

Shropshire


ISSUE 412 WINTER 2020/21

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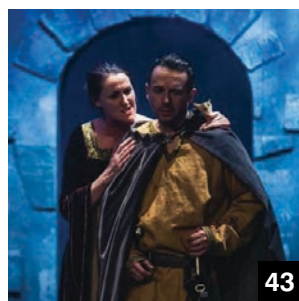
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Christmas Eve 8am - 4pm



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INSIDE:

First Word

4

Food

11

Live Arts

13

Festive Events

23

Film Favourites

26

Theatre

41



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What's On

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Strictly favourites to open new tour in Shropshire

Strictly Come Dancing professionals Anton Du Beke and Giovanni Pernice are joining forces in 2021 for their first ever tour together.

Him & Me! will see the duo being joined by a talented cast of dancers and singers.

The show's tour kicks off at Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn on Thursday 17 June.

It then returns to the Midlands the following month, stopping off at Birmingham's The Alexandra on Tuesday 20 July.

Midlands kids set to visit Narnia in 2021

Midlands youngsters are invited to step into the magical land of Narnia when a stage version of CS Lewis's classic children's story, The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe, stops off in Birmingham.

The critically acclaimed production is directed by Sally Cookson and visits The Alexandra from Tues 8 to Sat 12 March, 2022. To purchase tickets, visit atgtickets.com



Applications now open for film & theatre academy

Students in the West Midlands are being invited to apply for a new academy specialising in technical theatre, film and broadcast production.

Opening in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter next September, BOA Stage & Screen will be a state-funded academy for 16 to 19-year-olds. The academy will take an industry-led approach to developing young people's skills

in both existing and emerging production techniques and broadcast technologies. For information about how to apply, visit boa-stageandscreen.co.uk

Shropshire initiative urges doorstep carol singing

A Shropshire initiative is encouraging people to sing carols on their doorstep this Christmas.

Doorstep Carols is asking the whole nation to 'make a noise' at their front doors on Wednesday 16 December from 6pm to 7pm. The carols will be broadcast on local radio stations across the UK to help participants stay in time.

Carols sheets and simple sheet music can be downloaded from doorstepcarols.co.uk



Outdoor Christmas parties down on the farm

Popular Shropshire wedding & events venue Stanford Farm is this year hosting outdoor Christmas parties both for adults and children.

The adult parties take place in 20 log cabins, with participants encouraged to attend wearing fancy dress - think retro ski suits, naughty elves and silly ski hats.

The kids' parties include The Bookworm Players presenting their interactive musical show, The Elf Who Forgot About Christmas. To find out more about the parties and when they're taking place, visit stanfordfarm.co.uk

James and Happy Mondays to unite for 2021 Birmingham arena show

Two of Manchester's most celebrated bands will perform at Utilita Arena Birmingham next autumn.

With a diverse sound spanning 14 studio albums released across three decades, James have sold over 25 million albums worldwide. They will be joined in Birmingham by Happy Mondays, who will be performing hits including Step On, Kinky Afro and 24 Hour Party People. The concert takes place at Utilita Arena on Friday 26 November 2021.



New dates for Kevin & Joanne...

Strictly stars Kevin and Joanne Clifton have rearranged their tour dates as a result of the Covid-19 autumn lockdown.

The popular siblings will now present their An Evening With... show at the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton, on Tuesday 23 February, and at Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, on Sunday 28 February. The production provides a glimpse into the lives of the popular duo - from their formative years growing up in a dancing family, to their modern-day successes on Strictly and beyond.



Charity Santa Dash goes online

Hope House children's hospice is once again holding a Santa Dash to raise much-needed funds this Christmas - only this year, due to the pandemic, the event is virtual. Participants are invited to dig out their festive fancy dress and run, jog or walk 2.5k or 5k straight from their doorstep on Sunday 13 December. Commenting on the event, a Hope House statement said: "Donations have fallen drastically since Covid-19, and our children and families need your support now more than ever. Sign up today and you will ensure that they get the help they so desperately need in these difficult times." For more information, visit hopehouse.org.uk



Jess Glynne to perform at Forest Live

Jess Glynne will next summer perform in Cannock Chase Forest as part of Forest Live, the annual concert series presented by Forestry England.

The aim of the series is to introduce forests to new audiences by inviting people to enjoy live

music in a number of natural woodland arenas around the country. Over 1.9 million people have attended a Forest Live gig in the last 20 years.

Jess will play Cannock Chase Forest on Thursday 10 June. Tickets are now on sale at forestryengland.uk/music

Bongo's Bingo to return to The Buttermarket

Shrewsbury venue The Buttermarket's ever-popular Bongo's Bingo will return from June to August 2021.

The event, which promises 'more crazy bingo, awesome raves, mental prizes and hilarious dance-offs', takes place on Saturday 26 June, Friday 2 July, Friday 30 July, Friday 6 August and Saturday 28 August.

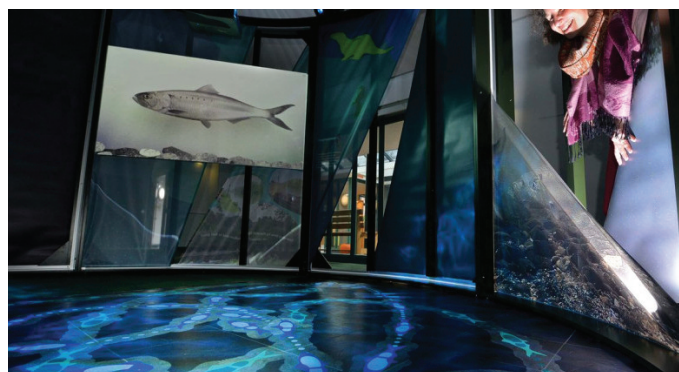
Tickets are on sale now at bongosbingo.co.uk or via the Bongo's Bingo app. If you've been issued Bongo's Bingo Credit for a previously cancelled show, you can also book your tickets now.

Ironbridge Gorge exhibition unlocks the secrets of the River Severn

A conservation project in Ironbridge is providing visitors with an insight into the underwater world of the River Severn.

Presented in The Footprint Gallery at Fusion - adjacent to the Jackfield Tile Museum - the new exhibition focuses on an endangered fish called the twaite shad, telling the story of its epic River Severn migration.

Created by conservation and river engagement group Unlocking The Severn, the display shows in Ironbridge until 28 February. It will then visit The Hive in Worcester - in May and June - before moving to Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery in the later summer.



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New playground plan for Blists Hill

A bespoke adventure playground may soon be created at the award-winning Blists Hill Victorian Town. The playground is part of Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust's ambitious three-year plan to attract a new generation of families and visitors to the historic site. Attractions will include multi-level themed buildings linking to elevated walks above the woodland floor, a log-style basket swing, a seesaw, immersive play areas, a zip wire, a toddler zone and a food & drink kiosk with seating area.

Buttons will go to the ball this year - in Brierley Hill!

Although pantomimes across the country have been cancelled due to the pandemic, in the Black Country one man is riding to the rescue, albeit early 2021.

Award-winning character comic Tom Binns - best known as hospital radio DJ Ivan Brackenbury - is bringing his one-man panto to Brierley Hill Civic for three nights in January, to ensure that families can still get their fix of theatrical fun.

Buttons: The One Man Panto is suitable for the whole family to enjoy. It will feature a number of cameos via Zoom from panto legends including Bernie Clifton... The one-hour show stops off at the Civic from Fri 8 to Sun 10 January, 2021.

To book, or for further information, go to funnybeesness.co.uk



New Osmonds musical heads for Brum

A brand-new stage show telling the story of one of the music industry's most famous families and biggest-ever boybands is coming to Birmingham's The Alexandra next autumn. The Osmonds: A New Musical celebrates the career of the five brothers from Utah who became massive pop stars in the 1960s and '70s.

Featuring some of The Osmonds' best-known tracks - including Love Me For A Reason, Crazy Horses and One Bad Apple - the show stops off at The Alex from Tuesday 12 to Saturday 16 October.



Join The Wednesday Wave, says Worcester mask theatre company

Worcester mask theatre company Vamos Theatre is urging people to join in with The Wednesday Wave - an initiative aiming to combat loneliness in care homes.

Launched in October, the Wave sees hundreds of members of the public pledge to walk by their local care home at 3pm every Wednesday and wave at residents through their windows.

Anyone who'd like to take part can simply look from their window from 3pm on Wednesdays, or head out on a walk to wave. There's also a poster available (at vamos theatre.co.uk/TWWposter) for care homes and others who would like to display one.

Pop-up panto at Alderford Lake

A socially distanced pantomime production of Dick Whittington is coming to Alderford Lake in Whitchurch this Christmas.

The show is being presented by Immersion Theatre, who enjoyed a summertime success at the venue with their stage adaptation of The Wind In The Willows.

Dick Whittington runs from Saturday 12 to Wednesday 23 December. Tickets can be booked by visiting alderford.com.

Falling For The City exhibition on show in Stoke-on-Trent

A new exhibition featuring places and spaces in Stoke-on-Trent which are close to local people's hearts has opened in Longton Exchange.

Falling For The City was created by local theatre company Potboiler and features portraits of local people in the places that mean the most to them.

The exhibition is available to view until the end of the year in the window of a vacant unit in Longton Exchange.

The full collection of Falling For The City images can be viewed online at potboilertheatre.co.uk

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Purchasing a seat sponsorship is easy, visit grandtheatre.co.uk or call the
Box Office on 01902 42 92 12 for more details.

*Normal price £250

News from around the region

RAF Museum Cosford launches new corporate membership programme

The Royal Air Force Museum in Cosford has launched a corporate membership programme.

The initiative offers businesses the opportunity to inspire and reward clients and employees through member benefits, while directly supporting the work of the RAF Museum.

Corporate membership starts from £5,000 per annum (+VAT).

For more details on how becoming an RAF Museum Corporate Member can benefit a business, visit rafmuseum.org.uk



Birmingham Rep to host new digital show for kids

Northern Ireland-based children's theatre company Cahoots NI will present a groundbreaking immersive digital show for children at Birmingham Repertory Theatre in early December.

The University Of Wonder And Imagination will be broadcast live over Zoom from an extensive, purpose-built set in Belfast 'where magic and illusion have no boundaries'. The hour-long production - during which audiences will experience themed rooms filled with illusion and encounter numerous problems and puzzles - is suitable for youngsters aged seven and older.

It shows at The REP from 1 to 5 December. For more information and tickets, visit birmingham-rep.co.uk



Midlands pantomime fun to come - but not till January!

Birmingham Hippodrome and Qdos Entertainment will present an all-new production of Robin Hood at the city's Alexandra theatre in the new year.

The socially distanced one-act production will star Craig Revel Horwood - as the Sheriff of Nottingham - Hippodrome pantomime favourite Matt Slack, Richard Cadell & Sooty, and Black Country comedy character Doreen Tipton.

In a joint statement, Hippodrome Artistic Director & Chief Executive Fiona Allan and managing director of Qdos Entertainment Michael Harrison, who's directed the Hippodrome pantomime for the past 10 years, said: "We're delighted to be working

together to make sure that our loyal audiences in Birmingham don't miss out on the magic of pantomime this year. "Presenting Robin Hood at The Alexandra allows us to see two of the city's key cultural institutions open with social distancing in place. Although on a different stage, this year's show will be designed and created by the usual Hippodrome panto creative team, and will feature all the comedy and laughter our audiences have come to expect." expect." Robin Hood shows at The Alexandra Theatre from Sat 16 to Sun 31 January. Tickets for the show are now on sale from atgtickets.com

Professor Brian Cox to bring new show to the region

Professor Brian Cox will return to Birmingham with a brand-new show next year, stopping off at the city's Utilita Arena on 2 October.

Commenting, Brian said: "I loved the 2019 arena tour because it gave me the opportunity to discuss the most profound ideas with tens of thousands of people in front of the most spectacular images of the universe.

"I hope the new show will make people think about how fortunate and precious we are, how strange and wonderful our universe is, and the limitless future we have to look forward to if we make the right choices over the coming decades."



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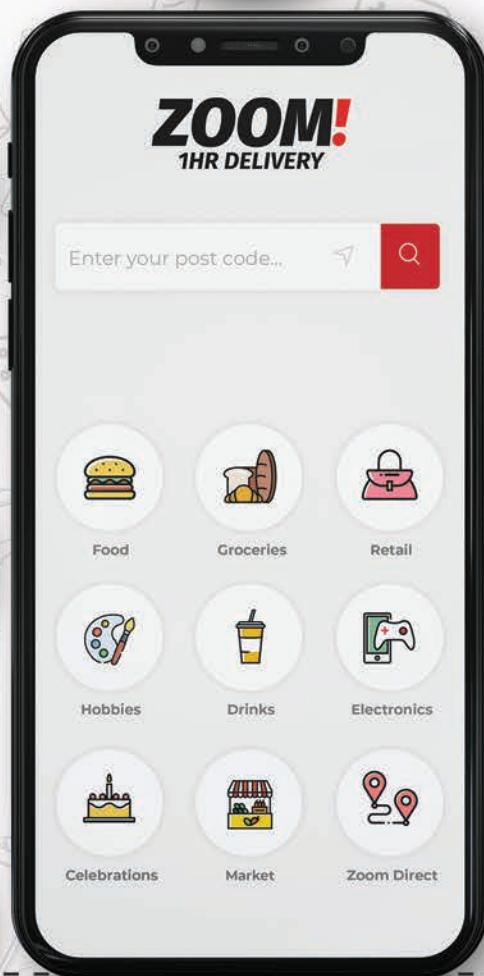
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New cafe set to open in Shrewsbury

Caffè Figo will be opening soon at the top of Shrewsbury's Wyle Cop, offering speciality coffees, homemade cakes and locally sourced foods. The venue is currently hiring, so get in touch on caffefigo@outlook.com for more details and to send a CV.

Brazilian restaurant launches Fazenda At Home service

Known for serving the finest cuts of South American meat, carnivore's paradise Fazenda has launched Fazenda At Home, with UK-wide delivery. Customers can choose from 45 cuts, including signature cap of rump, fillet and sirloin, grass-fed Hereford Tomahawk steaks, Wagyu ribeye and French-trimmed Agnei Ibérico lamb racks. The company has also launched a Fazenda At Home Box, consisting of a selection of five starters, three prime meats, an accompaniment and South American delicacies.

To purchase, visit shop.fazenda.co.uk

Church coffee from House Coffee Co

Shrewsbury favourite House Coffee Co is expanding. Whilst maintaining its existing site in Coleham, the award-winning family-run coffee shop will be taking over the recently vacated cafe space in the town's St Mary's Church.



A warm welcome awaits at newly refurbished eatery

Staff at the newly refurbished New Vic cafe and restaurant are looking forward to giving diners a warm welcome when the venue is able to reopen.

Fantastic value homemade food will be on offer, with social distancing measures in place. Enjoy seasonally-inspired dishes, full of heart

and local pride, in a relaxing setting. Table service has been introduced along with the usual covid safety measures, and it will be accepting card payment only. Opening times are yet to be announced and tables will be available to book in advance soon at newvictheatre.org.uk



Shropshire Lad to bring Fire Feast to Shrewsbury's White Horse in new year

Local self-taught home cook Adam Purnell - aka Shropshire Lad - will be preparing a six-course 'fire' menu at White Horse in Shrewsbury on 30 January.

Every dish served, whether it be barbecued, chargrilled, poked or smoked, will be prepared using fire.

Tickets cost £55 per person and can be purchased in-house or by calling 01743 340 777.

There will be a maximum of six people per table, with social-distancing guidelines applying. The ticket price includes all courses but not drinks.

The event will be hosted in White Horse's marquee, so attendees are advised to wrap up warm. **Photo by Adam Ricketts**

BIRMINGHAM

Director Carlos Acosta

Sir David Bintley's

Cinderella

31 Mar – 10 Apr 2021

On sale: 8 Oct from 11am

birminghamhippodrome.com

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ROYAL BALLET

Momoko Hirata as Cinderella.
© Sam Robinson

Live entertainment coming up in December and January

Jack And The Beanstalk - The Bite Size Panto

Lichfield Garrick, Fri 18 December - Sun 3 January

Jack and his mom are hard-up and have no choice but to take their cow to market to raise some much-needed cash. However, Jack being Jack, he decides to trade her in (the cow, that is, not his mom) for a handful of magic beans, which then grow into a real monster of a beanstalk...

Having decided that putting on a large-scale show was too much of a risk during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Garrick has instead elected to present a shorter and shorter-run pantomime with fewer performers on stage. Ever-popular panto Dame, Sam Rabone, stars.



Calan

Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton, Sat 30 January

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.



Dear Santa Live Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Sun 20 - Thurs 24 December

Presented with the intention of giving children aged two to seven both a fun introduction to theatre and a memorable yuletide treat, Dear Santa tells the tale of Father Christmas's backfiring attempts to sort out the most fantastic of festive gifts for

a girl named Sarah. With the assistance of his cheeky Elf, he finally settles on the perfect prezzie... Based on the bestselling book by Dear Zoo author and illustrator Rod Campbell.

We'll Have To Do It Again Then... Won't We?!

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, various dates between Fri 4 December - Sun 3 January

Shrewsbury's legendary 'Dame', Brad Fitt, here makes a welcome return with a specially written festive show for pantomime enthusiasts. A replacement offering for this year's scheduled panto - postponed due to the pandemic - We'll Have To Do It Again Then, Won't We?! provides audiences with the chance to meet the man behind the makeup and enjoy a 'socially distanced and side-splitting journey through panto stories, slapstick, songs and slosh'. Commenting on the production, Brad said: "It wouldn't feel like Christmas to me without being on stage at Theatre Severn. I hope you'll join me for this one-man/one-woman show, where I share my memories and anecdotes about the magic of panto. It's like a dressing-room natter between friends, but only one of us is talking..."





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Live entertainment coming up in December and January

Robin Hood

The Alexandra, Birmingham,
Sat 16 - Sun 31 January

Having hopefully kept at a safe social distance from one another while hanging out in Sherwood Forest, Robin Hood and his Merry Men make the cross-Midlands trip to Birmingham in the new year for some later-than-usual pantomime fun.

A collaboration between Birmingham Hippodrome, panto production specialists Qdos Entertainment and The Alexandra, the socially distanced one-act show replaces the Hippodrome's scheduled festive-season offering of Goldilocks And The Three Bears starring Jason Donovan (we'll have to wait till next Christmas to enjoy that one).

Craig Revel Horwood takes top billing as the Sheriff of Nottingham, and is joined in and



Ross Noble

The Place, Telford, Fri 8 January

Geordie comic Ross Noble may not have hit the heights once expected of him, but he's undoubtedly one of the UK's most talented funnymen. He also has a nice line in surreal comedy, never gives an audience the same show twice, and boasts an impressive

number of followers on Twitter. Heading for the Midlands with brand-new show Humournoid, Ross includes among his jokes: "If the Pope doesn't want to be knocked down, he shouldn't dress up as a skittle".

around Sherwood Forest by Hippodrome pantomime favourite Matt Slack and Richard Cadell & Sooty.

Black Country comedy character Doreen Tipton is on board too, returning for her second consecutive Hippodrome pantomime following a star turn in last year's production of Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs.



Circus Of Horrors

The Place, Oakengates, Telford,
Sat 30 January

An off-kilter affair that bears more resemblance to a freak show than any modern definition of a circus, the Circus of Horrors is a side-step into a world beyond

political correctness. It brings together all the more extreme acts associated with circus and takes them to the edge of reason. This latest show, postponed from last spring due to Covid-19, sees the company celebrating 25 years of bizarre and gloriously grotesque stage performances.

THERE AIN'T NO LIFE LIKE A DAME'S!

Getting their fill of panto slapstick is a well-established Christmas tradition for lots of households across the UK. More often than not, the glue that holds those festive frolics together is the character of the Dame. Here in the Midlands, we're fortunate to have some of the very best Dames in the business - but what are they up to this year, with the majority of lavish pantomime productions having been cancelled?...

IAN ADAMS

Marking the first festive season in 21 years that Ian hasn't performed in a pantomime, Christmas 2020 should have been his fifth anniversary as the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre Dame.

But Covid hasn't entirely put paid to his yuletide capers - Ian will instead be visiting a selection of Midlands schools with his Intro To Pantomime Tour. "I'm so excited to be bringing the magic of pantomime into 2020, which, for all of us, has been an unprecedented year," says Ian. "The tour normally lasts for 10 days, but this year we've extended it to three weeks and will be going as far afield as Shropshire and Worcestershire.

"The format has been adapted so that we can perform several times in one school to all bubbles in one day. Thanks to many generous sponsors, the schools will only be charged the same amount as one

performance, making it very accessible.

"I will miss treading the boards at the Grand this year - there really is nothing like performing to 60,000 families at Christmas. I will, however, take the opportunity to spend a more significant amount of time with my own family and support bubble, if government guidelines allow. I haven't spent a Christmas at home in 15 years. I think we've all learnt this year that life is precious and that we should treasure every moment, and I fully intend to do just that.

"I also intend to eat more mince pies, as I don't have multiple frocks I need to get into. The diet can start in January!"



BRAD FITT

A Christmas without Brad at Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn would be a sad Christmas indeed. But Shropshire fans of seasonal banter can rest easy - 'the Rolls Royce of Dames' is set to grace the venue's stage with a socially distanced one-man/woman show.

We'll Have To Do It Again Then... Won't We?! promises a sizeable dollop of yuletide merriment, as Brad dishes up an evening of sizzling slapstick - minus his usual entourage of fellow panto performers. Whether Radio Shropshire DJ Eric Smith - the butt of many of Brad's jokes during a show - will join him on stage as one of his special guests remains to be seen.



CHRISTIAN PATTERSON

One half of the Regent's famous festive double act (alongside Jonathan Wilkes), Christian is once again gearing up to don a variety of outlandishly loud costumes in the theatre's Lottery-funded panto version of Robinson Crusoe. Christian is taking on the role of the legendary castaway's mom, Mrs Crusoe, and will be sharing the festive-season stage with Jonathan for the 11th time.

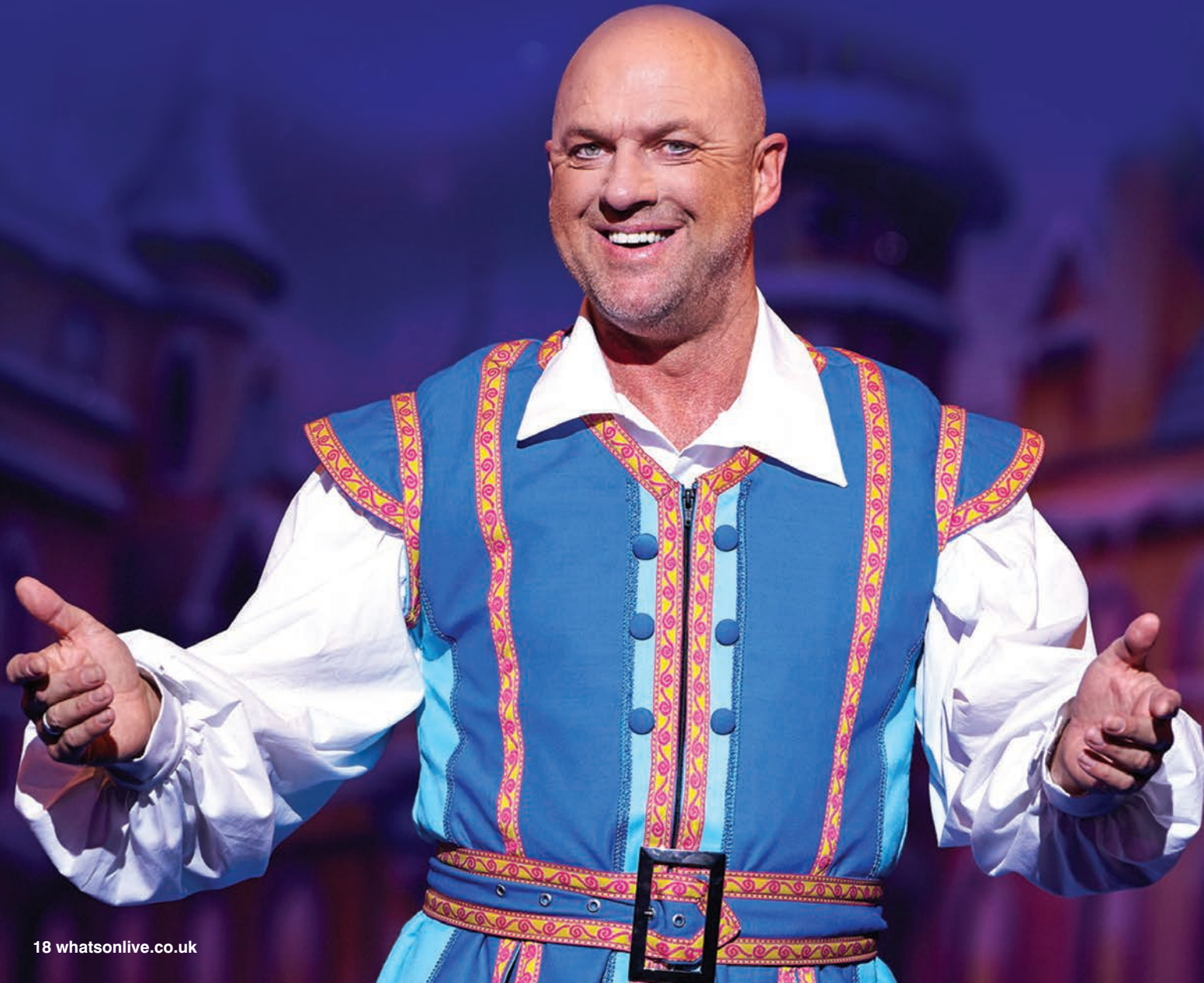
SAM RABONE

A much-loved seasonal staple of the Lichfield Garrick's annual panto production, Sam has played the larger-than-life Dame at the venue for five years. The Garrick was one of the region's first theatres to announce that its panto would still be going ahead - albeit in a markedly different way from usual. A bite-sized version of Jack And The Beanstalk will see Sam joined by a goodie and a baddie, in a show that's sure to be packed to its festive rafters with Christmas craziness.



MATT'S MOMENTOUS MOMENTS

Birmingham Hippodrome panto stalwart Matt Slack is without doubt one of the funniest and most entertaining performers in the business. Matt always looks like he's having the best time up on stage, so we asked him to share some of his best moments. Here's what he had to say...





Matt Slack will star in Robin Hood at The Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, from Saturday 16 - Sunday 31 January 2021

FIRST STAR-STRUCK MOMENT

I've worked and met with many famous faces over the years, and I never tend to get star-struck. However, when Sir Bruce Forsyth came down to the Babbacombe Theatre to film his autobiography documentary, I got to spend precious time with him both on and off stage. Huge moment for a young comic. He was an idol and a true pro!

WISH YOU HADN'T DONE THAT MOMENT

There's been a number of shows over the years where there's been a 3D section. It's a great bit of the show, plus it gives us on stage a break. The audience are given a pair of black 3D glasses and are told when it's the right time to put them on. I noticed a guy in the front row who was wearing them from the start, so I told him that this was not the 3D section of the show, and of course everyone laughed. Little did I know he was blind, until he politely pointed it out. Luckily he saw the funny side, but I felt awful. Never lose your sense of humour, regardless!

MOST PHYSICALLY DEMANDING MOMENT

I wrote and performed a lip-sync routine for Dick Whittington, where I fell off the stage into the orchestra pit onto a crash mat. That was fine, but when I rushed to get back up, I went over on my ankle. Nothing broken luckily, but the sprain was the worst possible. I had a detached ligament and still suffer

with it now. However, I finished the show, hopping through it, and then off to A&E. The things you do for a laugh! Regardless of many injuries, I've never taken a show off.

MOST VOCALLY CHALLENGING MOMENT

Performing two shows a day for six weeks with a paralysed vocal chord. That was not only physically demanding but also hugely challenging mentally. I thought I was letting the audience down by not being at my best, but how wrong I was. The support I received is something I'll never forget or ever take for granted.

MOST SURPRISING MOMENT

During a routine of The 12 Days Of Christmas, I fell into the curtain cloth, which then came down. Anyway, behind the curtain, the crew had set a dodgem car that was used for Paul Zerdin's entrance. I banged my head on it and was unconscious for a few seconds. That was a bit of a surprise!

STRUGGLED TO KEEP IT TOGETHER MOMENT

There have been many moments on stage where I've lost it in a comedic sense, and there's nothing quite like it when we, as well as the audience, are engaged in that moment. I completely lost it when Darren Day as Captain Hook got stuck in the jaws of the crocodile. He'd pressed the emergency cut-off

button by mistake and was just stuck there. I just laughed and was no help whatsoever. Eventually stage management came on and rescued him. I'm still laughing!

REALISATION THAT THIS IS THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD MOMENT

The audience reaction on my first entrance gets me every time. It's something quite special, particularly since my time in Birmingham. It's like coming out of lockdown and being allowed in a pub!

BEST AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION MOMENT

The relaxed performance is very special. To look out at an audience full of children and adults who wouldn't normally feel comfortable in that environment is, for me, a highlight of the whole run.

MOMENT YOU'D MOST LIKE TO RE-LIVE

I've experienced many big laughs during my time performing at the Hippodrome, but the biggest reaction I've ever had, and probably ever will, was the time I dropped a kid into the orchestra pit. It was a risky decision that paid off with a reaction of both shock and hilarity. The kid in question, Nicholas, loved doing it every show, and it was perfectly safe. Personally, I would've asked for danger money!



FEE-FI-FO-FUM!

festive fun with Jack and his mum!



It's panto as normal (well, almost) for Belgrade favourites Iain Lauchlan and Craig Hollingsworth, as they get ready to entertain audiences with yet more magical mayhem. Jack And The Beanstalk may have gone online this year, but that doesn't mean there'll be fewer festive frolics. What's On caught up with writer & director Iain to find out more about what viewers can expect...

What have been the particular challenges connected to producing a pantomime online, Iain?

We couldn't have a full cast because of Covid, so Craig Hollingsworth and I play most of the parts, which will give the audiences a giggle. We do have a principal boy, a princess, an ensemble guy and eight children, so we've done pretty well.

Secondly, we don't have the rehearsal time we usually have for a live show. We had two weeks' rehearsal, and then what we performed was the final performance. No time to let it bed in.

Thirdly, there's no live audience - nobody to play to and nobody to judge the timing of gags, routines etc. With no feedback in the way of reactions and laughter, we have to use our instincts to play the show.

What makes Jack & The Beanstalk a good panto choice to perform online?

It gives us so much to play with on TV. We can do things on screen that we can't do in the theatre. Things like, make characters appear and disappear before the viewers' eyes, have a massive giant played by an actor, see the beanstalk actually magically grow up to the sky, have lots of magical sparkles and effects. We have a social-distancing cow, and the infamous lemon meringue routine. Jack has so many magical elements - a giant, a fairy, magic beans, the beanstalk, a messy slosh routine, great characters like Fleshcreep and Dame Trott, and lots of fun!

What are the secrets of writing a good pantomime?

A good strong story with great characters that you care about. Telling a story is all we have to do. We have our strong story characters that drive the narrative no matter what, and this allows the comic characters like the Dame and comic to weave in and out of the story, causing a bit of mayhem and lots of fun. This, along with classic routines and great songs, completes the package.

Across the years, which of your pantomimes has been your favourite?

I enjoy all of them, but if I had to choose, I think it would be our Beauty And The Beast. This was a challenge when we did it the first time, as the Disney film had just come out and we felt we had to give a nod to their version because that was the one the kids would know. We had to make sure our Beast was brilliant, and that his transformation from the prince was impressive. We had to make sure our baddies worked and that Beauty and her father were truly characters that the audience cared about.

I love the show because the Beast is the baddie at the beginning, but by the end everyone wants Beauty to marry him and be with him. We also have a really good Dame & son duo in the panto, which offers so much in terms of anarchy and fun.

What attracted you to the world of pantomime in the first place?

Over the years, as an actor, I've seen many pantos in lots of different venues. My first professional panto was in a tiny theatre called The Little Theatre, in Inverness. I love having the opportunity to create fun characters and work on tried-and-tested traditional routines. Also, the contact with the audience is something I love - although there are many actors who hate it! I'd seen my fair share of dreadful pantomimes and vowed that if I ever got the chance to write and direct my own, I would make them the best they could be. The audiences deserve nothing less. Bob Hamlyn at the Belgrade gave me that chance, and I've been doing them ever since.

Which panto character is your favourite to write/script?

I do love writing for the Dame, as she can be so off-the-wall and anarchic, but also crucial to the storyline. However, the best character of all to write for is Abanazar, the evil sorcerer in Aladdin. He's the baddest baddie of them all, and it's a joy to write for him.

What does Iain Lauchlan do with his time when he's not writing, directing & performing in the Belgrade pantomime?

I have my own TV studio in north

Oxfordshire, where I film my own children's programmes for my online channel, CheekyChimpsTV.com

I also direct, write and produce programmes for other people who film in my studio. If I'm not working in the studio, then I'm in my workshop making someone something. I've just finished oak gates for our local church. I'm a carpenter as well as a performer. Also, my new granddaughter takes up a bit of time!

How has the 'Covid-era experience' been for you, Iain, with its lockdowns, its 'new normals' and its various other challenges?

Covid has been a challenge. I lost all the work in my studio during the first lockdown and also all my writing and performing work. The theatre and TV sector has really suffered and is still suffering. It was a joy to do the online panto, and I'm also about to film my Santa show for the pre-school audience. Santa's Christmas Rescue will hopefully be performed to socially distanced audiences at the Belgrade in December, but we also have a filmed version we can stream if the live performances are unable to take place.

What are the main reasons why audiences should check out Jack And The Beanstalk Online this Christmas?

Covid has written off most of our year. As we're speaking, we're in a second lockdown and still seem to be at the mercy of the virus. The positive thing about the lockdowns is that we all have a common experience of queues, lack of toilet roll, social distancing, online shopping, Zoom calls and all the rest - not to mention Joe Wicks! Well, we've included all these experiences in our online panto, and it makes for very funny viewing! So don't miss out on pantomime this year. Bring it into your own home and have a great experience with the family. I hope everyone enjoys it!

.....
Jack And The Beanstalk is available to view online from Tuesday 1 to Thursday 31 December. For further information and to purchase tickets, visit belgrade.co.uk

National
SEA★LiFE
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NEW
2020

Meet the UK's first and only sea otters

Come face-to-face with our
cuddly pair, Ozzy and Ola



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Christmas At Blists Hill

Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge, Shropshire, various dates in December

The award-winning Blists Hill Victorian Town has pulled out all the stops to ensure its visitors have a Covid-safe Christmas to remember.

The popular tourist destination is hosting two special Christmas weekends, featuring brass bands, carol singers, a Victorian Christmas shopping emporium, pantomime and performances. There will also be a

range of themed activities to enjoy, Christmas card and decoration making, as well as falling snow to add to the festive atmosphere.

A new addition for 2020 is the town's ice rink, where people both young and not so young can show off their skating skills. Time slots will be available and an additional charge applies.

A new grotto has also been added to the Victorian town - so make sure you visit Father Christmas as he prepares for his busiest day of the year. His trusted elves will be handing out presents to all visiting children.

Book at ironbridge.co.uk



Elf And Safety

Park Hall Farm, Oswestry, North Shropshire

We have it on good authority that elves have taken over this popular Shropshire visitor attraction and turned it into a training centre in readiness for the big day! Elf & Safety at Park Hall Farm will see the diminutive beings making several appearances, while Santa - stuck in the North Pole due to current travel restrictions - makes an appearance via video link. For youngsters wanting to showcase their artistic side, Park Hall Farm also features a craft area, in which decorations can be created to place on a tree at home. Tickets include admission to the venue, where visitors can feed the goats, meet the rabbits, see pigs racing, have a tractor ride and explore play areas. Free hot chocolate is included for all grown-ups, too.

Book tickets at parkhallfarm.co.uk

Follies Safari

Hawkstone Park, Weston-under-Redcastle, North Shropshire, Fri 4 - Wed 23 December

Jump aboard Hawkstone's land rover and journey through the site's illuminated woodland. Then meander through the fairy-lit caverns and tunnels until you reach the hillside grotto - the festive home of Father Christmas - where you will be greeted by one of his elves before receiving a special gift from the man himself. **Book at hawkstoneparkfollies.co.uk**





Ironbridge
BIRTHPLACE OF INDUSTRY

Come and experience the Magic of
Christmas
AT IRONBRIDGE

Victorian Christmas Weekends at Blists Hill Victorian Town

Lots of festive entertainment, fun activities, traditional gift ideas and, of course, the chance to see Father Christmas!

For dates, times and tickets visit
IRONBRIDGE.ORG.UK

Prebooking essential, no tickets available on the gate



A Magical Christmas Cracker

National Forest Adventure Farm, Burton-upon-Trent, Sat 5 & Sun 6 December; Sat 12 & Sun 13 December and Sat 19 - Thurs 24 December

This brand-new family adventure takes place outdoors but under cover. A packed programme of festive fun on the farm includes two 20-minute interactive shows: The Night Before Christmas - where every child comes away with a gift - and Charlie's Reindeer Adventure, complete with a personal message for each

young visitor.

A Snowmen Hall Of Fame tractor ride, reindeer carousel and gingerbread-decorating activities are also available to enjoy.

Each visitor will receive a complimentary hot chocolate or mulled wine, too. Bargain!

Book at adventurefarm.co.uk

Malvern Winter Glow

Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire, Wed 9 December - Sun 3 January

This new outdoor illuminations trail features dramatic light installations inspired by the area's natural landscape, history and heritage.

The mile-long trail takes in a mixed terrain, so appropriate footwear is essential.

And what better accompaniment can there be on your walk than a mug of festive cheer from one of the onsite vendors selling a range of seasonal food & drink.

Book at threecounties.org.uk/whatson/malvern-winter-glow/

Christmas At The Castle

Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire, Sat 5 & Sun 6 December

As well as seeing the castle decked in all its festive glory, visitors to this weekend-long event can also meet Father Christmas in the castle's old kitchen, see Mrs Christmas going about her festive chores, and follow the Christmas Elf Trail, picking up clues along the way. Festive wreaths - made by Hartlebury's gardeners - and a plethora of edible delights will also be on offer.

Book tickets at hartleburycastle.com



Steam In Lights Severn Valley Railway, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, various dates in December

Magical creatures, sparkling lights, flurries of snow and plenty of thrills are all present and correct on this sure-to-be-memorable illuminated adventure. Steam In Lights debuted in 2019, and, like all good visitor attractions, is aiming to be 'bigger and better' this year. Board your private compartment at Bridgnorth station, then sit back, relax and enjoy the ride as your train steams out

into the darkness and the magic unfolds. Passengers can then immerse themselves in a story of mischief and mystery, helping to make the lights shine along the line during their quest to find the Christmas Cacklers.

The Steam In Lights train journey lasts around an hour, travelling from Bridgnorth to Hampton Loade and back. **Book tickets at svr.co.uk**



Festive film

We reckon there's nothing nicer at Christmas than settling down in front of the TV to catch up with our favourite festive films, while maybe dipping into the Quality Street at the same time - assuming there are

any left, of course! We thought we'd check in with some of our Midlands-based friends to find out which Christmas movie they love the most. We hope you enjoy their responses as much as we have. Happy viewing!



White Christmas

"My favourite Christmas film has to be the old faithful, *White Christmas*. It came out in 1954, well before my family had a television, but I do remember some years later watching it for the first time with my parents. They'd seen it in the cinema and absolutely loved it. They were huge fans of Bing Crosby - that amazing, rich voice. The title song to me somehow

epitomises the essence of Christmas; the Christmas song of all Christmas songs. Every time I hear it, I just have to stop and reflect. It evokes such warm, cherished childhood memories. My parents would just look at each other when the song came on and say in unison, 'Ah, Bing. All is well.'"

Nick Owen: Presenter of
BBC Midlands Today

favourites



Fiona Allan:
Artistic Director and
Chief Executive of
Birmingham
Hippodrome



Monty Python's The Life Of Brian

"Perhaps not a classic festive film, but every year in the lead-up to Christmas, I have a night watching *The Life Of Brian*. In my mind the greatest of the Monty Python films, its

cheeky satire never fails to have me in stitches, and this year especially we all need a big laugh. Just remember 'He's not the Messiah - he's a very naughty boy!'"

Mary Poppins

"During the Christmas period, I traditionally watch *Mary Poppins*. As a child, my parents took me to the cinema to see this film, and to this day *Feed The Birds* is my all-time favourite song. The 'bird lady' featured in the song had very little



herself, yet she still thinks of others before herself. The lyrics are so poignant:

*"Early each day to the steps of Saint Paul's
The little old bird woman comes
In her own special way to the people
She calls, "Come, buy my bags full of crumbs.
"Come feed the little birds, show them you care
And you'll be glad if you do
Their young ones are hungry, their nests are so bare,
All it takes is tuppence from you..."*

It's a song about charity, giving and kindness, something I have grown with and still prioritise today. When I was a presenter at Saga Radio, I was very fortunate to interview the composer of *Mary Poppins*, Richard Sherman, and I asked him if he had a favourite song. It was also *Feed The Birds*. He shared with me that it was also Walt Disney's favourite song, and every Friday afternoon before he left his office with his brother, Robert, Walt would say to the Sherman brothers, 'Play it again, boys.' What a great legacy!"



Adrian Jackson:
CEO and Artistic
Director of
Wolverhampton
Grand Theatre

Festive film favourites



Dan Whitehouse:
Wolverhampton-born
musician

The Snowman (1982)

"The Snowman reminds me of my grandparents' council house on Finchale Road in Hebburn, on the south bank of the river Tyne, in the North East. Adults sat on the sofa with orange cans of Stones' lager, with my sister and I lying on the carpet watching the TV. The carpet was thicker than ours, and it felt so luxurious and warm to roll around in and push my fingers through; I'd fall asleep in front of the telly and loved the feel of it on my cheek. My grandparents also had a life-size, long-haired old English sheepdog soft toy. So it was touch sensory overload! We had fun riding him around the lounge and up and down the stairs. I watched The Snowman every year and never got over it - it's so sad! But I liked it because my mom would cry too, and then she'd give me the biggest hug at the end. I knew if I could sit the film out, I'd get this extra-special cuddle, so it was worth it. The song, Walking In The Air, is so evocative, and my mom is in the room with me whenever I hear that piece of music."



"This film by John Hughes is actually set around Thanksgiving and follows one man's journey in trying to get home for the holidays. His travels are filled with near-death experiences, explosions, punches to the face and 'that' scene with the shared bed and the pillow. I could watch this film over and over

- in fact, any film starring the late, great John Candy would be a Christmas classic in my eyes. I was just 12 when it came out and remember laughing so hard when John Candy fell asleep at the wheel that I couldn't breathe. My three boys had the same reaction when we watched it together over 30 years later."



Brad Pitt: Actor, director,
producer - and Theatre
Severn's favourite Dame



Carlos Acosta: Director of
Birmingham Royal Ballet

Home Alone



"Christmas was a late addition to my life. Growing up in Cuba, we had no celebrations at this time of year at all, so I have no childhood memories or traditions to relate to, as others have. But after living so many years abroad, it has become a big part of my life - and especially since having children and being part of an extended English family. I would have to say Home Alone is my favourite. I think because of not having had Christmas as a child, I love the little boy and can relate to his feelings of abandonment and vulnerability, and how he manages to triumph despite everything. He is very cheeky, which is just how I was too. It is a sweet, funny, feelgood movie, and just hearing the music gets me in the mood for Christmas. My eldest daughter is now at the age where we can watch it together, so that makes me happy."



Mrs Barbara Nice
(aka Janice Connolly):
Comedian and actress

The Wizard Of Oz

"It's always hard as a mother to name a favourite, as it's not nice for the others to know they're not number one, but I'm going to choose The Wizard Of Oz. It's got everything, from turning from black & white to technicolour, to witches and flying monkeys. I love the songs and I love the characters,

especially the Cowardly Lion. Like Dorothy, I yearned as a kid to go over the rainbow, 'where problems melt like lemon drops', only to learn in the end the good old lesson that 'there's no place like home'. Which has never been truer than in 2020 - the Year of the Home."



Theresa Heskins: New Vic Theatre's Artistic Director

"On Christmas Day we'd all go to Nanny Kakala's. She lived in a little one-bedroom council house, and suddenly there were 11 of us plus the dog, talking over each other, running about, playing with our Christmas toys, searching for batteries, arguing over which channel the telly should be on, knocking over the tree and yapping (that was the dog!). By the afternoon everyone was exhausted, and we could watch the afternoon film in (semi) quiet. I remember first seeing The Wizard Of Oz in this way - and being blown away by it.

The songs, the story of the little girl desperately trying to get home, the little dog, the lovely framing device where the people from the Kansas farm all turn up as different characters in Oz. It was only many years later that I realised I'd fallen in love with it without ever knowing the really big thing about it. On Nan's little black & white telly from Radio Rentals, I had no idea that Dorothy's monochrome Kansas blossoms into a technicolour land of Oz!"

Festive film favourites



Doreen Tipton:
Panto star and Lazy Cow

The Railway Children

"Just because you're brought up in poverty, it doesn't mean you can't be a happy, loving family. Family values have always been very important to me. There's nothing I used to like more than just a quiet night in, gathered round the 60-inch plasma with my daughters, Trojan, Tangerine and Troll, watching my favourite film, The Railway Kids. In so many ways, The Railway Kids remind me of us. They were poor as well, having to make do with hand-me-downs, just like the old i-Phones my kids have got. And the father, he was also absent, just like here. In prison. Though in the film I think he was innocent.

I don't think I've ever watched that film and not cried at the scene at the end, where the dad comes back from prison on the steam train and the eldest kid shouts: "Daddy! My daddy!"

It gets me every time. Mind you, if that

happened to us, it would probably be a bit different. Our Trojan would probably catch sight of him through the steam and say, 'Who the hell's that bloke?'"



It's A Wonderful Life



"The story of George Bailey, played beautifully by James Stewart, is one of someone who's ground down by life, and by the choices he's made. A man who gave up his dreams to help others, he feels disappointed in himself and his small-town job. When a financial crisis comes around Christmas - there's a run on the small family bank he runs - he decides to kill himself, only to be saved by his 'guardian angel', who then shows him his life in a new light - how the world would be if he'd never been born, and how deeply he's touched the lives of others. Probably many other people's favourite Christmas film, It's A Wonderful Life is an amazing, uplifting experience that has me sobbing every time I watch it. And I watch it every year."



Sean Foley:
Artistic Director at
Birmingham Repertory
Theatre



Hamish Glen:
Artistic Director at Coventry's
Belgrade Theatre

Dinner For One

"My festive favourite is a short film called Dinner For One. Although almost unknown to British audiences, it's become a tradition in Germany and is broadcast annually across Northern Europe.

It begins with Miss Sophie (May Warden) inviting her four closest friends to her 90th birthday. Unfortunately, since she's outlived them all, her butler James (Freddie Flinton) has to impersonate the guests, while serving a four-course meal and drinks. James' intoxication from drinking their toasts results in a classic sketch with running gags and slapstick delivered with superb timing. Since adopting two children, I've been able to re-introduce this classic comedy into my family's festive rituals."





Love Actually

"Who doesn't love a Christmas film?! In a normal year, Christmas is by far my busiest time of the year as a restaurateur, so when I lock the doors of the restaurant on Christmas Eve and step away from the tired, sweaty, hairy chefs in the hot kitchen, I love nothing more than going home and putting on a Christmas film. If I had to choose a favourite scene in Love Actually, it would have to be the famous

airport scene, where Sam dodges past all the security guards to go and tell his classmate how he feels about her. Every film needs a good airport chase, right?! But other scenes are close contenders, like Hugh Grant's dancing and the Nativity scene at the primary school, where Spider-Man, several lobsters and a giant whale were all present at the birth of Jesus!"

Festive film favourites



Glynn Purnell:
Chef, restaurateur
and TV star



Shazia Mirza:
Comedian

Educating Rita

"Every year, I watch Educating Rita. It was a groundbreaking film. Funny, moving, true and inspiring. Michael Caine and Julie Walters are funny, serious, interesting and mad. I love the scene where Frank comes home to find Brian talking on his phone again, talking to his publisher, but Frank informs him that 'the phone was disconnected this morning'. Julia then tells him she's leaving him to go with Brian. It's funny and sad at the same time. It's a film about everything - class, love, dreams and life - and it makes you feel like everything is possible. It made me believe I could be like Julie Walters."



The Muppet Christmas Carol

"My favourite festive film has got to be The Muppet Christmas Carol! It's so funny! Rizzo the Rat is just comedy gold, plus I love all the songs in it. In fact, everyone needs a muppet in their life - I have my panto partner, Christian (Patterson)!"



Jonathan Wilkes:
Panto star

A Christmas Carol

A new film adaptation of Charles Dickens' most famous Christmas story is showing at cinemas and theatres across the Midlands in December...

A theatrically inspired film adaptation of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol is showing in cinemas and selected theatres during December. Produced by BAFTA-nominated filmmaking siblings Jacqui and David Morris, the film takes a beloved story and gives it a highly innovative treatment.

The on-screen characters are portrayed by dancers but voiced by a cast of famous actors, including Martin Freeman, Carey Mulligan, Daniel Kaluuya, Andy Serkis and Simon Russell Beale. Vicky Price recently caught up with Jacqui and David to find out more...



There have been countless adaptations of A Christmas Carol - so what makes this version unique?

The story is one of the best known in the world. It's never been out of print, and a version of A Christmas Carol was one of the first silent films ever made. It struck a chord from the beginning and is in the DNA of the season. The work has become synonymous with the Christmas spirit. As Scrooge says: "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and keep it all year. I will live in the past, the present and the future."

In 2018, we decided to make our own version. But how to make ours stand out? Firstly, we wanted to show the complete story, every scene in the book. This, as far as we can tell, has never been done before in a film. The practical reason for this omission is that some of the scenes are simply descriptions of events, with no characters speaking. This is difficult to portray in a conventional film that only uses Dickens' dialogue. But early on in the process, we decided to use the concept of a grandmother - played beautifully by Sian Phillips - narrating the story to her family during their annual retelling, using a toy theatre. In this way, she was able to read the author's own words when he depicts these difficult-to-film scenes.

How did you arrive at the decision to use contemporary dance to interpret the story?

We had had our eyes opened to dance and its possibilities when we made our documentary about Russian ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev. In that film, we used contemporary dance to illustrate the early parts of Nureyev's life, where there was no

archive footage available. Our first thought had been to go down the conventional documentary route of using actors, but soon the idea came to us to use dancers. We believed that it would both be original and in keeping with the spirit of the story we wanted to tell.

After that, we thought that it would be a shame not to utilise the great team we had assembled for another project. We understood its potential, and believed that the principles we'd established could hold true when used on a grander scale. Russell Maliphant's choreography is famed for flow and fluidity. The movement on screen gels beautifully with the spoken word.

How do you think audiences will react to the film?

We believe people of all ages will love it. Dance enthusiasts have been very supportive. They appreciate the artistry of the choreography and the great talent of the dancers.

We've done extensive audience research and found that children respond wonderfully to it as well. They love Dickens' story but also the theatricality of the film - the colourful sets and melding of well-known actors' voices with corresponding dancers.

Although many people are initially a little puzzled at the idea of having two artists - dancer and voice actor - playing the same character, it's been widely praised for its originality and the fact that it works brilliantly as a piece of emotional drama.

Was the film originally planned just for cinema release, or did you always see it in a theatre setting as well?

The initial idea had been only to show the

film in cinemas. It never occurred to us that it would be suitable for live-theatre venues. After all, Christmas is their busiest time, what with pantomimes and their own versions of A Christmas Carol. But then Covid came along, and it became practically impossible for theatres to risk putting on expensive productions.

We approached theatres because we thought that our production was very like a theatrical production and would suit their venues. And we're pleased that many have taken up our offer. We're delighted to help out and bring the worlds of film and theatre together in this way.

What are the biggest challenges of being a brother & sister production team?

There are obvious challenges when siblings work together! It's easier to stand your ground and fight for an idea you believe in - sometimes to the point of rowing - with someone you've known all of your life, because you know that you'll always make up. That's not always the case with creative partners who are not so close.

Also, you trust the other person, and even if not always agreeing, you'll give one another a fair hearing.

A Christmas Carol shows at cinemas across the West Midlands from 4 December. You can also catch it at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre on Tuesday 22 & Wednesday 23 December.



ILLUMINATING LICHFIELD

A light & sound spectacle that's fast becoming a festive-season tradition, The Cathedral Illuminated will this year once again be lighting up Lichfield Cathedral with images that reflect the very essence of Christmas. What's On chats to artist Peter Walker, a member of Luxmuralis, the artistic collaboration responsible for the stunning presentation ...

"The illuminations have definitely become a very important part of the festive calendar, and in fact one of the major events of the whole year here in Lichfield," explains Peter Walker, in talking about light & sound installation The Cathedral Illuminated. Peter is a member of Luxmuralis, the artistic collaboration which curates the installation. The illuminations see sounds and images connected to Christmas being projected onto the walls of Lichfield Cathedral. "The installation attracts thousands of people to the city, and we had people asking

us months ago about tickets for the event. I live in Lichfield myself, and one of the main motivations for the close relationship between Luxmuralis and Lichfield Cathedral is to bring art you see in the main cities in the UK, Europe and America, home to where we live and work. And fortunately the public here have embraced us! The people of Lichfield are really proud of the illuminations because they've really put the city on the map. It's a huge moment in the cathedral's annual programme and, as artists, it's fantastic to create something for Lichfield

each year.

"We've managed to figure out a way to put the show on safely this year, whilst making sure it's just as impressive as usual. What we've done in previous years is have projections at different parts of the cathedral - but to make it safe this year, to allow people onto the site and to have as much space as possible, we're primarily using the front of the cathedral. We're giving people a much longer show on the western front - up from 10 minutes to 20 minutes - to encompass everything they would usually see at the

different sites. We've also developed a strict one-way system to arrive into and exit the close too, and there's a greater gap between shows. We've checked with some recent guidelines received, and they suggest we're already doing everything to stay Covid-safe. Unless the more severe restrictions in place from November into very early December are extended, then we're fairly confident that we will be able to give people a really beautiful and uplifting experience just before Christmas. We've also reduced the price this year to reflect the difficult economic situation the pandemic has posed, and to make the event more accessible."

As well as hopefully inspiring some real and much-needed festive cheer - and, of course, celebrating the Nativity - this year's display also marks the 150th anniversary of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol.

"We try to change things up every year," says Peter, "but we always have the Nativity at the centre of things, and also a more contemporary festive element that depicts a more recent view of Christmas. There's usually a third, unique element thrown in. Last year we did the stained-glass windows of Notre Dame, and this year we're working with the Dickens Museum London to honour A Christmas Carol. We've used original images and beautiful illustrations from the first edition of the book to create that first part of the projection."

With images and videos of The Cathedral Illuminated shared across the world, this year's installation will be truly global.

"The impact of The Cathedral Illuminated goes beyond the people who get tickets and actually come to the event. We find that footage and images of it are very popular online too, and have reached far beyond the UK. A new partnership between Lichfield Cathedral and the Cathedral of St Paul in Minnesota has been formed this year, which actually came about through some other work I've been doing. It's a very important American National Cathedral in Minneapolis, which was the city at the centre of the tragic circumstances that accelerated the Black Lives Matter movement earlier this year. The idea was to create something joyous to be shared simultaneously across the two cities - so the same show will also be there this Christmas. As far as I know, it's the first time the same artwork will be shown not only on two different buildings, but on two different continents during the same period."

Both Peter as a fine artist and sculptor, and Luxmuralis as a company, are motivated by bringing contemporary art to new spaces.

Their installations have moved and inspired viewers across the UK.

"Luxmuralis is two artists: myself - doing the visual work - and composer David Harper, who produces bespoke accompaniment for the illuminations. But the company also includes all the technicians, anthropologists, logistics people and project managers who bring everything to fruition. As artists, we have such a great support team for the work we do, not only in the UK but abroad as well. I see the projection and illuminations not so much as a departure from my fine art painting and sculpture, but almost as a series to curate. So when we take amazing content and great stories, like Charles Dickens for example, that automatically gives you so much inspiration. We also draw on current events and other things going on around us to shape the narrative and direction of the art, so that it reflects what we feel, think, hear and see.

"We see cathedrals as more traditional in the sense that they contain quite a lot of older artwork and architecture, and they certainly don't have much that's contemporary in them. It's very difficult to put contemporary artwork into places like cathedrals on a permanent basis because of the protection of the building and its history. But the way that we've developed projections and curated light & sound shows is in a contemporary context, to reflect both what's going on in society and the rise of different art forms. It's very important to be able to put these in places where we have traditionally collected as communities to view and experience artwork. At Luxmuralis we also like to bring art right onto the streets and into communities, so we do something called light tagging, where we project light as though it's graffiti. We always try to take our art into different spaces and project in or onto different buildings, so that we can make our art as accessible as possible - both geographically and in the sense that we bring it into the context of our audience and their lives, homes and communities."

Hope, optimism and innovation are the name of the game for Peter, Luxmuralis and the wider visual arts sector going forward...

"I think the Arts Council has been fantastic, and its funding has supported venues, individuals and projects to continue to find new ways to create engagement in 2020. The appetite from the public for the arts is certainly undiminished, which is incredible. Even though we've unfortunately had to cancel a few things this year, the demand for the arts was certainly there in our ticket

sales. It's remarkable! Once we're allowed to do things more freely moving forward into next year, I firmly believe there will be more art produced to really help people through. Creativity is such an important part of people's lives. Art and creative outlets are uplifting and hopeful. The great thing with the arts is that they can touch any part of the human experience: a concert can take you out of yourself; you can go into a museum and be intellectually stimulated; people come to big events like ours and have a joyous experience. If we just look at how the public has responded to creative work during lockdown - where people just want to be drawing, writing, painting, sewing or taking photographs at home - it really shows that undertaking and experiencing creativity has been blossoming and will continue to do so.

"The fact that The Cathedral Illuminated has won the What's On Readers' Award for Best Event in Staffordshire four years running proves just how much art can be integrated into communities. Curating art in the right way and using the right subjects really appeals to the public, and they keep coming back for more. I'm only encouraged by the hunger I've seen from audiences this year, and I'm sure that will continue going forward. This is fine art work - the kind that you would see equivalents of in prestigious buildings around the world - brought straight into Lichfield. Lichfield Cathedral continues to have a really vibrant and engaging programme of events, and Luxmuralis is heavily involved in that. We'll see The Great Exhibition return in 2021, which is another of our sell-out summer light & sound events at the cathedral, and lots of other exhibitions and events throughout the year. Unfortunately we had to cancel our Poppy Fields remembrance event this year, but we're hoping we can reschedule that for next year. My Luxmuralis team is already completely booked out for the whole of next year, and we're having so many people approach us - especially, I think, because we're very adaptable to outdoor spaces. The next few years provide such an opportunity for people to be able to embrace the arts: staying safe whilst experiencing incredible fine art, music and more. I think we will see a stronger arts scene across all disciplines over the coming years."

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The Cathedral Illuminated: The Manger shows at Lichfield Cathedral
For further information and to book tickets, visit lichfield-cathedral.org

TALES FOR WINTER

The Royal Shakespeare Company's upcoming programme sees audiences invited into its main theatre for the first time since March



Going back to the roots of theatre - a great story - the RSC's Tales For Winter promises a mixture of live streams and socially distanced events, epic tales of the classical era and magical musical offerings. We caught up with the Company's artistic director, Gregory Doran, to find out more about the theatre's long-awaited 'return to business'...

"We've been waiting so long for theatres to start presenting stuff again," says RSC Artistic Director Gregory Doran. "It was great in the summer when we were able to put on Shakespeare's Snapshots in the gardens, and we had such a fantastic response to that. Because we'd been doing so much online in 2020, we wanted to make sure that, at the end of this year, we had something in the theatre. We had a programme ready to go, and then the new lockdown was imposed, so we had to change our thinking a little bit. We had to adapt very, very quickly to the new lockdown. The Tales For Winter programme takes its name from the play we were meant to be opening our season with: Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale. But its premise is to go right back to the very start of our theatre making, which is performers standing up in front of a group of people and telling them a story. If you can grab an audience with a single voice telling a story, then you can do anything."

The programme kicks off with the return of The Boy In The Dress...

"David Walliams was supposed to be live in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre for the launch of The Boy In The Dress cast recording, but now that will be online," Gregory explains. "David will be reading a bit of the book, and we will launch the soundtrack with special guests including Guy Chambers, who wrote the music with Robbie Williams, and cast members. This has been long-awaited, and since the musical was supposed to be in the West End at the moment, it was even more important that we made this happen. There's a bitter-sweet element to it as well. We're opening the Tales For Winter programme with a signal of where we left off when we went into our first lockdown. If you go into the Royal Shakespeare Theatre now, the wings and changing rooms are filled with the costumes, set, and chairs with the cast names from The Boy In The Dress - ready to go for its run at the Savoy Theatre, London. We're remembering what a great show it is, and what fantastic musical numbers feature. It's a sad sense of both remembering where we were when we had to close, and pushing forward to where we hope to be in the near future."

“It’s a sad sense of both remembering where we were when we had to close, and pushing forward to where we hope to be in the near future.”

Gregory is directing a proportion of the programme himself: Troy Story is a five-installment live stream retelling the fall of Troy and all that came both before and after.

"Following on from that premise of storytelling inspiring the programme, we're going back to the very beginning of stories in Europe and basing Troy Story on Greek classics The Iliad and The Odyssey, and Latin epic The Aeneid. We're going to stream it over the whole day, and the entire RSC acting company are going to be in that. We're taking all different parts of the story, from the wooden horse and the end of the Trojan War, to the rage of Achilles, the murder of Hector, and the people's journeys afterwards - whether that be Aeneas fleeing to Italy, or Odysseus trying to get home to Ithica. It's an incredible, epic tale over a five-hour stream. Also, I haven't yet directed this particular RSC acting company. They're such a talented bunch, who've been with us through thick and thin the last few months. It's fantastic to be able to be with them for their first outing on the Royal Shakespeare Theatre stage - albeit socially distanced - to tell a story that's been part of our cultural heritage for two-and-a-half millennium."

The winter programme also includes a Christmas treat: Festive Tales will be presented to a live, reduced-capacity audience.

"Normally at this time of year, we would do a carol concert for ourselves, but that can't happen in 2020, so we thought we would move it onto the stage and share our yearly tradition with the wider RSC community, who we've engaged with so much since March. There will also be a carousel outside the theatre, and some fire bowls, so that there can be some more adhoc storytelling alongside the carols. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre seats around 1,000, but we'll have to cut that down to 200 for appropriate social distancing. But getting audiences back in the theatre is going to be an incredibly moving moment for everyone - the performers, the audience, and us as a whole company."

Looking forward to early 2021, the RSC will present a week of live streamed performances inspired by bestselling author Michael Morpurgo's new book, Tales From Shakespeare. Offerings include Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream and Romeo And Juliet.



"It's fantastic that Michael Morpurgo himself will be part of the festival. I had a conversation with Michael about three years ago, about whether he'd consider rewriting Tales From Shakespeare, so I'm really thrilled that he's done it and that we have the honour of premiering them. Michael was the Children's Laureate and obviously much-loved by schools and families. He doesn't actually publish them until next year, but still he'll be reading some of them. He's written 10, and we're presenting six of them at the moment - and hopefully the other four will follow shortly, too. Instead of performing them to a house of schools and family audiences, we'll be doing them online with our RSC acting company. The company will



The Royal Shakespeare Company's production of
David Walliam's *The Boy In The Dress*

be reading them knowing that the intended audience is primary school children. They are incredible tales in the way that he's rewritten the plays in a very vivid and contemporary way. We're so excited to be able to use these tales to help inspire a younger generation with Shakespeare."

The RSC's unavoidable focus on online content this year has revolutionised their work for the foreseeable future.

"So much has been going on over lockdown and beyond with our associate schools programme, with our regional theatre partners - lovely initiatives like Share Your Shakespeare. They will continue. We've been at the forefront of online work with schools over lockdown, helping drama teachers who've never had to conduct drama lessons on Zoom. We've been getting some of our freelancers and education practitioners to put their creative minds to that, and help in any way possible. The work we do outside of the performances has had time to grow and develop over this period, and it's been very necessary to do so for the community. I'm sure that will continue to develop.

"We've found a whole different life online, and different ways of keeping engagement with our international friends and stakeholders who won't be travelling any time soon. Our Talking Shakespeare programme in the summer had Judi Dench, David Tennant, Harriet Walter and Juliet Stevenson. The new series at the moment started with Ian McKellen, Helen Mirren and Roger Allam, and will soon be followed by David Oyelowo and Jane Lapotaire - so many great RSC actors entertaining us with stories of their careers and love of Shakespeare. We're also leading a fantastic initiative called Audiences Of The Future, and that's looking at really interesting ways of putting content online."

There will also be other changes going forward: "There's certainly been a lot of recalibration and rethinking going on here at the RSC; thinking about how we create and how we deliver. Our process of dealing with closure and opening again hasn't just been about restoration, but there's also an element of opportunity. We're reassessing who we are and what it is that we do. While this has obviously been a huge crisis, I think it has also posed great opportunities for us. Clearly, in the short term, closing the Swan Theatre and the Studio Theatre at The Other Place is devastating for us, but it's in order for us to



Gregory Doran

“ This period has made us realise how much we need the arts; how much we need theatre. It brings that sense of community, communion and congregation that we didn't really understand the value of until it was taken away. ”

come back stronger at a later date. I think with The Other Place, in particular, it's less about the bricks and mortar and more the spirit of the place that makes it so unique. We should have been in Tokyo with Taming Of The Shrew before the Olympics this year, and when talking to the British Council over there, they reminded us that the Olympic Torch is still alight. That became a really

powerful symbol for us, about how we need to keep our flame burning on - and the way to do that is to keep finding new writing, new platforms for underrepresented voices, and new digital solutions. We want to continue that radical spirit of The Other Place - invention, innovation, all things new. The same with the Swan Theatre - we want to make sure that we've had writers working on projects all this time."

Despite the challenges 2020 has posed, Gregory is confident about the RSC's future: "Post-Christmas we've got an amazing piece of work coming up that's a fusion of jazz and Shakespeare with Black performers. We're very excited about that, but we haven't announced it just yet. We wanted that to come before Christmas, but unfortunately we had to shift it back a little. Having audiences back is the most important thing and is what we're looking forward to most in the future. Our audiences are who we are. We are there to perform to people - Shakespeare primarily, and also other things - but without people to watch, we are nothing. We so wanted to be opening this winter with The Winter's Tale and Comedy Of Errors productions, which we had to postpone back in the spring when lockdown was announced, but we knew we simply couldn't do that just yet with the social distancing. We will, hopefully, be able to stage those in summer 2021, and then they'll be followed by fantastic family show The Magician's Elephant for the autumn and on through Christmas.

"This period has made us realise how much we need the arts; how much we need theatre. It brings that sense of community, communion and congregation that we didn't really understand the value of until it was taken away. We've never faced a crisis like this in the history of the RSC. In 140 years we've never missed a summer season - even when the theatre burnt down in 1926 - apart from maybe during the First World War. This is the first time in a very long time that we haven't been performing Shakespeare plays in the theatre in the summer, so we can't wait for that to happen again. There's a wonderful moment at the end of The Winter's Tale where a statue comes to life, and that image is going to be a really powerful one for us in 2021."

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For further details about the Tales For Winter programme, and to book tickets, visit: rsc.org.uk

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Must see theatre coming up in 2021



The Da Vinci Code

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 26 - Sat 31 July; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 6 - Sat 11 September; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 18 - Sat 23 October; Malvern Theatres, Mon 22 - Sat 27 November

Dan Brown's bestselling novel - written in 2003 and made into a blockbuster movie starring Tom Hanks in 2006 - sees cryptologists Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu grappling with a series of baffling codes found alongside the body of the brutally murdered curator of

the Louvre...

"I'm thrilled that The Da Vinci Code is being adapted for the stage," says Dan, "and excited to see the unique potential of live theatre enhance this story. The team making the production has been faithful to the book, but will also bring something new for the audience, in what's certain to be a gripping, fast-paced stage thriller and a thoroughly entertaining show." The production stops off at five Midlands theatres as part of a 31-venue UK tour.

Pericles

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, date tbc

This rarely performed work is thought to have been a collaboration between Shakespeare and the dramatist & pamphleteer George Wilkins, with the Stratford bard having written just under half of its 1,662 lines.

Produced around 1608, it tells the story of the young Prince of Tyre, Pericles, who, fearing for his life, takes to the seas and finds himself embarking on a series of perilous adventures...

"The play echoes the many stories of displaced families struggling to escape oppression and forced to face the dangers of sea crossings in today's Mediterranean," says RSC Artistic Director Gregory Doran. "I'm very excited at the chance to reassess this timely play. It's over a decade since we produced Pericles and nearly 20 years since it was performed in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre."

Looking Dead Good

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 12 - Sat 17 April; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Mon 10 - Sat 15 May; Malvern Theatres, 30 August - Sat 4 September; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 6 - Sat 11 September



Bestselling crime writer Peter James has scored major successes on stage as well as in print, with adaptations of his books having played to appreciative audiences at venues across the UK. This latest offering features Detective Superintendent Roy Grace, the Brighton-based policeman who's headed up murder investigations in a number of James's most popular novels. On this occasion, Grace is called in when a man who finds a USB

memory stick on a train inadvertently becomes a witness to a vicious murder... EastEnders stalwart Adam Woodyatt (Ian Beale) stars.

The 39 Steps

Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, Thurs 8 - Sat 17 April

Anybody who remembers the various film versions of John Buchan's classic spy thriller will be hard-pressed to call any of them 'humorous'. So it's a bit weird to think of this stage version bagging the Olivier Award for Best New Comedy. Nonetheless, that's exactly what it did, courtesy of some imaginative thinking on the part of its creative team.

So why not catch up with handsome hero Richard Hannay as he battles to remain impressively stiff-upper-lipped in the face of dastardly murders and life-threatening encounters with double-crossing secret agents... Four fearless actors play no fewer than 150 roles in this real gem of a show.

The Woman In Black

Malvern Theatres, Mon 11 - Sat 16 May



Adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from Susan Hill's same-titled novel, *The Woman In Black* is a classic ghost story first performed in 1989. It has since become one of the West End's most successful plays. Solicitor Arthur Kipp believes that his family have somehow been cursed by a mysterious woman in black. In an attempt to tell his story, and to exorcise the evil curse which he's convinced hangs over him, he hires a young actor to assist him in recounting his experiences...

Jack The Ripper: Mary Kelly

Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, Wed 14 - Sat 17 July

Of 11 murders which took place in the Whitechapel area of London between 1888

and 1891, five have been strongly linked to history's most famous unidentified serial killer - Jack The Ripper.

The fifth of those victims, who met her grizzly fate on 9 November 1888, was poverty-stricken prostitute Mary Jane Kelly - and it's through the telling of her life story that the gruesome tale of the Ripper is here recounted.

Expect a winning blend of 'naturalistic dialogue and fast-paced stylistic storytelling' interspersed with moments of brutal violence...

Absurd Person Singular

Malvern Theatres, Tues 29 June - Sat 3 July

Alan Ayckbourn's *Absurd Person Singular* charts the progress - and decline - of three couples in three kitchens during three Christmas gatherings, during which each couple gets more than they bargained for. One of the playwright's most pleasing comedies, it's an enduring piece which has lost none of its bite in the 48 years since it was premiered.

Beauty And The Beast

New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, dates tbc

Postponed from 2020 for obvious reasons, the New Vic's retelling of this classic fairytale sees the venue's artistic director, Theresa Heskins, bringing to bear all of her

trademark inventiveness to present a show that promises to breathe new life into an old fable. Heskins, whose previous triumphs have included the Olivier Award-winning *The Worst Witch*, has returned to the original versions of the tale for her much-anticipated adaptation. Expect a show replete with enchanting storytelling, an impressive score and a generous helping of family-friendly humour...

The Winter's Tale

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, dates tbc

One of Shakespeare's later and lesser-known works, *The Winter's Tale* recounts the story of Perdita, who, after being lost at sea as a baby, is rescued and brought up by an old shepherd.

When she meets the king's son, Florizel, love blossoms amid the rustic revelry...

The production was originally scheduled for last summer, when it would have been presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company alongside new versions of *Pericles* (previewed above) and *The Comedy Of Errors*.

"The sea divides families in all three plays," says RSC Artistic Director Gregory Doran.

"Themes of separation & loss and the restorative power of time connect all three of them. Each play is wonderfully different, yet at the same time they share a fascination with identity, the challenges of leaving your native land and the deep bonds of family."



Something Rotten

The REP, Birmingham, Thurs 7 - Sat 30 October

When the 16th century Bottom brothers - aspiring playwrights living in the shadow of William Shakespeare - find out from a soothsayer that the future of theatre will see acting being combined with singing and dancing, they set about the task of writing the world's first ever musical...

Sean Foley (pictured) has had a far from ideal first few months in his new role as artistic director of the Birmingham Rep, so he'll be crossing his fingers - along with the rest of us - that 2021 will bring with it a return to normality. Assuming it does, Sean will no doubt relish getting his teeth into this hit musical comedy, an offering described by *New York Magazine* as "The Producers meets *Spamalot* meets *The Book Of Mormon*... squared."



Dial M For Murder

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Tues 16 - Sat 20 March

Samantha Womack and Tom Chambers star in Frederick Knott's erotic tale of betrayal, passion and murder - best known, of course, from its

1954 Alfred Hitchcock-directed film version starring Ray Milland and Grace Kelly... When Tony becomes convinced that wife Margot is having an affair, he devises a means of having her murdered while at the same time ensuring he has a watertight alibi. But not everything goes according to plan...

Chaplin: Birth Of A Tramp

The Old Rep, Birmingham, Fri 2 & Sat 3 April



Charlie Chaplin's stellar Hollywood career was all the more remarkable given that his childhood had been spent in abject poverty. The son of an alcoholic father and a mother who would eventually succumb to psychosis, he was brought up in a late-19th century London slum and twice sent to the workhouse before the age of nine... The critically acclaimed Arrows & Traps are the company behind this psychological exploration of the silent-movie era's biggest, brightest and perhaps most surprising star.

Macbeth

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 24 - Wed 26 May; Albany Theatre, Coventry, Wed 20 October

Having been spurred into action by the prophecies of three supernatural women - and egged on by his conniving wife - Macbeth's desire to be king of Scotland sees him slaughtering first Duncan and then Banquo. As the pressure mounts and his grip on sanity weakens, he decides to commit even more atrocities - including the murder of women and children...

This latest version of Shakespeare's famous tragedy is presented by Daniel Taylor Productions.



By The Waters Of Liverpool

Albany Theatre, Coventry, Sun 28 March; Malvern Theatres, Sat 6 & Sun 7 November



Helen Forrester's autobiographical play - from her same-titled bestselling book - is set in the 1930s and finds the teenage Helen fighting a bitter battle with her parents for the right to educate herself and go out to work. Life, however, has a habit of getting in the way of even the best-laid plans - and so it proves for Helen...

Following her family's fall from grace, she finds herself taken from school to work as an 'unpaid slave' looking after her siblings. But with Britain on the brink of war, the arrival in her life of a tall, strong seaman provides Helen with the chink of light for which she's been so desperately searching...

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must see musicals coming to the Midlands...



Mamma Mia!

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 2 - Sat 13 March; Birmingham Hippodrome, Tues 3 - Sat 14 May, 2022

This legendary show is of course a nicely contrived vehicle for the chart-topping music of 1970s super troupers Abba.

The Swedish Fab Four scored mega-hit after mega-hit with catchy numbers including Waterloo, Dancing Queen, The Name Of The Game, The Winner Takes It All and Take A Chance On Me, all of which are present and correct in this blockbuster offering.

Waitress

Birmingham Hippodrome, Tues 11 - Sat 15 May; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 23 - Sat 28 August; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 29 November - Sat 4 December

Smash-hit Broadway and West End musical Waitress makes three Midlands stop-offs next year as part of its first ever UK tour.

Based on the 2007 movie, Waitress tells the story of Jenna, an expert pie maker in a small town who dreams of a way out of her loveless marriage. A baking contest in a nearby county and the town's new doctor may provide her with the chance of a new life, while her fellow waitresses offer their own recipes for happiness...

The show is being brought to life by a groundbreaking female-led creative team.



Rock Of Ages

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 6 - Sat 10 July; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Tues 2 - Sat 6 November



Cinema-goers who caught the 2012 movie version of Rock Of Ages, starring Tom Cruise, Alec Baldwin, Russell Brand and Catherine Zeta-Jones, will know exactly what to expect from this feelgood musical. For those who didn't and therefore don't, it focuses on the romance between a small-town girl and a big-city rocker, and is packed to its proverbial rafters with classic 1980s numbers. So if you're someone for whom the decade of Glasnost, yuppies, Miami Vice and mullet hair-dos took place against a soundtrack of pounding rock anthems, this is the show for you. Songs include We Built This City, Here I Go Again, I Want To Know What Love Is and The Final Countdown.

9 To 5 The Musical

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 25 - Fri 29 May; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 1 - Fri 5 June; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 3 - Fri 7 August;

"I'm so excited that 9 To 5 is heading to the Midlands," says Dolly Parton, in talking about her hit musical's three visits to the region in 2021. "I'm hoping you have as much fun watching it as I had writing the music for it. The show is perfect for anyone who's ever wanted to string up their boss, which is almost all of us. So come join the fun!"

As with the original 1980s movie and spin-off TV series, the stage production of 9 To 5 centres around the story of three office workers, who team up to turn the tables on their sexist and egotistical bigot of a boss. Expect to be dancing in the aisles...



must see musicals coming to the Midlands...



We Will Rock You

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 8 - Sat 13 February; Birmingham Hippodrome, Mon 17 - Sat 29 May

A pulsating Ben Elton-written homage to the music of Queen, *We Will Rock You* may be short on storyline, but it's got bags of energy - and just about as brilliant a soundtrack as any musical's ever likely to boast. The show's frontline performers give it their all to excellent effect, while the sets and

choreography ensure a visual spectacle to remember. For those who care about the wafer-thin plot, the story is set in a future where originality has been quashed, musical instruments banned, and a hero is needed to bring back rock music...

Yes, it's all a bit contrived, but how else are you going to glue together all of Queen's greatest hits in a single show?

A fantastic evening's entertainment for fans of Freddie & Co, so catch it when you can...

Grease

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 3 - Sat 8 May; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 13 - Sat 17 July

Dust off your leather jackets, pull on your bobby-socks and get ready for the most fun-filled high-octane rock'n'roll party of them all!

Grease is the original high-school musical, featuring all the unforgettable songs from the hit movie, including *You're The One That I Want*, *Grease Is The Word*, *Summer Nights*, *Hopelessly Devoted To You*, *Sandy and Greased Lightnin'*.



Footloose

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 15 - Sat 20 March; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 6 - Sat 10 April; Malvern Theatres, Mon 17 - Sat 22 May; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 2 - Sat 7 August



Featuring classic numbers such as *Holding Out For A Hero*, *Almost Paradise*, *Let's Hear It For The Boy*, and of course the title track itself, hit Broadway and West End musical *Footloose* tells the story of city boy Ren's arrival in Bomont - and of the impact which his dancing has on a town held back by the memory of a tragedy.

Everybody's Talking About Jamie

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, date tbc; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 26 April - Sat 1 May

Everybody's Talking About Jamie may have come from humble beginnings - it was inspired by a television documentary and premiered in Sheffield - but after only a matter of months it had transferred to the West End. Since then, the hit musical has enjoyed blockbusting success, with five Olivier Award nominations, an extensive UK tour and a forthcoming feature-film version testifying to its incredible popularity.

The show, which follows Jamie New's quest for acceptance on his journey to becoming a drag queen, co-stars soap favourites Shane Richie and Shobna Gulati. Layton Williams takes the title role. "This musical tries to tell people to stay true to who they are and to be proud of themselves," says Layton, "and that if they're different, or feel like they don't fit in, then there's a place for them in the world anyway. It's all about having hope."



Dreamgirls

Venues and dates to be confirmed soon...

Take a rollercoaster ride back to the 1960s with this smash-hit musical inspired by the story of Diana Ross & The Supremes. *Dreamgirls* debuted on Broadway 39 years ago but is best known from the 2006 film version starring Jamie Foxx and Beyoncé Knowles. A story of friendship, ambition, and how the former can sometimes be compromised by the latter, the show follows the fortunes of Effie, Lorrell and Deena - three talented young singers in the turbulent '60s who, managed by a former Cadillac salesman, aim to hit the high notes as girl group the Dreamettes. Featured numbers include *And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going*, *Listen, I Am Changing* and *One Night Only*.



Six The Musical

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Tues 20 - Sun 25 April (tickets on sale, 1 December) Birmingham Hippodrome, Tues 14 - Sat 18 September

SIX's runaway success has shown no signs of abating since it premiered as a student production at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2017. From Tudor queens to battling boss-women, the show features the wives of Henry VIII taking to the stage to tell their own versions of their lives. This high-energy celebration of girl power sees the cast backed by all-female band The Ladies In Waiting.

Chicago The Musical

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Fri 12 - Sat 20 March; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 28 June - Sat 3 July; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 25 - Sat 30 October

Chicago's debauched glamour, jazz-tinged score and smouldering dance numbers give it a touch of real old-Broadway style decadence.

An astonishingly accurate satire on the shallow, media-obsessed world of the 21st century, it's almost impossible to believe it was first conceived over 40 years ago. It also has the considerable lure of choreography by Broadway legend Bob Fosse - and he's the reason the show was re-conceived in 1996.

Set in the Chicago of the Roaring 20s, the action takes place in a jailhouse, as two ambitious and sexy 'cons battle it out to be the most notorious murderer...



Hairspray

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 20 - Sat 24 April

It's 1962, and in Tracy Turnblad's Baltimore hometown, massive hairdos, dancing the

twist and Corny Collins' daytime dance show are the hottest tickets in teen culture.

In some ways, life for the starry-eyed Tracy is as big, bright and breezy as a bubblegum balloon - but there's trouble brewing just beneath the surface...

This Tony Award-winning hit of a show returns to the Midlands with a jukebox-worth of 1960s-style dance music and 'downtown' rhythm & blues. Hit songs include Welcome To The 60s, You Can't Stop The Beat and The Nicest Kids In Town.



School Of Rock

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Sat 13 - Sat 27 February; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 20 - Sat 25 September; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 26 - Sat 31 July

There's a school of thought that School Of Rock would've been even better without Jack Black. And the great thing about Andrew Lloyd Webber's stage version of the hit 2003 movie is that you actually get to find out if that's true!

Alongside its lack of Black, the show has plenty else to recommend it, including no fewer than 14 new songs from Lord Lloyd Webber. All the original numbers from the

movie also feature.

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must see musicals coming to the Midlands...



Mamma Mia!

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 2 - Sat 13 March; Birmingham Hippodrome, Tues 3 - Sat 14 May, 2022

This legendary show is of course a nicely contrived vehicle for the chart-topping music of 1970s super troupers Abba.

The Swedish Fab Four scored mega-hit after mega-hit with catchy numbers including Waterloo, Dancing Queen, The Name Of The Game, The Winner Takes It All and Take A Chance On Me, all of which are present and correct in this blockbuster offering.

Waitress

Birmingham Hippodrome, Tues 11 - Sat 15 May; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 23 - Sat 28 August; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 29 November - Sat 4 December

Smash-hit Broadway and West End musical Waitress makes three Midlands stop-offs next year as part of its first ever UK tour.

Based on the 2007 movie, Waitress tells the story of Jenna, an expert pie maker in a small town who dreams of a way out of her loveless marriage. A baking contest in a nearby county and the town's new doctor may provide her with the chance of a new life, while her fellow waitresses offer their own recipes for happiness...

The show is being brought to life by a groundbreaking female-led creative team.



Rock Of Ages

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 6 - Sat 10 July; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Tues 2 - Sat 6 November



Cinema-goers who caught the 2012 movie version of Rock Of Ages, starring Tom Cruise, Alec Baldwin, Russell Brand and Catherine Zeta-Jones, will know exactly what to expect from this feelgood musical. For those who didn't and therefore don't, it focuses on the romance between a small-town girl and a big-city rocker, and is packed to its proverbial rafters with classic 1980s numbers. So if you're someone for whom the decade of Glasnost, yuppies, Miami Vice and mullet hair-dos took place against a soundtrack of pounding rock anthems, this is the show for you. Songs include We Built This City, Here I Go Again, I Want To Know What Love Is and The Final Countdown.

9 To 5 The Musical

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 25 - Fri 29 May; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 1 - Fri 5 June; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 3 - Fri 7 August;

"I'm so excited that 9 To 5 is heading to the Midlands," says Dolly Parton, in talking about her hit musical's three visits to the region in 2021. "I'm hoping you have as much fun watching it as I had writing the music for it. The show is perfect for anyone who's ever wanted to string up their boss, which is almost all of us. So come join the fun!"

As with the original 1980s movie and spin-off TV series, the stage production of 9 To 5 centres around the story of three office workers, who team up to turn the tables on their sexist and egotistical bigot of a boss. Expect to be dancing in the aisles...



must see musicals coming to the Midlands...



We Will Rock You

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 8 - Sat 13 February; Birmingham Hippodrome, Mon 17 - Sat 29 May

A pulsating Ben Elton-written homage to the music of Queen, *We Will Rock You* may be short on storyline, but it's got bags of energy - and just about as brilliant a soundtrack as any musical's ever likely to boast. The show's frontline performers give it their all to excellent effect, while the sets and

choreography ensure a visual spectacle to remember. For those who care about the wafer-thin plot, the story is set in a future where originality has been quashed, musical instruments banned, and a hero is needed to bring back rock music...

Yes, it's all a bit contrived, but how else are you going to glue together all of Queen's greatest hits in a single show?

A fantastic evening's entertainment for fans of Freddie & Co, so catch it when you can...

Grease

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 3 - Sat 8 May; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 13 - Sat 17 July

Dust off your leather jackets, pull on your bobby-socks and get ready for the most fun-filled high-octane rock'n'roll party of them

all!

Grease is the original high-school musical, featuring all the unforgettable songs from the hit movie, including *You're The One That I Want*, *Grease Is The Word*, *Summer Nights*, *Hopelessly Devoted To You*, *Sandy and Greased Lightnin'*.

Footloose

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 15 - Sat 20 March; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 6 - Sat 10 April; Malvern Theatres, Mon 17 - Sat 22 May; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 2 - Sat 7 August

Featuring classic numbers such as *Holding Out For A Hero*, *Almost Paradise*, *Let's Hear It For The Boy*, and of course the title track itself, hit Broadway and West End musical *Footloose* tells the story of city boy Ren's arrival in Bomont - and of the impact which his dancing has on a town held back by the memory of a tragedy.



Menopause The Musical

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Thurs 25 February; Bedworth Civic Hall, Sat 27 February; Malvern Theatres, Fri 9 April; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Wed 21 April; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Sun 13 June

Female TV stars 'of a certain age' are much in evidence in this well-reviewed show, although the identities of those taking part on this particular occasion are yet to be revealed.

When four menopausal women meet in a department store, conversation quickly turns to the one thing they all have in common - the menopause. Cue innumerable one-liners on subjects including forgetfulness, mood swings, wrinkles, night sweats and uncontrollable chocolate binges...





Six The Musical

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Tues 20 - Sun 25 April (tickets on sale, 1 December) Birmingham Hippodrome, Tues 14 - Sat 18 September

SIX's runaway success has shown no signs of abating since it premiered as a student production at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2017. From Tudor queens to battling boss-women, the show features the wives of Henry VIII taking to the stage to tell their own versions of their lives. This high-energy celebration of girl power sees the cast backed by all-female band The Ladies In Waiting.

Chicago The Musical

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Fri 12 - Sat 20 March; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 28 June - Sat 3 July; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 25 - Sat 30 October

Chicago's debauched glamour, jazz-tinged score and smouldering dance numbers give it a touch of real old-Broadway style decadence.

An astonishingly accurate satire on the shallow, media-obsessed world of the 21st century, it's almost impossible to believe it was first conceived over 40 years ago.

It also has the considerable lure of choreography by Broadway legend Bob Fosse - and he's the reason the show was re-conceived in 1996.

Set in the Chicago of the Roaring 20s, the action takes place in a jailhouse, as two ambitious and sexy 'cons battle it out to be the most notorious murderer...



Hairspray

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 20 - Sat 24 April

It's 1962, and in Tracy Turnblad's Baltimore hometown, massive hairdos, dancing the

twist and Corny Collins' daytime dance show are the hottest tickets in teen culture.

In some ways, life for the starry-eyed Tracy is as big, bright and breezy as a bubblegum balloon - but there's trouble brewing just beneath the surface...

This Tony Award-winning hit of a show returns to the Midlands with a jukebox-worth of 1960s-style dance music and 'downtown' rhythm & blues. Hit songs include Welcome To The 60s, You Can't Stop The Beat and The Nicest Kids In Town.



School Of Rock

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Sat 13 - Sat 27 February; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 20 - Sat 25 September; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 26 - Sat 31 July

There's a school of thought that School Of Rock would've been even better without Jack Black. And the great thing about Andrew Lloyd Webber's stage version of the hit 2003 movie is that you actually get to find out if that's true!

Alongside its lack of Black, the show has plenty else to recommend it, including no fewer than 14 new songs from Lord Lloyd Webber. All the original numbers from the

movie also feature.

For those not in the know, School Of Rock tells the story of wannabe rock star Dewey Finn. Posing as a substitute teacher at an elite prep school, Dewey not only introduces the students to 'his kind of music' but also helps the uptight headmistress to rediscover her inner wild child...Nicest Kids In Town.

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Everybody's Talking About Jamie

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, date tbc;
The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 26 April -
Sat 1 May

Everybody's Talking About Jamie may have come from humble beginnings - it was inspired by a television documentary and premiered in Sheffield - but after only a matter of months it had transferred to the West End. Since then, the hit musical has enjoyed blockbusting success, with five Olivier Award

nominations, an extensive UK tour and a forthcoming feature-film version testifying to its incredible popularity.

The show, which follows Jamie New's quest for acceptance on his journey to becoming a drag queen, co-stars soap favourites Shane Richie and Shobna Gulati. Layton Williams takes the title role. "This musical tries to tell people to stay true to who they are and to be proud of themselves," says Layton, "and that if they're different, or feel like they don't fit in, then there's a place for them in the world anyway. It's all about having hope."



Dreamgirls

Venues and dates to be confirmed soon...

Take a rollercoaster ride back to the 1960s with this smash-hit musical inspired by the story of Diana Ross & The Supremes. Dreamgirls debuted on Broadway 39 years ago but is best known from the 2006 film version starring Jamie Foxx and Beyoncé Knowles. A story of friendship, ambition, and

how the former can sometimes be compromised by the latter, the show follows the fortunes of Effie, Lorrell and Deena - three talented young singers in the turbulent '60s who, managed by a former Cadillac salesman, aim to hit the high notes as girl group the Dreamettes. Featured numbers include And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going, Listen, I Am Changing and One Night Only.

The Magician's Elephant

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Wed 14 October - Sat 1 January 2022

The Royal Shakespeare Company's Christmas offering this year would have been a new musical adaptation of The Magician's Elephant.

Sadly, the Covid crisis means that families will have to wait until next autumn to enjoy the stage version of bestselling author Kate DiCamillo's critically acclaimed novel.

The Magician's Elephant tells the story of orphan Peter Augustus Duchenne, who lives a frugal life in the lonely town of Baltese.

Then, one day, a magician conjures an elephant from the sky...

The animal's appearance sets off a chain of remarkable events that changes Baltese forever.



Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

Stafford Gatehouse, Fri 4 June; Lichfield Garrick, Sat 5 June; Malvern Theatres, 9 June; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sun 20 June; Sutton Coldfield Town Hall, Wed 14 July; Brierley Hill Civic, Thurs 15 July; Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Sat 17 July; The Place, Telford, Thurs 9 September; Swan Theatre, Worcester, Sun 12 September; The Albany Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 16 September; Palace Theatre, Redditch, Wed 22 September; William Aston Hall, Wrexham, Sat 6 November

Linda Nolan and X-Factor finalist Niki Evans are two of the four women enjoying an evening of fun and frivolity in this brand new musical comedy.

Described as a no-holds-barred romp through everything life throws at a modern-day woman, the show is unlikely to pull up any trees when it comes to originality. That said, having previously helmed Hormonal Housewives, its producers absolutely know the market they're playing to, and are old hands at giving their audience a fantastic night out. So if you fancy channelling your inner diva for a couple of hours, you know what you need to do...

Christmas isn't Cancelled

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13 - 25 DECEMBER

13 DECEMBER 16:00 - Lantern Service OUTSIDE EVENT TICKETED (FREE)

19:00 - Light in the Darkness LIMITED NUMBERS PER 15 MINS
A vigil for everyone facing a difficult Christmas

14 DECEMBER 19:00 - Meditation at the Manger LIMITED NUMBERS PER 15 MINS

15 DECEMBER 19:00 - Out of Bethlehem - A Cry LIMITED NUMBERS PER 15 MINS
A vigil of reflection and support for today's people of Bethlehem

16-22 DECEMBER from 17:00 - Cathedral Illuminated TICKETED (PAID)

19 DECEMBER 14:00 & 15:00 - Carols Around the Tree OUTSIDE EVENT TICKETED (FREE)

20 DECEMBER 15:00 - Share the Gift TICKETED (FREE)

23 DECEMBER 19:00 - Service of Lessons & Carols TICKETED (FREE)

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with our Virtual Advent Calendar

produced in association with South Staffordshire College

24 DECEMBER 15:00 - Crib Service OUTSIDE EVENT TICKETED (FREE)

19:00 - Service of Lessons & Carols TICKETED (FREE)

22:00 - First Eucharist of Christmas TICKETED (FREE)

Christmas Day

8:00 - Traditional Language Eucharist

10:30 - Christmas Day Eucharist TICKETED (FREE)

12:30 - Christmas Day Said Eucharist

16:00 - Evening Prayer

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