcester

CHRISTMAS AT THE CASTLE Step back in time to a nostalgic family Noel, complete with carol singing, storytelling and toy making, Sat 8 - Sun 9 Dec, Kenilworth Castle

CHRISTMAS WASSAIL Christmas stories and carols from Birmingham Crescent Theatre. Mulled wine, a roaring fire and mince pies are included, Sat 8 - Sun 9 Dec, Coughton Court, Warwickshire

CHILDREN'S VICTORIAN SANTA TRAILS Meet the Victorian household as they ready themselves for the annual visit of a very special guest, Sat 8 - Sun 9 Dec, Tamworth Castle

VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS Enjoy 1800s-style celebrations and entertainment, and meet Father Christmas in his grotto, Sat 8 - Sun 9 Dec, Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge, Shropshire

FESTIVE FAMILY FUN Featuring motor-themed festive entertainment, Sat 8 - Sun 23 Dec, British Motor Museum, Gaydon

SPOT SANTA! Take part in a range of Christmas activities, Sun 9 Dec, Compton Verney Gallery, Warwick

NATURAL WONDERS TREE DECORATIONS Make your own decorations out of natural materials found in the grounds, Sun 9 Dec, Compton Verney Gallery, Warwick

FESTIVAL OF LIGHT Free outdoor event, bringing together music, community and award-winning carnival, Sun 9 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

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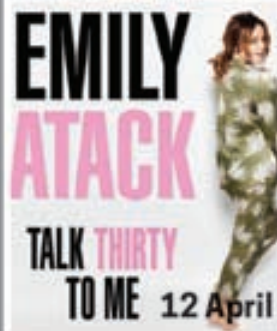
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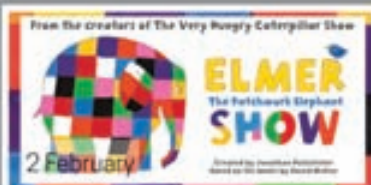
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29/1	A Viennese Strauss Gala	£21
30/1	Gaelforce Fabulous Irish music & dance	£22
2/2	The Buddy Holly Winter Dance Party	£19/£18
7/2	The Girl From Tiger Bay - Bassey tribute	£17
12/2	Dad's Army Radio Show 3 episodes	£18
14/2	Someone Like You - The Adele Songbook	£21
20/2	Exciting Science Show - Half term fun	£10
21-22/2	Let's Hang On - Four Seasons show	£24
23/2	A Night at the Musicals with Karl Loxley	£21
8/3	Matt Ford's Salute to Sinatra Show	£20
20/3	Stephen Bailey Live: Our Kid Tour (16+)	£14/£11
27/3	Dan Snow: The History Hit Tour 2019	£25
28/3	The Lindisfarne Story	£20
29/3	STARMAN The David Bowie Story	£22
30/3	Sindhu Vee Stand up comedy	£14/£12
11/4	The Lionel Ritchie Songbook	£22.50
12/4	The Bon Jovi Experience	£22
24/4	Pop Divas Live - fun tribute, two shows	£15
26/4	Andy Abraham's Nat King Cole Songbook	£24.50

This is not a full list of shows, please view/book online anytime at:

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Cara Dillon - Artrix, Bromsgrove

Gigs

D BLOCK EUROPE Mon 10 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

WSTR Mon 10 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

NIGHTWISH Mon 10 Dec, Arena B'ham

MERCURY REV Mon 10 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

RAZORLIGHT Mon 10 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

AARON CARTER Tues 11 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

THE BOOTLEG BEATLES Tues 11 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

SNEAKBO Tues 11 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

BLACKSTONE CHERRY Tues 11 Dec, Arena Birmingham

VON HERTZEN BROTHERS Tues 11 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

FIREBALL - FUELLING THE FIRE TOUR Wed 12 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

BURY TOMORROW Wed 12 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

MAC AYRES Wed 12 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

CARA DILLON Wed 12 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

POWERHOUSE GOSPEL CHOIR Wed 12 Dec,

The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury

A CHRISTMAS CONCERT Wed 12 Dec, Malvern Theatres

JACOB BANKS Thurs 13 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT WITH LINDA TOLCHARD Thurs 13 Dec, Malvern Theatres

THE LEGENDARY OSMONDS ON TOUR Thurs 13 Dec, Malvern Theatres

MIKE SANCHEZ AND HIS BAND Thurs 13 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

THE BIG BAND AT CHRISTMAS Thurs 13 Dec, Stratford Playhouse

OCEAN COLOUR SCENE - THE CHRISTMAS SHOW Thurs 13 & Fri 14 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

DREADZONE Fri 14 Dec, The Marr's Bar, Worcester

BORN IN THE 80'S Fri 14 Dec, The River Rooms, Stourbridge

GILES PETERSON Fri 14 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

T.REXTASY Fri 14 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

SKENGDO X AM Fri 14 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

DENZEL CURRY Fri 14 Dec, O2 Institute,

Birmingham

LILY ALLEN Fri 14 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

THE CRAIG CHARLES FUNK & SOUL CLUB Fri 14 Dec, The Empire, Coventry

THE TWANG Sat 15 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

EVERYTHING ASIDE, OPERATION GUILLOTINE, ALL THE REST Sat 15 Dec, The Tin Music and Arts, Canal Basin, Coventry

A CELTIC CHRISTMAS WITH CALAN Sat 15 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

MADNESS Sat 15 Dec, Arena Birmingham

THE SUPERSONIC 70'S SHOW Sat 15 Dec, Evesham Arts Centre

FUNCTION RECORDS CHRISTMAS PARTY Sat 15 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

FOREVER QUEEN Sat 15 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

APE WITH MARA FALLS SATSANGI THE ELLIPSIS THE BIG SUGARS SHANADE Sat 15 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

NILE RODGERS & CHIC Sun 16 Dec, Arena Birmingham

JOHN KIRKPATRICK - CAROLLING & CRUMPETS Sun 16 Dec, The Fleece Inn, Evesham

Classical Music

SING CAROLS WITH THE CITY ORGANIST AND BIRMINGHAM CATHEDRAL CHOIR Mon 10 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

WARWICK & KENILWORTH CHORAL SOCIETY: HANDEL'S MESSIAH Featuring Colin Druce (organ) & Benedict Wilson (conductor), Mon 10 Dec, St Nicholas Church, Warwick

JOHN WILSON & THE JOHN WILSON ORCHESTRA: AT THE MOVIES Mon 10 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Rupert Jeffcoat & Alexander Mason (organs), Tues 11 Dec, St John's Church, Hagley, Birmingham

WARWICK & KENILWORTH CHORAL SOCIETY Featuring Colin Druce (organ) & Benedict Wilson (conductor), Tues 11 Dec, St John's Church, Kenilworth

SIRINU Presenting an evening of Christmas music from medieval times, Tues 11 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick

TENORS UN LIMITED CHRISTMAS SHOW Tues 11 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: BRUCH'S VIOLIN CONCERTO Featuring Daniele Rustioni (conductor) & Ray Chen (violin). Programme includes works by Tchaikovsky, Bruch & Rachmaninov, Wed 12 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

BERLIN PHILHARMONIC STRING QUINтет Featuring Luiz Felipe Coelho & Romano Tommasini (violins), Wolfgang Talirz (viola), Tatjana Vassilijewa (cello) & Janusz Widzyk (double bass). Programme includes works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Rossini, Tartini, arr. Vieuxtemps & Bartok, Wed 12 Dec, The Barber Institute, Birmingham

A CLASSIC ENGLISH CHRISTMAS Featuring the Choristers of Gloucester Cathedral & Orchestra of the Swan. Featuring Adrian Partington (conductor). Programme includes works by Handel, David Willcocks, Elgar & Rutter, Wed 12 Dec, Malvern Theatres

ANDRÉ RIEU Thurs 13 Dec, Arena Birmingham

JOHN RUTTER'S CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION Featuring the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, John Rutter (conductor), Elin Manahan Thomas (soprano), Melanie Marshall (mezzo soprano), Andrew Lucas (organ), The Purcell Singers & The Temple Church Choir, Thurs 13 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

LONDON CONCERTANTE: VIENNESE CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT Pro-

gramme includes works by Strauss, Tchaikovsky & Brahms, Thurs 13 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

MIDLANDS HOSPITALS' CHOIR: SING NOEL Conducted by James Llewelyn Jones, Fri 14 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: CHRISTMAS SWING Featuring David Firman (conductor) plus Caroline Sheen, Damian Humbley & Nadim Naaman (vocalists), Fri 14 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

ROYAL BIRMINGHAM CONSERVATOIRE CHAMBER CHOIR Featuring Paul Spicer (director), Fri 14 Dec, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

COVENTRY CATHEDRAL CHORUS CHRISTMAS CONCERT Led by Paul Liddington Wright, Sat 15 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

A BAROQUE CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring The Elgar Chorale & Piers Maxim (Director of Music). Programme includes works by Bach, Gabrieli & Schutz, Sat 15 Dec, Church of the Ascension, Malvern

ORCHESTRA PRO ANIMA Featuring Michael Boehmann (violin). Programme includes works by Corelli, Telemann, Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Bizet & Anderson, Sun 16 Dec, Berkley Castle, Gloucestershire

A CHORAL CHRISTMAS WITH MATT BAKER Featuring the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Matt Baker (presenter) & the CBSO Choruses, Sun 16 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

ASTARIA STRING QUARTET: CHRISTMAS FAMILY CONCERT Sun 16 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

BIRMINGHAM PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA Featuring Michael Lloyd (conductor). Programme includes works by Tchaikovsky, Khachaturian & Shostakovich, Sun 16 Dec, The Brimall, University of Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM BACH CHOIR: SERVICE OF NINE LESSONS & CAROLS Sun 16 Dec, St Alban The Martyr, Highgate, Birmingham

Comedy

THE DESI CENTRAL CHRISTMAS SPECIAL FEATURING PATRICK MONAHAN, MICKEY SHARMA, AATIF NAWAZ & TEZ ILYAS Mon 10 Dec, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

IAN MOORE, ANDY ASKINS, ROB ROUSE & JOJO SMITH Wed 12 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

JETHRO Thurs 13 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

CATHERINE BOHART, IAN MOORE, ANDY ASKINS & ANDREW RYAN Thurs 13 -

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Sat 5 Dec, The Glee Club, B'ham

ADAM BLOOM, SEAN PERCIVAL & PETE OTWAY Thurs 13 & Fri 14 Dec, The Comedy Loft, Birmingham

COMEDY CLUB 4 KIDS: CHRISTMAS CRACKER Sat 15 Dec, The REP, Birmingham

SEAN PERCIVAL, PETE OTWAY & QUINCY Sat 15 Dec, The Comedy Loft, Birmingham

CATHERINE BOHART, IAN MOORE, ANDY ASKINS & ROB ROUSE Sun 16 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

Theatre

BENIDORM LIVE Stage version of the popular TV show starring Sherrie Hewson, Adam Gillen, Tony Maudsley, Jake Canuso & Janine Duvitski, until Sat 29 Dec, Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham

THE WIZARD OF OZ Follow the yellow brick road to the Emerald City this Christmas, until Sun 13 Jan, The REP, Birmingham

A CHRISTMAS CAROL David Edgar's acclaimed staging of Dickens' festive classic, showing at the RSC for a second year, until Sun 20 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

TIMON OF ATHENS Simon Godwin directs Kathryn Hunter in Shakespeare's satire on wealth, greed & betrayal, until Fri 22 Feb, The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

CHRISTMAS ENTERTAINMENT The Nonentities present an evening of carols, sketches and festive fun, Tues 11 - Fri 14 Dec, The Rose Theatre, Kidderminster

BAH HUMBUG! Worcester Repertory Company present a bitter-sweet comedy that gives Dickens' A Christmas Carol a modern twist, Tues 11 - Sat 22 Dec, Swan Theatre, Worcester

TWELFTH NIGHT Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Theatre Company presents its version of Shakespeare's popular comedy, Wed 12 - Sat 15 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome

DID WE MENTION THE FREE MINCE PIES? A lighthearted look at Christmas, presented by The Bear Pit Theatre Company, Thurs 13 - Fri 14 Dec, The Bear Pit Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

A CHRISTMAS WASSAIL Festive feast of music, comedy & spoken word, Sat 15 Dec, Hartlebury Castle, Nr Kidderminster

BEYOND THE BARRICADE Musical theatre concert performed by a cast of past principal performers from Les Miserable, Sat 15 Dec, Malvern Theatres

GRIMMS FAERY TALES Blue Orange Theatre present three favourite fairy-

tales by the Brothers Grimm - Rumpelstiltskin, Little Red Riding Hood & Rapunzel, Sat 15 - Sun 16 Dec, The Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN Amateur staging presented by Malvern Theatre Players, Sat 15 - Fri 21 Dec, Malvern Theatres

Kids Shows

PINOCCHIO Brand new staging of Carlo Collodi's classic tale about an inquisitive young puppet, until Sun 30 Dec, The Old Rep Theatre, B'ham

SANTA'S SPARKLY SURPRISE Join Santa, Ellie the Elf and the gang in Iain Lauchlan's Christmas show for very young audiences, Wed 12 - Mon 24 Dec, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

SANTA'S CHRISTMAS PARTY Help get Santa's party back on track in an adventure full of festive songs and party games, Sun 16 Dec, Henry Sandon Hall, Worcester

Pantomime

DICK WHITTINGTON Garrick panto favourites Sam Rabone and Ben Thornton are joined by CBeebies star Katrina Bryan, until Sat 5 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

SLEEPING BEAUTY High-energy pantomime fun, written and directed, as usual, by Iain Lauchlan, until Sat 5 Jan, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry



SLEEPING BEAUTY Starring Debbie McGee, Richard Cadell & Sooty, Doreen Tipton and Ian Adams, until Sun 13 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

PETER PAN Ceridwen Theatre's retelling of JM Barrie's classic tale, featuring puppetry, an original musical score and 'heroic swordplay', Mon 10 - Sat 22 Dec, Albany Theatre, Coventry

ALADDIN Featuring Strictly favourite Robin Windsor, Collabro's Michael Auger, Britain's Got Talent star Simon Howe and Louise Cannon, various dates between Mon 10 Dec - Sun 6 Jan, Palace Theatre, Redditch

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK Traditional family pantomime presented by The Abbey Players, Wed 12 - Sun 16 Dec, Abbey Theatre, Nuneaton, Warwickshire

PUSS IN BOOTS Traditional family panto, Wed 12 - Sun 30 Dec, Priory Theatre, Kenilworth

SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS Starring Su Pollard as the Wicked Queen, Thurs 13 Dec - Sun 6 Jan, Malvern Theatres

SLEEPING BEAUTY Brand new spin on an old yarn, Fri 14 Dec - Sun 6 Jan, The Core Theatre, Solihull

PETER PAN Amateur staging adapted from the story by JM Barrie, Sat 15 - Sun 16 Dec, The Rose Theatre, Kidderminster

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK All & Sundry return with a traditional family pantomime, Sat 15 - Sun 23 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

Dance

THE NUTCRACKER Birmingham Royal Ballet presents its annual staging of Peter Wright's world famous festive production, until Thurs 13 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome

CHARITY DANCE SHOW Presented by the Jennifer Lee School of Dance, Sun 16 Dec, Bridge House Theatre, Warwick

Film

INDEPENDENT LISTINGS:

NT LIVE: THE MADNESS OF GEORGE III Live theatre broadcast. Starring Mark Gatiss. Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Mon 10 Dec

THE WIFE (15) Drama. Starring Glenn Close, Jonathan Pryce. The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Mon 10 - Sun 16 Dec

NT LIVE: ANTONY & CLEOPATRA (12a) Theatre. Starring Ralph Fiennes, Sophie Okonedo. No.8, Pershore, Thurs 13 Dec

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY (12a) Biography/Drama. Starring Rami Malek, Joseph Mazzello. The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Thurs 13 - Sun 15 Dec

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (U) Family. Starring James Stewart, Donna Reed. Artrix, Bromsgrove, Fri 14 Dec

MET OPERA: LA TRAVIATA Opera screening. Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Sun 16 Dec

FANTASTIC BEASTS: THE CRIMES OF GRINDELWALD (12a) Fantasy. Starring Eddie Redmayne, Johnny Depp. The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Sun 16 - Sat 22 Dec

Events

BIRMINGHAM FRANKFURT CHRISTMAS MARKETS Offering a large range of traditional food & gifts and a selection of tempting food and drink across over 80 stalls, until Sun 23 Dec, Birmingham City Centre

THINKTANK ELF HUNT Pick up a finders' sheet at the box office to record all the elves you find as you explore the museum, until Sun 23 Dec, Thinktank Science Museum, Birmingham

ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM Festive fun in one of the 'best outdoor ice skating rinks in the UK', until Sun 6 Jan, Eastside City Park, Birmingham

MINI MUSEUM ENGINEERS Get problem-solving and explore the vehicles in this new family session, Wed 12 Dec, Coventry Transport Museum

LEGOLAND DISCOVERY CENTRE ADULT NIGHT Special adults-only night where visitors can explore Birmingham's 'ultimate indoor playground', Wed 12 Dec, Legoland Discovery Centre, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS MADE-TO-MEASURE TRAIL FOR CHILDREN Follow the festive trail, discover how 1920s' children decorated their Christmas tree, and meet a special Christmas guest, Fri 14 - Mon 17 Dec, Upton House & Gardens, Nr Banbury

CHRISTMAS AT CHEDHAM'S Featuring carols and songs by the wood stove, 'Christmas cheer', cakes and mince pies, Father Christmas and children's activities, Sat 15 Dec, Chedham's Yard, Warwickshire

MEET FATHER CHRISTMAS Sat 15 - Sun 16 Dec, Hall's Croft, Stratford-upon-Avon

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS A festive day out with a chocolate twist. See Father Christmas in his very own stage show - and there's a gift for every child, Sat 15 - Sun 16 Dec, Cadbury World, Birmingham

NATURAL WONDERS TREE DECORATIONS Make your own decorations out of natural materials found in the grounds, Sat 15 - Sun 16 Dec, Compton Verney Gallery, Warwick

CHILDREN'S VICTORIAN SANTA TRAILS Meet the Victorian household as they ready themselves for the annual visit of a very special guest, Sat 15 - Sun 16 Dec, Tamworth Castle

WHAT THE DICKENS! CHRISTMAS AT ASTON HALL Meet your favourite Charles Dickens characters and join in the Victorian festivities as Aston Hall presents a Dickensian Christmas, Sun 16 Dec, Aston Hall, B'ham

BIG BANG AND BRASS BAND Featuring the Royal Spa Brass Band and a 'spectacular' firework display, Sun 16 Dec, Compton Verney Gallery, Warwick


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Theatre

SATURDAY 15TH DECEMBER

A TRIBUTE TO
MARIAH CAREY

Mariah

The Loft



Tony Hadley - Step Back To The 80s @ Ricoh Arena, Coventry

Gigs

DEF LEPPARD Mon 17 Dec, Arena B'ham

REPLAY CHRISTMAS CHARITY PARTY Wed 19 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

NEW AMEN CORNER WITH MIKE D'ABO Wed 19 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

HOLLY AT CHRISTMAS Wed 19 Dec, The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury

MADDY PRIOR AND THE CARNIVAL BAND: CAROLS & CAPERS Wed 19 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

CHOIR OF CLARE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE Wed 19 Dec, Royal Spa Centre, Leamington

CHRISTMAS WITH EAST

17 Thurs 20 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

UB40 Fri 21 Dec, Arena Birmingham

BON JOVI EXPERIENCE Fri 21 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

BABY DEE Fri 21 Dec, The Tin Music and Arts, Canal Basin, Coventry

THE OFFICIAL RECEIVERS Fri 21 Dec, The Marr's Bar, Worcester

CLUTCH Sat 22 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

STEPBACK 80'S CONCERT Featuring Bananarama, Tony Hadley, ABC, Bonnie Tyler, Go West, The Selecter, Chesney Hawkes, Katrina (ex Katrina & The Waves) & Black Lace,

Sat 22 Dec, Ricoh Arena, Coventry

JAMIE KNIGHT & THE MANUKA BAND Sat 22 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

TALON - THE BEST OF THE EAGLES Sat 22 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

A ROCK 'N' ROLL CHRISTMAS PARTY WITH THE MERCY Sat 22 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

OLD SCHOOL HEAVY METAL Sat 22 Dec, Scruffy Murphys, Birmingham

NATHAN DAWE LIVE#0121 Sun 23 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

MISTY'S BIG ADVENTURE Sun 23 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham



East 17 - The Assembly, Leamington Spa

Classical Music

CHOIR OF KING'S COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE - A CHORAL CHRISTMAS Featuring Stephen Cleobury (conductor). Programme includes works by Britten & Vaughan Williams, Mon 17 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

MESSIAEN'S 'LA NATIVITE DU SEIGNEUR' Featuring Andrew Caskie (organist), Mon 17 Dec, Great Malvern Priory

LUNCHTIME CHRISTMAS MUSIC WITH SALISBURY CATHEDRAL CHOIR Featuring Thomas Trotter (organ), Mon 17 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

ENGLISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: HANDEL'S MESSIAH Featuring Kenneth Woods (artistic director), Academia Music Choir, April Fredrick (soprano) & Timothy Edlin (bass), Tues 18 Dec, Great Malvern Priory

A CHORAL CHRISTMAS WITH ALAN TITCHMARSH Also featuring the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Simon Halsey (conductor) & the CBSO Choruses, Tues 18 - Wed 19 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Rupert Jeffcoat & Alexander Mason (organs), Tues 18 - Sat 22 Dec, St Paul's Church, Birmingham

CHOIR OF CLARE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE: WINTER'S NIGHT Programme includes works by Praetorius, Parry, Holst, Howells, Barber, Tavener, John Rutter, Judith Weir, Roxanna Panufnik, Irving Berlin and more... Wed 19 Dec, St Mark's Church, Leamington Spa

ARMONICO CONSORT & ORCHESTRA Featuring Christopher Monks (director). Programme includes works by Bach & Charpentier, Fri 21 Dec, Malvern Theatres

LONDON CONCERT ORCHESTRA: CHRISTMAS CLASSICS Also featuring the City of Birmingham Choir, Adrian Lucas (conductor) & William Dazeley (baritone). Programme includes works by Gruber, Wilberg, Darke, Strauss, Bach, Vaughan Williams, Berlioz & Handel, Fri 21 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THE WAITES OF GLOUCESTER: THE HOLLY & THE IVY Evening of historical Christmas music, Fri 21 Dec, Harvington Hall, Kidderminster

EX CATHEDRA: ANGELS, STARS & KINGS Also featuring Ex Cathedra Academy of Vocal Music, Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor) & Alexander Mason (organ), Sat 22 Dec, St Paul's Church, Birmingham

LONDON FESTIVAL OPERA: A CHRISTMAS NIGHT AT THE OPERA Featuring

works by Mozart, Rossini, Verdi, Bizet, Puccini, Offenbach, Gilbert & Sullivan & more... Sat 22 Dec, Malvern Theatres

Comedy

MARLON DAVIS, DANE BAPTISTE, MICKEY SHARMA & LATEEF LOVEJOY Tues 18 Dec, The Glee Club, B'ham

TOM LUCY, ANDY ROBINSON, CARL DONNELLY & DAVE FULTON Wed 19 - Sat 22 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

DAVE LONGLEY, KANE BROWN & ROBERT WHITE Thurs 20 - Fri 21 Dec, The Comedy Loft, Birmingham

RICHARD MORTON, JAVIER JARQUIN, PAUL RICKETTS & BARRY DODDS Fri 21 Dec, Abbey Theatre, Nuneaton

DAVE LONGLEY, KANE BROWN & ROBERT WHITE Sat 22 Dec, The Comedy Loft Birmingham

Theatre

CINDERELLA ON ICE Tues 18 Dec, Planet Ice, Coventry

AN EVENING OF CHRISTMAS READINGS Rehearsed readings of seasonal favourites by Thomas Hardy, Laurie Lee, Dylan Thomas, TS Eliot & Kenneth Grahame, Tues 18 Dec, Malvern Theatres

A CHRISTMAS CAROL IN CONCERT Unique retelling of Dickens' heart-warming tale by musician-singers Green Matthews, Thurs 20 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

YOUNG DIRECTORS' FESTIVAL Stage2 Youth Theatre present an evening of 10-minute extracts from classic and contemporary texts, Fri 21 - Sat 22 Dec, MAC, Birmingham

GRIMMS FAERY TALES Blue Orange Theatre present three favourite fairytales by the Brothers Grimm - Rumpelstiltskin, Little Red Riding Hood & Rapunzel, Sat 22 - Sun 30 Dec, The Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham

A CHRISTMAS CAROL BY CHARLES DICKENS In December 1853, Charles Dickens chose A Christmas Carol for his first ever public reading in the Town Hall. Over 160 years later, Clive Francis recreates the occasion, Sun 23 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

Kids Shows

PINOCCHIO Brand new staging of Carlo Collodi's classic tale about an inquisitive young puppet, until Sun 30 Dec, The Old Rep Theatre, B'ham

CHRISTMAS at SYMPHONY HALL

Saturday 15 December at 2.30 & 7.30pm
CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR



MUSIC, DANCE, LIGHTS AND A SNOW FILLED FINALE.

With special guest **Kimberley Walsh**

Merry Christmas Everyone • **Winter Wonderland** • **Jingle Bell Rock**
Sleigh Ride • **Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas**
Santa Claus is Coming to Town • **All I Want for Christmas is You**

Kerry Ellis & Tim Howar guest singers **The Jingle Belles** dancers
John Rigby conductor **Capital Voices** **London Concert Orchestra**

Friday 21 December at 7.30pm
CHRISTMAS CLASSICS



Herald the season with festive classics and carols.

Darke in the bleak midwinter **Rutter** The holly and the ivy
Vaughan Williams Fantasia on Christmas Carols
Tchaikovsky The Nutcracker Suite plus **CAROLS FOR ALL**

William Dazeley baritone **Adrian Lucas** conductor
City of Birmingham Choir **London Concert Orchestra**

Saturday 22 December at 7.30pm
WHITE CHRISTMAS



All-time favourite Christmas songs and carols.

Winter Wonderland • **White Christmas** • **Let It Snow!**
Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas • **Santa Baby**
I'll Be Home for Christmas • **The Christmas Song**
Santa Claus is Coming to Town and many more...

With guest singers **Matt Ford & Emma Keirshaw**
Anthony Gabriele conductor
Canzonetta **London Concert Orchestra**

Sunday 23 December at 2.30pm
CHRISTMAS CAROL SINGALONG



Jonathan Cohen leads you through another
fun-filled jamboree of carols and Christmas hits.

Jingle Bells • **Frosty the Snowman** • **Let It Snow**
Merry Christmas Everyone • **Sleigh Ride**
I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day
Santa Claus is Coming to Town plus **CAROLS FOR ALL**

Jonathan Cohen conductor/presenter **Louise Dearman** guest singer
London Concert Chorus **London Concert Orchestra**

Monday 24 December at 2.30pm
CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT



Carols and seasonal classics, staged in full 18th Century
costume in an evocative candle-lit style setting.

Cullen Joy to the World **Pearls** In dulci jubilo
Handel Zadok the Priest, Christmas Sequence
including **Hallelujah Chorus** from **Messiah**
plus **CAROLS FOR ALL**

With readings by special guest **Peter Davison**

Rowan Pierce soprano **Michael Bawtree** conductor **Canzonetta**
Mozart Festival Orchestra in full period costume

Thursday 27 December at 7.30pm
LAST NIGHT OF THE CHRISTMAS PROMS



Rousing classics with a grand flag waving British finale!

Humperdinck Hansel and Gretel Overture
Puccini O soave fanciulla from *La bohème*
Vendí Brindisi from *La traviata* **Tchaikovsky** The Nutcracker Suite
RULE, BRITANNIA! **LAND OF HOPE AND GLORY**

Sky Ingram soprano **Robyn Lyn Evans** tenor
John Pryce-Jones conductor **London Concert Orchestra**

Friday 28 December at 2.30pm
GLENN MILLER ORCHESTRA



Favourite wartime chart toppers and hits from the
forties, directed by legendary band leader **Ray McVay**.

Strike Up The Band • **Moonlight Serenade**
American Patrol • **Tuxedo Junction** • **In The Mood**
Pennsylvania 6-5000 • **Chattanooga Choo Choo**

With special guests **The Polka Dot Dolls**
and guest vocalists **Mark Porter & Catherine Sykes**

Friday 28 December at 7.30pm
THE MUSIC OF ZIMMER vs WILLIAMS



The very best scores from the two greatest film
composers of all time, **Hans Zimmer** and **John Williams**.

Inception • **Gladiator** • **Superman** • **Man Of Steel**
The Dark Knight Rises • **Pirates Of The Caribbean**
Star Wars • **Harry Potter**
The Da Vinci Code • **Raiders Of The Lost Ark**

Anthony Inglis conductor **London Concert Orchestra**

Saturday 29 December at 2.30pm
STAR WARS AND BEYOND



Iconic film scores of **John Williams** – one of the most
respected and acclaimed film composers of all time.

Jaws • **Star Wars** • **E.T.** • **Hook** • **Jurassic Park** • **Superman**
Close Encounters Of The Third Kind • **Born On The Fourth Of July**
Schindler's List • **Harry Potter** and many more...

Anthony Inglis conductor **London Concert Orchestra**

Saturday 29 December at 7.30pm
TCHAIKOVSKY SPECTACULAR



Celebrate the music of Russia's most popular composer with
this all-Tchaikovsky extravaganza of his greatest works.
Featuring internationally acclaimed violin soloist **Jennifer Pike**.

Violin Concerto in D Major • **Polonaise** from *Eugene Onegin*
Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture • **Swan Lake Suite**
1812 OVERTURE FINALE

complete with thundering cannon effects and indoor fireworks

Benjamin Pope conductor **London Concert Orchestra**

Sunday 30 December at 7.30pm
PIANO LEGENDS



Symphony Hall comes alive to the greatest hits of Piano Legends.
The iconic songs of **Elton John**, **Alicia Keys**, **Stevie Wonder**, **Billy Joel**
Barry Manilow and **Ray Charles** combine in a fabulous glittering
show of music, song and dance that will set your toes tapping.

Goodbye Yellow Brick Road • **Could It Be Magic**
Superstition • **New York State Of Mind** • **Your Song**
Beautiful • **Hit The Road Jack** • **Candle In The Wind**

Mark Read guest singer
Leading West End vocalists **London Concert Orchestra**

Tuesday 1 January at 2.30pm
THE JOHANN STRAUSS GALA



Elegant dancers in their billowing gowns flamboyantly
whirl to the music of the King of Waltz and friends.

Blue Danube Waltz • **Radetzky March** • **Snowstorm Waltz**
Cinderella Waltz • **Thunder and Lightning Polka** • **Emperor Waltz**
Voices of Spring and many more...

Johann Strauss Dancers in beautiful costumes of the period
Corinne Cowling soprano **Nico Darmanin** tenor
John Rigby conductor **Johann Strauss Orchestra**

EMILY BROWN AND THE THING Tall Stories present a 'magical adventure for the whole family to enjoy', Mon 17 Dec - Sun 6 Jan, The Patrick Centre, Birmingham Hippodrome

THE CANTERVILLE GHOST Tall Stories present a new version of Oscar Wilde's 'gruesomest' ghost story, Tues 18 - Sun 23 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

ELF - A CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR David Essex and Martine McCutcheon star in a 'supersized show' based on the hit West End and Broadway musical, Thurs 20 - Mon 24 Dec, Genting Arena, Birmingham

SANTA IN LOVE Festive play for very young children, featuring singalong games and a meet-and-greet with Santa, Fri 21 - Mon 24 Dec, The Core Theatre, Solihull

Pantomime

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK All & Sundry return with a traditional family pantomime, until Sun 23 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Daniel O'Brien's festive treat, featuring a cast of actors, singers & musicians, until Mon 31 Dec, Sutton Coldfield Town Hall

DICK WHITTINGTON Garrick panto favourites Sam Rabone and Ben Thornton are joined by CBeebies star Katrina Bryan, until Sat 5 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

SLEEPING BEAUTY High-energy pantomime fun, written and directed, as usual, by Iain Lauchlan, until Sat 5 Jan, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

SLEEPING BEAUTY Brand new spin on an old yarn, until Sun 6 Jan, The Core Theatre, Solihull

ALADDIN Featuring Strictly favourite Robin Windsor, Collabro's Michael Auger, Britain's Got Talent star Simon Howe and Louise Cannon, various dates between until Sun 6 Jan, Palace Theatre, Redditch

SLEEPING BEAUTY Starring Debbie McGee, Richard Cadell & Sooty, Doreen Tipton and Ian Adams, until Sun 13 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

PETER PAN Matt Slack returns to entertain Hippodrome audiences in a swashbuckling pantomime adventure which promises 'barrels of laughter, amazing flying effects and a trip to Neverland'. Jimmy Osmond, Meera Syal & Jaymi Hensley also star, Wed 19 Dec - Sun 27 Jan, Birmingham Hippodrome

ALADDIN Fri 21 Dec - Sat 5 Jan, Talisman Theatre, Kenilworth

Film

INDEPENDENT LISTINGS:

THE NUTCRACKER: ROYAL BALLET LIVE ENCORE SCREENING(12a) Dance. Starring The Royal Ballet. Artrix, Bromsgrove, Tues 18 Dec

PETERLOO (12a) Drama/History. Starring Rory Kinnear, Maxine Peake. The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Tues 18 - Wed 19 Dec

THE NUTCRACKER Live ballet broadcast. No.8, Pershore, Sun 23 Dec

NEW FILMS ON GENERAL RELEASE:

Released from Fri 21 Dec, showing at selected cinemas

MARY POPPINS RETURNS (tbc)

Events

MEET SANTA Visit the North Pole of the city in the Antarctic Ice Cave, meet the man himself and check out the family of cheeky Gentoo Penguins in the Ice Adventure area, until Sun 23 Dec, National Sea Life Centre, B'ham

THINKTANK ELF HUNT Pick up a finders' sheet at the box office to record all the elves you find as you explore the museum, until Sun 23 Dec, Thinktank Science Museum, Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM FRANKFURT CHRISTMAS MARKETS Offering a large range of traditional food & gifts and a selection of tempting food and drink across over 80 stalls, until Sun 23 Dec, Birmingham City Centre

SANTA'S WINTER WONDERLAND until Mon 31 Dec, The Snowdome, Tamworth

DRAYTON'S MAGICAL CHRISTMAS until Mon 31 Dec, Drayton Manor Theme Park, Tamworth

MAGICAL LANTERN FESTIVAL 2018 Back at Birmingham Botanical Gardens due to exceptional demand, with all-new lanterns for 2018, until Tues 1 Jan, Birmingham Botanical Gardens

ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM Festive fun in one of the 'best outdoor ice skating rinks in the UK', until Sun 6 Jan, Eastside City Park, Birmingham

MINI MUSEUM ENGINEERS Get problem-solving and explore the vehicles in this new family session, Wed 19 Dec, Coventry Transport Museum

A FESTIVE CHRISTMAS EVENING An exclusive opportunity to see Eastnor Castle decorated for Christmas and enjoy a tour by James Hervey-Bathurst, Thurs 20 Dec, Eastnor Castle, Herefordshire

CHRISTMAS CAROL TRAINS Sing along or just soak up the festive atmo-



Sleeping Beauty - The Core, Solihull

sphere as you get Christmas off to a traditional start with an evening of carols & festive songs, Fri 21 - Sat 22 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, Kidderminster

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS A festive day out with a chocolatey twist. See Father Christmas in his very own stage show - and there's a gift for every child, Fri 21 - Sun 23 Dec, Cadbury World, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS MADE-TO-MEASURE TRAIL FOR CHILDREN Follow the festive trail, discover how 1920s' children decorated their Christmas tree, and meet a special Christmas guest, Fri 21 - Sun 23 Dec, Upton House & Gardens, Nr Banbury

UPTON MAKES THE HOUSE DESIRABLE THIS CHRISTMAS See the house decorated for a 'modern' 1920s Christmas, Fri 21 - Sun 23 Dec, Upton House & Gardens, Nr Banbury

MONSKI MOUSE'S BABY DISCO DANCE HALL: CHRISTMAS SPECIAL Join DJ-mumma Monski Mouse and her dancers for a morning of family fun, Sat 22 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

STICK MAN - INTERACTIVE STORY-TELLING AND CRAFT SESSION Activities based around Julia Donaldson's much-loved story, Sat 22 Dec, Henry Sandon Hall, Worcester

SANTA STEAM SPECIALS Get Christmas off to a magical start by meeting Father Christmas in his grotto, Sat 22 - Sun 23 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, Kidderminster

CHILDREN'S VICTORIAN SANTA TRAILS Meet the Victorian household as they ready themselves for the annual visit of a very special guest, Sat 22 - Sun 23 Dec, Tamworth Castle

MEET THE SNOWMAN Sun 23 Dec, West Orchards Shopping Centre, Coventry



Festive Christmas Evening - Eastnor Castle

MERRY & BRIGHT

Christmas 2018

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01926 479100

Gigs

FLEETWOOD BAC Fri 28 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa
THE MAD HATTERS NEW YEARS EVE TEA PARTY Sat 29 Dec, The Flapper, Birmingham
NOW! THAT'S WHAT I CALL MANCHESTER Sat 29 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham
THE BIG NYE PARTY WITH

CHARLIE SLOTH Mon 31 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

NEW YEARS EVE PARTY WITH BEAT BROTHERS Mon 31 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

NEW YEARS EVE MASQUERADE BALL 2018 Mon 31 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

NEW YEAR EVE - THE BLUE SOCKS, Mon 31 Dec, The Fleece Inn,

Evesham

SWIM WITH SHARKS + DJ (pictured) Mon 31 Dec, Irish Centre, Birmingham

NYE NORTHERN SOULMOD AND MOTOWN ALL NIGHTER Mon 31 Dec, The Night Owl, Birmingham

NEW YEAR'S EVE INDIE DISCO Mon 31 Dec, The Tin Music and Arts, Canal Basin, Coventry



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Classical Music

LONDON CONCERT ORCHESTRA: WHITE CHRISTMAS Also featuring Canzonetta, Anthony Gabriele & guest singers Matt Ford & Emma Kershaw, Sat 22 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

LONDON CONCERT ORCHESTRA: CHRISTMAS CAROL SINGALONG Featuring Jonathan Cohen (conductor/presenter) & Louise Dearman (guest singer), Sun 23 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

COVENTRY CATHEDRAL CHORUS: HANDEL'S MESSIAH Featuring Philippa Hyde, Simon Ponsford, Matthew Minter, James Cleverden, Orchestra Pro Anima, Coventry Cathedral Chorus & Paul Leddington Wright, Sun 23 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

MOZART FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA: CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring the Canzonetta Choir, Michael Bawtree (conductor), Rowan Pierce (soprano) & Peter Davison (special guest reader). Programme includes works by Cullen, Handel, Pearsall & Willcocks, Mon 24 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

LONDON CONCERT ORCHESTRA - LAST NIGHT OF THE CHRISTMAS PROMS Also featuring John Pryce-Jones (conductor), Robyn Lyn Evans (tenor) & Sky Ingram (soprano). Programme includes works by Humperdinck, Grieg, Puccini, Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Debussy & Strauss, Thurs 27 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

LONDON CONCERT ORCHESTRA: STAR WARS AND BEYOND A John Williams spectacular conducted by Anthony Inglis and featuring scores from Jaws, Gravity, Batman Suite, E.T., Hook, Close Encounters, Jurassic Park, Schindler's List and more... Sat 29 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

TCHAIKOVSKY SPECTACULAR Featuring the London Concert Orchestra, Benjamin Pope (conductor) & Jennifer Pike (violin), Sat 29 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

LONDON CONCERT ORCHESTRA: NEW YEAR'S EVE GALA Featuring Anthony Inglis (conductor), Grant Doyle (baritone) & Peter Auty (tenor). Programme includes works by Bizet, Tchaikovsky, Mascagni, Coates & Elgar, Mon 31 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Comedy

ANDY ROBINSON, ANDY WHITE, CRAIG MURRAY & JOSH JONES Fri 28 - Sat 29 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

SOL BERNSTEIN, MIKE NEWALL, GARRETT MILLERICK & DIANE SPENCER Sat

29 Dec, The Comedy Loft, B'ham
GUZ KHAN, DALISO CHAPONDA, SLIM & KANE BROWN Sun 30 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

ANDY ROBINSON, GEOFF NORCOTT, DANNY MCLOUGHLIN & COMIC TBC Mon 31 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

NICK PAGE & DAVE LONGLEY Mon 31 Dec, The Comedy Loft, Birmingham

Theatre

BENIDORM LIVE Stage version of the popular TV show starring Sherrie Hewson, Adam Gillen, Tony Maudsley, Jake Canuso & Janine Duvitski, until Sat 29 Dec, Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham

GRIMMS FAERY TALES Blue Orange Theatre present three favourite fairytales by the Brothers Grimm - Rumpelstiltskin, Little Red Riding Hood & Rapunzel, until Sun 30 Dec, The Blue Orange Theatre, B'ham

THE WIZARD OF OZ Follow the yellow brick road to the Emerald City this Christmas, until Sun 13 Jan, The REP, Birmingham

A CHRISTMAS CAROL David

Edgar's acclaimed staging of Dickens' festive classic, showing at the RSC for a second year, until Sun 20 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN Amateur staging presented by Malvern Theatre Players, Thurs 27 - Sun 30 Dec, Malvern Theatres



Kids Shows

PINOCCHIO Brand new staging of Carlo Collodi's classic tale about an inquisitive young puppet, until Sun 30 Dec, The Old Rep Theatre, B'ham

SANTA'S CHRISTMAS PARTY Help get Santa's party back on track in an adventure full of festive songs and party games, Mon 24 Dec, Artrix, Bromsgrove

THE TIGER WHO CAME TO TEA Stage adaptation of Judith Kerr's much-loved picture book for children, Wed 26 Dec - Sun 13 Jan, Birmingham Town Hall

THE CANTERVILLE GHOST Tall Stories present a new version of Oscar Wilde's 'gruesomest' ghost story, Thurs 27 - Sun 30 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

Pantomime

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BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Three Spires present 'festive fun & frolics for all of the family', Mon 31 Dec - Sat 5 Jan, Albany Theatre, Coventry

Film

INDEPENDENT LISTINGS:

THE KING & I Recorded theatre performance. No.8, Pershore, Thurs 27 Dec

THE NUTCRACKER Live ballet broadcast. No.8, Pershore, Fri 28 Dec

MAMMA MIA! HERE WE GO AGAIN SING-

A-LONG (PG) Musical/Comedy. Starring Colin Firth, Amanda Seyfried. Artrix, Bromsgrove, Fri 28 - Sat 29 Dec

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST SING-A-LONG (PG) Musical/Comedy. Starring Emma Watson, Dan Stevens. Artrix, Bromsgrove, Sat 29 Dec

RALPH BREAKS THE INTERNET (PG) Animation. With the voices of John C. Reilly, Sarah Silverman. The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Sat 29 - Sun 30 Dec



Events

SANTA'S WINTER WONDERLAND until Mon 31 Dec, The Snowdome, Tam-

worth

DRAYTON'S MAGICAL CHRISTMAS until Mon 31 Dec, Drayton Manor Theme Park, Tamworth

MAGICAL LANTERN FESTIVAL 2018 Back at Birmingham Botanical Gardens due to exceptional demand, with all-new lanterns for 2018, until Tues 1 Jan, Birmingham Botanical Gardens

ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM Festive fun in one of the 'best outdoor ice skating rinks in the UK', until Sun 6 Jan, Eastside City Park, Birmingham

FESTIVE SEASON SERVICE Let the Christmas festivities continue with a leisurely steam train journey along the beautiful Severn Valley, Wed 26 Dec - Sun 6 Jan, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

TOY COLLECTORS FAIR Explore over 500 stalls packed with all kinds of collectable toys, trains and models for sale. Thurs 27 Dec, NEC, B'ham

WINTER HOLIDAY FAMILY CRAFTS Transform wrapping paper, Christmas cards and a selection of surprise material to make 'amazing gifts that you can use throughout the year', Thurs 27 - Sat 29 & Mon 31 Dec, Coventry Transport Museum

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SEA LIFE
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Includes free gift for all kids PLUS under 3s go free!

THE ROSES

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Live Cinema

National Theatre Live: Antony & Cleopatra

Thur 6 Dec 7pm



Tewkesbury Town Band

Sat 8 - Sun 9 Dec



Powerhouse Gospel Choir

Wed 12 Dec 8pm



Holly At Christmas

Wed 19 Dec 7.30pm



The King And I

From the London Palladium
Thur 20 Dec 7.30pm

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