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inside:

VAN GOGH IS BACK interactive exhibition returns to Birmingham Hippodrome



FRESH AIR THEATRE find out what's showing and where this summer

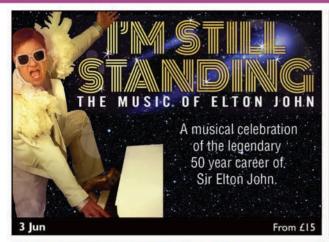


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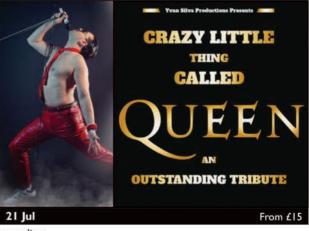












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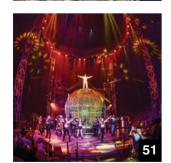
















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Hippodrome announces new shows for 2021/22

Hit West Enders Priscilla, Queen Of The Desert and Blood Brothers will be stopping off at Birmingham Hippodrome in the autumn, with another much-loved musical, Chichester Festival Theatre's Olivier Awardnominated Singin' In The Rain, visiting the Midlands venue in summer 2022.

But wait, there's more...

But wait, there's more...

Alongside this trio of marvellous musicals, the Hippodrome is also presenting ever-popular drag superstar Ceri Dupree in her latest show, A Star Is Torn!!!, family favourite What The Ladybird Heard, and smash-hit comedy The Play That Goes Wrong...

For more information about these and other visiting shows, and to book tickets, go to: birminghamhippodrome.com

Film festival Flatpack to launch new season



Birmingham's long-established film festival, Flatpack, kicks off a four-month season of events on Friday 21 May.

Event highlights include the BAFTA-award-qualifying short-film competition - featuring more than 30 UK premieres - a feature & documentary film programme, and a selection of special events, including live-performance premieres, beer & film pairings, and a life modelling class. The festival can be enjoyed online, outdoors and, all being well, in the city's cinemas and auditoriums.

Jazzlines Summer School making a welcome return

Birmingham's Symphony Hall will this August once again host its Jazzlines Summer School for young people aged between 11 and

The five-day-long initiative will be presented in conjunction with a jazz festival.

The free non-residential course, taking place from Monday 23 to Friday 27 August, offers a comprehensive and broad-ranging programme aimed at emerging performers 'who wish to expand their horizons and playing capability'.

The accompanying jazz festival (23 - 28 August) is being presented in partnership with Jazz FM. Audiences will be able to enjoy free and low-cost performances at The Spotted Dog in Digbeth, on stage at Symphony Hall and in Symphony Hall's new Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space. To find out more and apply for a free space at the Jazzlines Summer School, visit thsh.co.uk



New 3,500-capacity music venue to open in Dale End

A newly renovated, multi-faceted, 3,500-capacity entertainment space is set to open in Birmingham.

Located in the city's Dale End, Forum Birmingham will play host to 'world-class DJs and live acts from across the live & electronic music spectrums'. The new venue is housed in a building formerly known as The Ballroom. The building has lain dormant and decaying for a decade.

You can sign up for more information about the venue and pre-sale tickets by visiting: forumbirmingham.uk

Eleven days of 'fabulous entertainment' in Lichfield

Mica Paris (pictured), Eddi Reader and Alistair McGowan are among the performers appearing at this year's Lichfield Festival. The eleven-day event, opening on Thursday 8 July,



features ballet, cabaret, symphony orchestras, steel pans, family fun, chamber music, live cooking, storytelling, drama and comedy.

Commenting on this year's get-together, Lichfield Festival Director Damian Thantrey said: "With distancing and regulations expected still to be in place, things will be a little different this summer, with shorter event times and repeated performances, particularly those in the smaller venues. There will also be a number of outdoor events, making the most of the glorious summer weather - we hope! - and some of Lichfield's beautiful and verdant outdoor spaces." For more information about the event, visit lichfieldfestival.org

AJ and Curtis to star in Cinderella at Wolves Grand...

Much-loved dancing siblings AJ and Curtis Pritchard will star in the pantomime production of Cinderella at the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre this Christmas (Saturday 4 December - Sunday 9 January). The brothers, who between them have on their CVs hit TV shows Strictly Come Dancing, I'm A Celebrity and Love Island, will take the roles of Prince Charming and Dandini respectively.

For more information and to book tickets for the panto, visit grandtheatre.co.uk.



Sonia Sabri in new team-up with Sähëlï Hub

Birmingham's award-winning Sonia Sabri Company - one of the UK's leading contemporary South Asian dance & music ensembles has teamed up with Birmingham-based socialenterprise charity Sähëlï Hub, to coordinate an initiative aimed at improving women's health and wellbeing. The Butterfly Project will provide women who would not normally have access to dance 'with a chance to step away from their daily lives, interact with other women from their community, build confidence, make friends, and help improve their physical and mental health'.



Not one but two Birmingham International Dance Festivals!

Birmingham International Dance Festival (BIDF) returns this year with not one but two editions - an 11-day online summer event and a 13-day live autumn festival.

From 3 to 13 June, BIDF presents a brand-new dedicated digital platform, BIDF TV, hosting screen dance performances and new film com-

missions.

Then, from 21 September to 3 October, the festival will host an extensive outdoor programme, showcasing local touring, youth engagement, co-productions and digital work.

For more information about both festivals and their respective programmes, visit bidf.co.uk

Art for sale at Ikon...

Birmingham's Ikon gallery will be hosting an exhibition of artworks for sale during the second half of May.

The show, Ikon For Artists, aims to support artists whose income has been impacted by the pandemic. More than 250 pieces will be available to purchase, all produced by Birmingham artists and submitted through an open call. All proceeds from sales go directly to the artists.

Ikon For Artists launches with a digital event with comedian and participating artist Joe Lycett. These Are A Few Of My Favourite Things sees Birmingham-born Joe share his 10 favourite works of art with Ikon Director Jonathan Watkins.

The exhibition shows from 17 to 31 May and is open seven days a week. For more information, visit ikon-

gallery.org

Sandwell Valley Country Park to host 'the world's craziest party'

'The world's craziest party' is coming to Sandwell Valley Country Park this autumn.

Award-winning experiential event concept Elrow will feature 'surreal theatre, incredible production, the most colourful clubbing and an unrivalled soundtrack of quality house music'. The event takes place at the popular visitor destination on 25 & 26 September.

Tickets can be purchased at elrow-midlands.co.uk





Birmingham Rep line-up revealed for its Centenary Square 50th anniversary season

Smash-hit comedy-drama East Is East will open a season of shows celebrating Birmingham Repertory Theatre's 50 years in Centenary Square, the venue's artistic director, Sean Foley, has announced.

The production, which world-premiered at The REP in 1996, will be joined in the autumn/winter season line-up by Sean's hit homage to Morecambe & Wise - The Play What I Wrote - and a stage version of Floella Benjamin's book, Coming To England.

A brand-new Swinging London-set musical featuring the songs of Tom Jones - What's New Pussycat? - is also included in The REP's autumn schedule.

Commenting on the forthcoming season, Sean said: "We are tremendously excited by the shows and proud of the amazing array of creative talent from our freelance community that will be at The REP for this very special 50th-anniversary season of the company on Centenary Square.

"The programme is testament to the whole company's determination and desire to share the amazing event of live theatre with our audiences again, and we can't wait to welcome everyone back - back to entertainment, to debate, to laughter, and to the sheer joy of experiencing the excitement that being part of a great night out brings."

Solihull Summer Fest 2021 line-up revealed



Solihull Summer Fest 2021 is set to go ahead at Tudor Grange Park on Saturday 24 & Sunday 25 Iuly.

The fifth edition of the event will feature performances from headliners Billy Ocean and Kool & The Gang.

Other artists appearing at the festival include Shaggy, Shalamar, The Brand New Heavies, Snap!, The Blow Monkeys, Tony Hadley, Belinda Carlisle, Nik Kershaw and Bad Manners... For more information, visit solihullsummerfest.co.uk

All the fun of the fair in Birmingham's Digbeth

There's all the fun of the fair to enjoy in Birmingham's Digbeth over the next few weeks, courtesy of a giant amusement park. The new attraction comes complete with a 32-

metre big wheel - offering fantastic views across the city - 30 rides, bunjee jumping and a specially designated kids' zone.
Located on a derelict site off Charles Henry Street and Moseley Street, the amusement park is the brainchild of the local husband-and-wife team behind the Christmas season's Ice Skate Birmingham attraction.

Jodie Prenger goes it alone at the Hippodrome

Jodie Prenger is 'going it alone' this summer in a new production of Andrew Lloyd Webber & Don Black's classic one-woman musical, Tell Me On A Sunday (Birmingham Hippodrome, 24 to 28 August).



Charting the romantic misadventures of young English girl Emma in New York during the 1980s, the show features the number-one hit, Take That Look Off Your Face.

Commenting on the show, its producer, Jamie

Wilson, said: "Tell Me On A Sunday, with its cast of just one actress, is probably the most naturally socially distanced musical in the world! We're delighted that Jodie is able to reprise her incredible performance as Emma."

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit: birminghamhippodrome.com

Showing Gratitude in Birmingham this summer



An installation developed by public art producer Wild In Art, to thank NHS staff and all key workers for their courage and dedication throughout the pandemic, will be launched in Birmingham in August. Entitled Gratitude, the installation will comprise 49 uniquely painted human-form sculptures, all of which will be designed by individual artists and sponsored by different businesses.

After visiting Birmingham, Edinburgh, London and Manchester, the sculptures will be auctioned off in the autumn, with substantial proceeds donated to NHS Charities Together.

Businesses interested in sponsoring a sculpture should contact Julie Gaskell at Wild In Art on 07768 038912, or via her email at: julie@wildinart.co.uk

From The Specials at MAC

Legendary 2 Tone superstar Neville Staple will be inviting people to dig out their pork-pie hats and dancing shoes this summer, when he performs in MAC's newly spruced-up outdoor theatre.

The one-time front man of The Specials, Fun Boy Three and Special Beat will be appearing at the venue in a 75-minute show on 2 July. For more information and to book tickets, visit macbirmingham.co.uk



Re-igniting Fuse at Beacon Park

Lichfield Arts' annual free-toattend music & arts community festival - Fuse - will this year take place a month later than usual (13 - 15 August, in the city's Beacon Park). Commenting on Fuse 2021, the festival's organisers said: "We want to make Fuse broader and even more inclusive, offering more people more opportunities to perform, play, dance, sing, share, laugh, enjoy and celebrate - but we need donations via a Go Fund Me campaign to make this happen. Please spread the word and, if you can, make a donation, to enable us to deliver all we have planned and help us run this fabulous free event for the local community." To donate, visit gofund.me/92fda4f1





New outdoor seating scheme for Summer In The Square

Colmore BID - in partnership with the city council and Retail BID - has unveiled a new outdoor seating scheme in Birmingham's Victoria Square. The new space features socially distanced seating for 120 people, a bandstand for live music and entertainment, and four beach huts, with vendors selling a range of food & drink. The space, which is free for anyone to use and will be open 24/7, will host a full programme of summer events under the

umbrella title of Summer In The Square.
Commenting, Michele Wilby, CEO of Colmore BID, said: "Summer In The Square will allow for increased outdoor seating in the District, in a safe and measured way. We have big plans for the coming months that will hopefully see patrons flock back to their favourite venues. I, for one, can't wait to be out there once again with friends and colleagues."



£9.5million Southside redevelopment project gets under way

The redevelopment of Birmingham's Southside district is now under way.

The estimated £9.5million scheme will deliver improved walking and cycling routes to New Street Station and a new public square adjacent to Birmingham Hippodrome.

Commenting on the scheme, Southside BID Manager Julia Robinson said: "Southside District is Birmingham's beating cultural heart, and we welcome the redevelopment of Hippodrome Square, which will create an inviting and engaging space for everyone to enjoy.

"Now, more than ever, it's so important for us to invest in outdoor spaces to enliven the city and bring visitors back to Birmingham.

"New street furniture, lighting and the introduction of more trees will transform the area, making it an attractive place for visitors old and new, and adding to the wide appeal of our vibrant district."



Birmingham's Midlands Art Centre is all set for its reopening this month, complete with an exciting programme of events... What's On recently caught up with Chief Executive & Artistic Director Deborah Kermode, to find out what's on the cards for the popular venue...

It's been a tough 12 months for the arts, as MAC Chief Executive Deborah Kermode is only too well aware. With a phased reopening of the venue planned from the end of May, Deborah and her team have much to consider. Top of the list is the wellbeing of loyal customers and staff...

"Our main aim this summer is to ensure our vulnerable communities feel safe coming back to MAC. Although the government has given us this roadmap, our surveys tell us that people are still quite concerned about everything opening back up again. We want people to get used to coming back to the

venue and to feel safe while they do that. We're trying to be really sensible about it and manage it carefully so that our audience are happy, rather than going for 100% straight away.

"We've had so much support in the pandemic. We've had so many kind letters and donations. People cared about us enormously, and I just want to say thank you to them. Even though we've been closed as an organisation, people have kept in touch with us so closely. It's kept our tiny team going. It's been so, so heartwarming to know that people are waiting for us to come back."

MAC relaunches with a series of exhibitions from women artists. Womanhood and female experience is a particularly poignant topic in the UK right now - and one close to the hearts of many, including the team at MAC. Debbie Kermode told us more: "Our three exhibitions contain portraits of women, and they're about women's experience. At MAC we're a female-led organisation, and our senior management team is made up of women. We care enormously about representing the women in our community. Firstly, I think that women have been disproportionately hit during the pandemic, so we've invited all our artists to update their

exhibitions during this period. In two of the three exhibitions there is new work that reflects the chaotic time that we've been living in. Women's Work by Caroline Walker is made up of very large-scale paintings depicting women at work. It's often about the unseen work women do, whether that's working in retail, hotels, or cleaning jobs. This is very relevant to the way we live our lives. Women have also been particularly affected by job losses in the pandemic.

"UKBFTOG: We Are Here is a group show highlighting young female black photographers.

It's about giving people a voice and showcasing their work. At MAC we're a very open community space, and it's extremely important that people can share their feelings, experiences and emotions to make sense of the world around them. Our photography exhibitions are always very popular - and I think they will be even more so after lockdown. We've seen so many people making sense of the world and taking up photography during this period, whether that's wandering off on a walk or going into their garden. I think a lot of recent experiences resonate in these exhibitions.

"Our third exhibition is from Birminghamborn Maxine Walker. She came to prominence in the '90s and made these very arresting photographic self-portraits wearing different guises and outfits. It's all about Black women's experience - and with the Black Lives Matter movement, the photographs feel all the more relevant today. The lovely thing about art is that you can get a different perspective on the same work in every decade. Depending on who you are, where you are at that time, and how you've changed, the work feels different to you as well. This exhibition is particularly poignant now and also feels just as fresh and exciting as in the '90s. It has come in part from the Victoria and Albert Museum. So it's the first time in about 25 years that the photographs have come back to Birmingham. It's a very special time for Maxine too, as she also hasn't seen them since they went to the V&A."

MAC's outdoor summer programme includes cinema, family theatre, and a very special live music performance.

"We have this incredible outdoor theatre, which has had a massive facelift during the pandemic," says Debbie. "People feel much safer outdoors and are more excited by it now too. We're going to be doing outdoor cinema, children's theatre, family events,

dance shows, and music performances from artists like The Specials. So it's very eclectic, but that's the kind of programmes we have! It's very fun! We're focusing on music talent and theatre companies from the city, as we really want to give local talent a chance to shine and give them the priority. We want our local artists and performers to be back in front of audiences and getting an income again as soon as possible.

"We also have our summer courses and classes: from yoga to drawing, painting, ceramics, and more. So many people have been desperate to come back to our studios. Those courses will be on sale from 8 May and we know they're going to be very popular. MAC is a very sociable place. A lot of people have friendship groups that meet regularly at MAC, and they've missed that.

The venue is looking forward to the future. Slot Machine Theatre returns in the festive season with an adaptation of Nick Butterworth's One Snowy Night - a show for young children and their families about animals living in a park. But MAC also has one eye firmly on its 60th anniversary in 2022.

"We're getting on a bit - not quite pensionable!" jokes Debbie. "But we're still young at heart. We can still wear heels and have a good time! I know a lot of people think of MAC as being like a pair of cosy slippers, but we know how to party too. So we will be having lots of fun in 2022, which I think will extend across the whole city with the Commonwealth Games too. It's a great time to acknowledge how important we are to Birmingham and its residents. Eighty-two percent of those who visit us are Birmingham residents, and they come often. An anniversary year is an excellent opportunity just to celebrate the success of MAC as we go forward. It's a fantastic achievement and we're really excited by it."

Whilst the digital world has played its part in keeping the arts alive during the pandemic, Debbie knows the importance of getting audiences back into venues.

"For a venue like us with a footfall of about 5,000 people a day, we never really explored the potential of digital until we had to. It's been fantastic for us. We've done the most exciting and innovative online programmes, but that will never replace actually seeing audiences and families in person. To see them connect directly with artists and performers is the bit I'm looking forward to the most, as it's the absolute best a venue can offer. I'm excited for artists to be back on

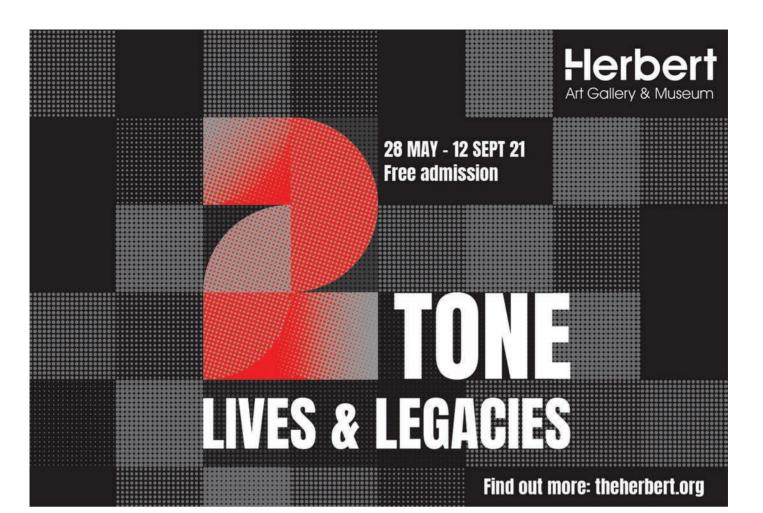
a stage where they belong. I think over the pandemic we've felt everything has been very planned in our lives, but the arts are all about being surprised. I absolutely think the next few years will see the arts scene flourish. Those joyful opportunities to be together and experience something will be absolutely essential. Art and culture will play such an important part in our resilience and recovery going forward, both as individuals and communities.

"I think that creativity has played a vital part in people's lives during the pandemic - and has been a lifeline really. Look at all the people putting art in their windows, colouring in the NHS rainbows, setting up choirs, and trying new things. People have had a real desire to explore the world around them through art. That idea of participating in the arts, not only with friends and family but just purely for yourself, will play a very important role going forward. In terms of wellbeing, and when exploring vital movements like Black Lives Matter, people have looked to art and their own creativity to help them. This is the kind of role that MAC will continue to play. Because of our courses and workshops, people come to MAC to interact directly with artists and discover something new. It's about feeling like you can contribute and experience things. I think that will stay with people going forward."

With the arts set for their comeback, what's most important to MAC going forward?

"I think that MAC is part of people's everyday life in Birmingham," says Debbie. "We're a space where you will be welcomed, whether you come alone or with family and friends. Inclusivity is incredibly important to us, and we've made incredible changes on site to the building. These are things we want to continue going forward to make sure we're as accessible as possible. Our arts programme itself also has to be inclusive. We're at the forefront of this. No matter your background or experiences in the world, you can come to MAC and find a welcoming space where you feel represented. We're here every day of the year except Christmas Day, and we open out onto this very busy park, so it always feels like a vibrant space. We hope people will keep coming to support us, because we have so many wonderful things to share."

For information on all events and activities coming up at mac, visit: macbirmingham.co.uk





Six of the Best!

New restaurants in Birmingham city centre you should visit asap...

Lucarelli

lucarellirestaurant.co.uk

Recently opened, family-owned restaurant Lucarelli offers traditional Italian cuisine - think pizzas, pastas, meats and fresh lobster - fine Italian wines and cocktails.

Food & drink aside, its stunning outside terrace, covered in white flowers and surrounded by potted olive trees, is a real showstopper and the perfect setting for the summer months ahead.



Gup Shup

gup-shup.co.uk

Great Western Arcade's new addition, Gup Shup serves takeaway sandos made with its own fresh-baked Japanese Shokupan - a soft melt-in-your-mouth sweet bread. Options include ramen egg, hot pepper chicken, katsu chicken and yankie hottie - mature cheddar, American cheese, Texan ground beef, dil pickles, chipotle ketchup, French's mustard and fried onions.



Vietnamese Street Kitchen

vietnamesestreetkitchen.com

After pandemic-related setbacks, Vietnamese Street Kitchen has finally opened at Bullring. Guests can enjoy authentic Vietnamese cuisine in a vibrant, colourful setting inspired by the family's heritage.

The focus of the menu is sharing: street food and small plates create a Vietnamese tapasstyle experience. Classics such as warming pho and bun cha ha noi are available.



Kouzina

kouzinagreekmeze.co.uk/selfridges

From Street Kitchen Brothers, a West Midlands-based Greek-Cypriot family-run business, Kouzina is the first authentic Greek food restaurant to launch in Selfridges. Shoppers can indulge in Greek mezze cuisine - including the famous moussaka, souvlaki and stifado - and a range of traditional sweet treats from the Greek bakery such as baklava and kadaifi.



Perios

myperios.com

This new Tex-Mex restaurant will soon be opening its doors to guests in Brindleyplace after expanding its business into Birmingham city centre for the first time. Perios will serve Mexican classics such as tacos, burritos and nachos, as well as American burgers and beef and chicken dishes. Perios is expected to open this summer, depending on Covid-19 restrictions.



Qavali

instagram.com/qavaliuk

A brand-new fine-dining concept featuring dishes from across the Persian Empire, Qavali is set to open in Brindleyplace this summer. Named after a style of Sufi devotional singing and originating from the Arabic word qual-meaning 'to speak' - the eatery will offer a range of delicious dishes inspired by Turkish, Arabic, Persian and Indian cuisine. Qavali is expected to open in July or August.



Fazenda to reopen following agreement with landlords

Brazilian restaurant Fazenda has reopened in its original location on Birmingham's Colmore Row.

The much-loved eatery had previously announced that it was closing its doors for good.

However, a new agreement with the landlords has meant that it can now continue to serve its Rodízio - all-you-can-eat-style meats - to its appreciative Birmingham customers.

Midlands brewers serve up tropicalflavoured craft beer

Midlands brewery owners Gary Meads and Al Smith, who last year launched pale ale Gypsy Water, have created a second craft beer.

Having co-founded their Gypsy Brew company during last year's lockdown, Gary and Al have now developed Garrity Mash - a tropical fruit 3.9% ABV Session Pale Ale.

'Packed full of juicy notes of mango', it promises to be a real crowd favourite as the warmer weather approaches. You can order the beer at gypsybrew.co.uk.

Hockley Social Club opens its doors

The organisers of popular street-food event Digbeth Dining Club have kickstarted a brand-new venture. Hockley Social Club is located in a warehouse on Hampton Street and will feature a bar and a food court-style area. The venture is initially being launched outdoors, with the venue's car park being used as a beer garden and street-food market.





Craft beer festival Beer Central to return to Birmingham

Craft beer festival Beer Central makes a welcome return this summer, bringing 'the best in beer, food and music' to Birmingham on Friday 2 & Saturday 3 July.

Taking place for a second time at The Mill in Digbeth, the event will feature 30-plus 'world-class breweries' pouring hundreds of tasty and hard-to-find beers. This year's line-up includes: Attic, Braybrooke, Brew York, Brixton, Burning Soul, Dark Star, Full Circle, Gipsy Hill,

Glasshouse, The Kernel, North, Sierra Nevada, Signature, Twisted Barrel and Vocation. Some of Birmingham's top restaurants and street-food favourites will be bringing their fare to the festival, too. Beer Central 2019 saw the likes of Baked In Brick, Original Patty Men and Purecraft Kitchen join the line-up. Guests can also expect headline music acts on the decks. Visit beercentralfestival.com for more details.

Zumhof Biergarten reopens with new bar & food market

Digbeth-based bar & entertainment venue Zumhof Biergarten has launched a second floor, housing the Zumhof Junkvard bar and Zumhof Food Märkt. Zumhof now becomes the second site for fried-chicken favourites Bonehead. whilst Japanese street-food concept Zuki is serving up ramen, katsu curries and small plates at the venue. Food blogger Fat Foodie, meanwhile, has launched Meat Meets Bun, a range of burgers which includes the Black & Blue - created using black pudding crumb, stilton cheese and chilli jam. The three new residents join Rudy's Neapolitan Pizza at Zumhof Biergarten. To book, visit: zumhof.co.uk.





A WILD DAY OUT





Award-winning chef Stuart Collins chats about his time on the BBC's Great British Menu, explains what's on offer at his Michelin-plated Shropshire restaurant, and remembers his time spent working with one of the industry's biggest names...

"The nation's top chefs compete for the chance to cook at an incredible four-course banquet."

The above is the official BBC description of its programme, Great British Menu - one of the most popular cooking shows on UK television. And it's a programme with which renowned chef Stuart Collins is extremely familiar. Stuart was recently crowned winner

of the 'central region' heats, meaning he's made it through to the national final.

"It's a cooking competition entered by professional chefs," Stuart explains. "It's broken down into regions, and chefs compete to get through to the finals to represent their region. That then gets whittled down to one chef per course to cook at the banquet."

This year's theme was 'British innovation'.

Stuart, who opened his restaurant, Docket no.33, in the Shropshire market town of Whitchurch back in 2017, was competing against fellow culinary maestros Shannon Johnson, Liam Dillon and Sabrina Gidda to get his place in the final.

"They were tough opponents. It was Sabrina's third attempt in the competition, and that plays on your mind. She's an amazing chef and knows her way around the kitchen. Equally, Liam was very, very strong, and his cooking is exceptional. I'd never met Shannon before, and I didn't know her cooking. When the canapés go up on the pass, that's the first insight you have into each other's cooking. Everyone, in their own way, kept me on my toes.

"The whole process is a massive up-and-down rollercoaster of emotion. Even though I was fortunate to score quite well in the week, it only takes one dish to go wrong and all of that can suddenly be turned around. For the whole week you don't sleep very well, you don't eat very well, and you literally take each day as it comes and do the best that you can."

Stuart started the week with a solid score of nine out of 10 from veteran judge Lisa Goodwin Allen, who was suitably impressed with his 'Take it with a grain of salt' pork cheek dish. The 'cooked perfectly' dish was inspired by Elsie Widdowson, the food scientist who revolutionised the way the world assessed nutritional values.

Stuart's 'Dissected Maps' main course, meanwhile - which also impressed the judge - utilised a host of local ingredients. These included Rose veal from Staffordshire, beer from Walsall and Vitelotte potatoes from Shropshire. The course received a score of eight out of 10.

"My favourite dish was probably the fish course," Stuart reveals. "The appearance of it was exactly how I wanted it. It was one of the dishes that was clear in my mind from the get-go. That, and the traffic-light predessert."

Stuart's Docket No.33 restaurant, which boasts a front room seating 24 guests and a private room seating 12, has featured in the prestigious Michelin Guide for two consecutive years and offers a carefully curated seven-course tasting menu.

"We really focus on local ingredients, and we use as many Shropshire suppliers as we can. The menu is focused around what's in its absolute prime at the time. The menu can change almost daily according to what's available. We normally start with some snacks, then there's a bread course - we use local beer to make the bread - then there's normally a vegetable course, a fish course, a meat course, cheese, and then dessert. It's a lovely journey. We want it to be an experience. There's an optional wine pairing, too - sometimes there may be a cocktail in there, or a spirit that goes well with a dish."

During the pandemic, with restaurants being temporarily forced to close, Stuart and his team have been providing an 'At Home' service. Each week, Docket No.33 has been devising a three-course dinner menu for customers to enjoy within the comfort of their own home. Dinners are available every Friday and Saturday and are served chilled. A set of simple instructions is also provided, so that people can easily re-heat or cook the meals when they get home.

"We fully intend to carry on with the service even with the restaurant back open. It's been lovely. We have a few older guests who've had it every single week! Every menu is different, and they love coming and getting the ingredients each week. It's nice for us because it's almost putting something back into the community. We've found, for example, that it also works for young professionals with younger kids. One of the parents can put the child to bed while the other comes and picks up dinner to cook at home. We've found two lovely little pockets in the market and people love it. It would be really hard to stop it.

"It's been good for business, too. It's helped us pay the rent. We're not rolling in loads of money, but it's helped. It's helped keep us focused. We couldn't open the restaurant as such, and that's a great shame after 12 months, but what we have been able to do is make food; to use those local suppliers who are so important to us. Now that we're reopening, it's nice that we can pick up the phone and our suppliers are still there. It's very much a supply chain. We can't do what we do if we have no suppliers. Just to play a very small part in that wheel has been a lovely opportunity for us."

Stuart's extensive experience in the industry includes working with a host of well-known culinary experts, including Michael Caines, Gordon Ramsey and the late Gary Rhodes.

"Working at Restaurant Gordon Ramsey was an amazing experience. Whilst it's about cooking for the name above the door - or with the name above the door - vou're surrounded by amazing people. It was fast-paced and busy in London; a hugely rewarding experience, undeniably hard work, but I absolutely loved it. That then gave me the opportunity to move across to New York when Gordon opened over there - to move there and carry on in that same vain. It was great to embrace New York - it was incredible. Again, I had a whole different pool of chefs to work with, and then it starts to open up your mind. You're surrounded by different styles of restaurants - the city is different to London - different influences and different ingredients are available. Working at the restaurant was incredible, and being around Gordon and his hierarchy was amazing. It also gives you those wonderful

experiences that help shape where we've got to today."

It's no secret that working in hospitality is a tough gig. From the fast-paced environment to the long hours, it's certainly not an industry in which everybody would thrive. So why be a chef?

"I kind of fell into it when I was younger. I think just having that ability to be creative, work with amazing ingredients and create something that people can enjoy is a wonderful position to be in. To see people enjoy your food is just an amazing thing. Primarily it was about working in a fantastic team with some really motivated and focused people. And then to work with exceptional ingredients, and then to get it to guests, is an all-in win."

Stuart's best piece of advice for budding chefs is to take their time and learn to master their craft: "Everyone wants this fast-track 'come out of college and two years later you're driving a Ferrari' experience, but that just doesn't happen. I don't think there would be much fun in that, because you'd very quickly run out of ideas. You see so many young chefs burn out. Take your time, learn your craft, learn the ingredients and enjoy it. As for the money and the fame - if you want it, you can chase that once you know what you're doing, but it's a labour of love, this industry."

With restaurants finally reopening for indoor dining, what are Stuart's plans? "We need to get back up and running. We've got a few events and collaborations pencilled in, which is great. We don't want to plan too much and for it not to happen, so it's quite hard. We're sort of thinking, let's get to Christmas and see what happens after that. Nothing solid just yet. Getting the wheels back turning is the most important thing."

One event in the diary is the Big BBQ Bash at Birmingham's revolutionary dining space, Craft, with Stuart set to join forces at the event with chef Andy Sheridan and 'Shropshire Lad' Adam Purnell. Diners can expect bold flavours and hearty barbecue food cooked over flames. Dishes will be presented in full banquet style and served with sparkling wine and summer cocktails.

Tickets are on sale now and can be purchased at weare-craft.co.uk.

Docket No.33 in Whitchurch, Shropshire, is open Thursday to Saturday evenings from 7pm. Booking is live, but good luck getting a table any time this year - it's a seriously popular spot!







"Each piece is just greater than the last," says City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Music Director Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla, in talking about the long-neglected works of Polish composer Mieczysław Weinberg. "If you love Shostakovich and Mahler, it'll sweep you off your feet." Mirga and the CBSO's recording of Weinberg's 21st symphony was last autumn named the winner of the 2020 Gramophone award for recording of the year - so it's a real no-brainer for the orchestra to once again be turning to his work... On this occasion they will be performing his powerful third symphony.

"Seven years ago, I hadn't even heard the name Mieczysław Weinberg," says Mirga, "but during the years since, he has become one of the most important composers for me. He is the composer I would like to stay on for the rest of my life.

"I think that in days of ideological search and loss that we are living through right now, Weinberg stands as a symbol of humanism. His life and work are huge inspirations. Every score I've encountered so far is a masterwork."

The concert also features Weinberg's Rhapsody On Moldavian Themes and Mahler's Rückert-Lieder.

Ex Cathedra: Summer Music By Candlelight

St Peter's Collegiate Church, Wolverhampton, Sat 5 June; Hereford Cathedral, Wed 9 June; Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Sun 13 June

The sweet scents of summertime are very much in the air as Ex Cathedra soaks up the sun on a mini-tour of its own backyard. Presenting a concert inspired by 'birdsong, holidays, sea and sunshine', the Midlands early music ensemble perfectly demonstrates its versatility by performing a truly eclectic programme of choral music - from a world première by Liz Dilnot Johnson entitled The Windhover, to a seventh-century Latin chant (Te lucis ante terminum), with plenty of stop-offs in between.

Benjamin Britten, Maurice Ravel, Penelope Thwaites and Alec Roth are other composers whose work features in a concert that carefully combines music and readings, all performed by the glow of candlelight. The ensemble's founder, Jeffrey Skidmore, is the man with the baton.





Pink Martini

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Sat 29 May
Jazz, world music, cabaret, lounge and
1940s & '50s movie tracks are the stock-intrade of an ensemble described by the New
York Times as a 'suave salon orchestra'.
Founder, bandleader and pianist Thomas
Lauderdale is here joined by long-term
collaborator China Forbes and a group of
hugely talented musicians to present a
concert postponed from the orchestra's
2020 Silver Jubilee tour.

Dope Lemon

O2 Academy, Birmingham, Fri 4 June
Having come to prominence making indiefolk music with his sister, Julia, Angus
Stone has more recently been releasing
material under the Dope Lemon moniker,
in the process playing around with a
psychedelic, electric-rock sound.
Angus is chilled about his Dope Lemon
future: "It's just a case of one foot in front
of the other for now. Keep it easy and let it
unfold in whatever way it will."



Lady Sanity

Hare & Hounds, Birmingham, Sun 20 June



Making her name on Birmingham's grime scene, emcee Lady Sanity has of late been drawing her influences from old-school hiphop and jazz to create her five-track EP, A Problem Shared.

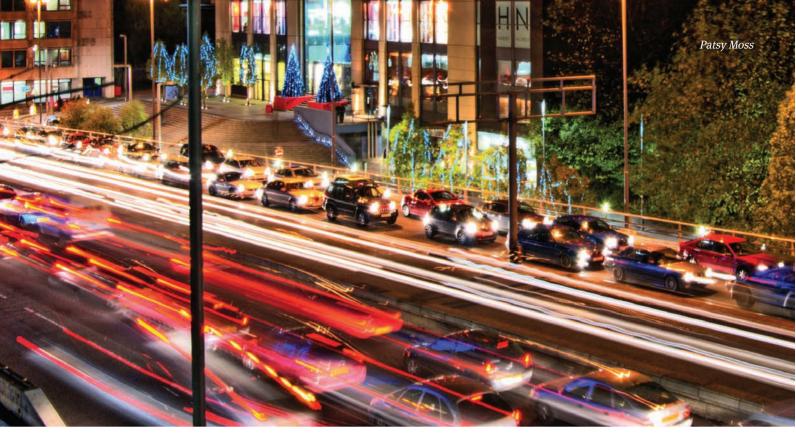
"I seem to write my most motivational songs when I'm mentally in a really low place," she explains. "When I'm in that headspace, it's almost as if I take on the personality I require to say the things that I need to hear to feel uplifted."



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THE AIR THAT WE BREATHE

We take a look at the true cost of travelling into Birmingham city centre from 1 June...

With the arts, culture, hospitality, retail and nighttime economy sectors desperate to put the past 14 months behind them and start welcoming back customers, there's one thing that people travelling into Birmingham city centre by car need to be aware of.

From Tuesday 1 June, the city will join with Bath in introducing the central government-enforced Clean Air Zone policy (CAZ). Although this is a step forward in terms of protecting the environment for future generations, the policy will have a negative financial impact on individuals who are driving cars of a certain age into the zone.

Despite widespread recognition that the environment needs to be protected, there have nevertheless been calls for Birmingham City Council to delay its implementation of the new policy until 2022.

Unions representing musicians, theatre workers and actors in Birmingham recently sent an open letter to City Council leader Ian Ward, urging him to put CAZ on hold and to implement a support scheme for the cultural sector. At the time of going to print, CAZ remains on schedule to come into effect on the 1st of June, and there's no word on any support scheme.

So what do people need to know about Birmingham's new Clean Air Zone policy?

WHO HAS TO PAY?

Vehicles meeting the following criteria are exempt from paying to enter the city's clean air zone.

Diesel Euro 6 (VI) standard or better. Roughly from the end of 2015 onwards

Petrol Euro 4 standard or better. Roughly from the end of 2015 onwards

Gas Euro 6 (VI) standard or better

Fully electric or hydrogen fuel cell all compliant and avoid any charges.

Hybrid Electric the diesel/petrol engine must meet the relevant criteria above

Check where you stand at **gov.uk/clean-airzones**

IN THE ZONE:

Birmingham's Clean Air Zone, which is everywhere within the A4540 Middleway (but not the Middleway itself) will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Signage is to be installed on the road network surrounding the boundary, to inform motorists that they are approaching the zone.

CHARGES:

Cars, taxis and LGVs cost £8 per day.
Coaches, buses and HGVs £50 per day. A day is classified as midnight to midnight. If you cross the threshold of this, you will be charged for two days.

PAYMENT:

Motorists can pay six days prior to, and up to six days after their visit. The onus is on the driver to ensure payment is made within this window, as no notification of charge will be issued. Failure to do so will result in a penalty charge of £120.

HOW TO PAY:

Call 0300 029 8888 (Monday - Friday, 8am - 4.30pm), or pay online at gov.uk

WHERE WILL THE MONEY GO?:

All revenue raised from CAZ and subsequent fines will be used to fund sustainable transport-related measures such as walking and cycling routes and public transport.

Financial incentives are available (eligibility applies) for taxi drivers, private hire drivers and those who work in the Clean Air Zone but live outside it.

More information about CAZ can be found at brumbreathes.co.uk

LETTHE MUSIC The last 14 month music industrylockdown seeming the live music seeming the

The last 14 months have had a devastating impact on the music industry - but with the government's roadmap out of lockdown seemingly on track, what does the future hold for the live music scene?

More than 50 years ago, Joni Mitchell wrote, "You don't know what you got 'til it's gone," in Big Yellow Taxi. It's a lyric that might well sum up the feelings of UK concert-goers since the country first went into lockdown in March last year in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Of course, in the wider scheme of things, being deprived of a night out enjoying some live music is a small price to pay when there's a collective need to tackle a deadly virus which has already been responsible for more than 127,000 UK deaths.

However, as the percentage of the population vaccinated rises every day, and with the government's provisional road map to end the lockdown now in

place, there seems to be some light at the end of what has been a very bleak tunnel these past 14 months.

The Brit Awards welcoming an audience of 4,000 non-socially distanced music fans is a sign that the live-music scene may well be returning to some kind of normality. A look at the listings for local venues, meanwhile, shows quite a few gigs scheduled after the 21st of June - the proposed date for Step Four of the road map, when the government "hopes to reopen nightclubs and ease the restrictions on large events and performances".

So what damage has been done to the music industry since I saw The Pete Wylie Show in Chester more than 16 months ago,

oblivious to how appropriate the title of one of his most popular tunes, The Story Of The Blues, was going to be?

Well, swift government action to compensate employees who were laid off as a result of the lockdown certainly helped to avoid mass redundancies among permanent company staff. However, these handouts were, for the most part, unavailable to many people working in the live-music sector. Most musicians are self-employed, as are many sound engineers, lighting technicians and security staff - other vital spokes in the live-performance wheel

The Culture Recovery Fund (CRF), a £1.57billion source of grants set up by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media &



Sport earlier this year, offered welcome relief. One of the region's most popular live venues, Birmingham's Hare & Hounds, was a grateful beneficiary - as Adam Regan, Director of Leftfoot Venues Ltd and co-owner of the Kings Heath-located pub, explained: "Without the two CRFs, we wouldn't be hereit's as simple as that, really. They've helped us pay our bills and kept the three remaining shareholders on a living wage.

"We've had many low points, when we thought we weren't going to make it through, but we're still here, so we must be more resilient than we thought!

"The short-term plans are to get open and not lose money. The building will be in great shape and the diary's filling up from late June onwards. If we can operate without too many restrictions, we should hopefully have a strong second half of 2021."

And the good news for Birmingham is that the city centre is gaining a new venue: the 3,500-capacity Forum Birmingham - which older readers might remember as The Ballroom. Or the Hummingbird. Or Top Rank Suite. Or the Carling Academy!

Commenting on the new venue, Billy Chauhan of Global Venues, the organisation which has breathed new life into the premises, said: "Prior to the pandemic, a quarter of a million people in the West Midlands worked in the culture, media and nighttime industries, and the relaunch of this historic venue will help to refuel this damaged part of our local economy... We're also extremely passionate about preserving Birmingham's musical heritage, and our work culminates with Forum Birmingham."

The new venue is very much welcomed by the CEO of Night Time Industries Association, Michael Kill: "The club scene is a huge part of British culture and heritage spanning decades. We need to preserve it so that future generations can share the experience and pursue careers and opportunities within this sector for years to come. At the moment, our clubs are fighting to survive during the pandemic, so it's really inspirational that Forum Birmingham will reopen, saving a cultural institution in the city and giving the local industry a much-needed shot of confidence."

To make up for the lack of live shows, musicians all over the world have taken to the internet, with the leader of The Wonder Stuff, Miles Hunt, not only performing a series of streamed concerts from his home in

Shropshire, but also offering fans a neat line in face masks on The Wonder Stuff website.

For Scottish post-rock band Mogwai, the latest lockdown coincided with their first number-one album - their 10th LP, As The Love Continues. However, as frontman Stuart Braithwaite told What's On, the pandemic inevitably affected the recording of the record: "We had to change our album plans. Originally, we were meant to record in America, but obviously that became impossible because of the lockdown. Also, like every other band, we had to shelve all live plans.

"Whenever putting out new music, I'm always nervous about whether people will actually like it or not, so I was really happy when the reviews were positive, and people seem to be receptive towards the album. It did really well, and that was obviously great too. So all in all, I was delighted with how it went."

Bad news though the pandemic has been for the industry these last 14 months, Stuart is able to see a silver lining: "I think the one positive is that people seem to value music more than, maybe, the day before the lockdown. People seem to really want to support artists, and I think that, in the future, because of this experience, people's attitudes towards music may change."

When the concert halls finally open, it will be interesting to see the audience demographic. If entry is going to be restricted to punters who can show that they've been vaccinated the Covid-status certification scheme that's been mooted by the government - will gigs be made up of generation-Xers and baby boomers? Or will unrestricted access to shows deter older people, who might not relish sweating it out with a crowd of millennials?

There does appear to be a groundswell of enthusiasm building up amongst concertgoers to get back into venues, though - and that's despite any lingering fears about how Covid-secure a premises might be.

In terms of the outlook for summertime festivals, 2021 is proving to be a mixed bag. While the good news is that many events - such as Shrewsbury Folk Festival at the end of August and Moseley Folk early September - will go ahead, several others scheduled for the next few months have already been cancelled due to ongoing uncertainties caused by the pandemic. One such casualty is the Bluedot festival at Jodrell Bank in Cheshire. Announcing the cancellation, the

event's organisers said: "Despite continuous calls from our industry over the past six months, the government has refused to step up and provide us with protection via a government-backed insurance scheme. Without such a scheme, which would have provided us with security, the overwhelming risk and high upfront costs for us to hold Bluedot this year are, sadly, just too high."

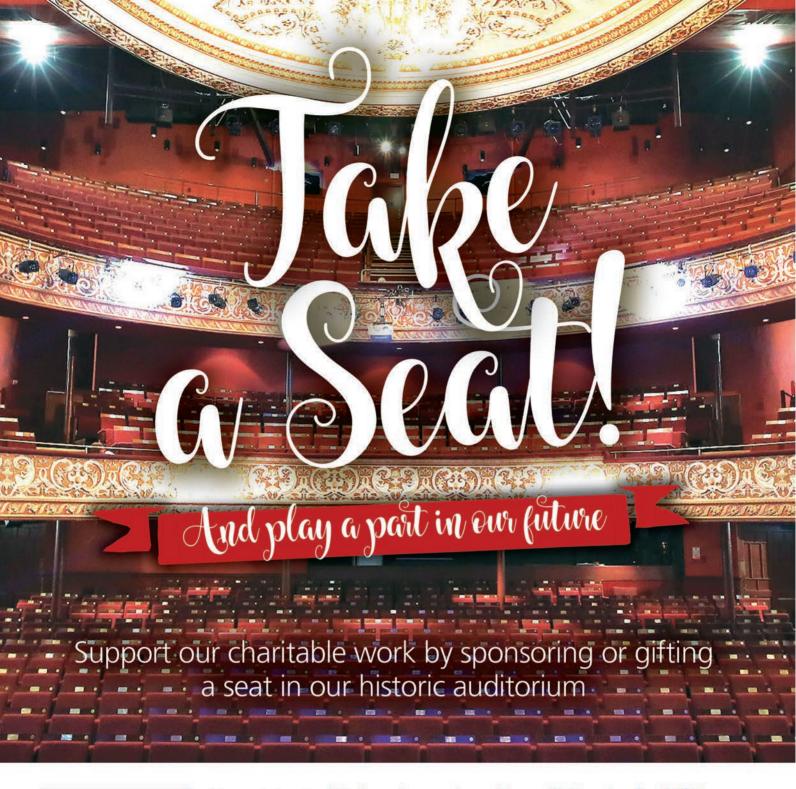
And as if the region's live-music scene isn't already under enough pressure due to Covid, there will be additional obstacles caused by the UK's withdrawal from the EU. European artists intending to tour the country will face additional paperwork and increased expenses. For the Hare & Hounds, this will be another hurdle to overcome...

"The early signs are not great," says coowner Adam Regan. "Music is not about just looking inwards - so restricting people's freedom to travel, tying them up in visas and paperwork, is very damaging. I hope the politicians find a way to enable the free movement of touring artists, because if they don't, all those great European bands will just side-step the UK. Some people will argue that this could see UK artists given more exposure, but if you look back over the last 50 years of UK music, so much is influenced by other cultures."

There's no question that the pandemic's impact on the live-music industry will continue to be felt even after everybody has been vaccinated to the eyeballs. But who knows, some of the changes which come about might even be beneficial to the Midlands music scene. For example, internationally touring artists faced with the inconvenience of Covid-19 tests at airports may elect to limit their travel, a decision which could potentially lead to a more locally based low-key live-music scene.

But there will still be plenty of large-scale music events to enjoy. Nostalgia concerts should do well, given that their main audience is people in the Covid-vaccinated age group. The ever-popular Let's Rock series, for instance, is making a welcome return and will surely prove a welcome tonic.

The festival stops off in Shrewsbury mid-July, with Pete Wylie one of numerous 1980s hitmakers who'll feature on the bill. And as a clarion call to music fans who might be feeling a bit hesitant about returning to the live-music fray, what better tune could there possibly be to fire up some positivity than that anthemic Mighty Wah! hit, Come Back...





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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.

Shappi Khorsandi

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sunday 20 June Iranian-born comedian Shappi found herself being moved to the UK some 40-plus years ago, after her father - the poet and satirist Hadi Khorsandi - wrote a poem that was perceived as being critical of Iran's revolutionary regime.

"Obviously there's free speech in Iran," says Shappi, "but little freedom after you've spoken."

A regular contributor to radio and television programmes, Shappi describes herself as a 'spit and sawdust' stand-up comic, happily pulling on her wellies and trudging through muddy fields to perform at any and every music festival that boasts a comedy tent. Jokes include, "I was going to India on holiday and wanted to know what the weather was like there. So I phoned my bank."

Shappi visits the Midlands with her new show, Skittish Warrior...Confessions Of A Club Comic.



Catherine Bohart

The Glee Club, Birmingham, Sat 12 June 'The OCD, bisexual offspring of a Catholic deacon', Catherine Bohart's natural enthusiasm ensures excellent rapport with her audience, for whom the Irish comedian seems to have a genuine affection. Her jokes include: "Lesbian sex is like cricket: it goes on forever and there's a lot of men watching it at home, alone, on the internet."





Ed Byrne

The Forum, Birmingham, Fri 25 June; Just The Tonic, Coventry, Sat 3 July; Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Sat 11 September; Birmingham Town Hall, Wed 24 November; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Thurs 10 February 2022; Dudley Town Hall, Sat 12 February 2022; Walsall Arena, Wed 16 February 2022; The Core, Solihull, Wed 23 February 2022; The Place, Telford, Wed 15 June. 2022

A highly regarded master of observational comedy, Ed Byrne admits to being a little uncomfortable about some of the 'more laddish' material he used in the early days of his stand-up career.

"My comedy reflected my life at that time single and enjoying myself. Most of it was fairly harmless, but some of the stuff about an ex-girlfriend I can see was a bit angry, and I wouldn't do it now."

So 20-plus years after first dipping his toes into the decidedly dangerous waters of stand-up comedy, does Ed still enjoy touring? "Apart from the travel involved, which no comic likes, I love it. You have people responding to something that you've written alone in your office, and the work comes alive in a roomful of people. I like the TV things I do, but nothing can beat a live comedy audience."

Jason Manford

Just The Tonic at The Assembly, Leamington Spa, Fri 25 June; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Tuesday 31 August; The Place, Telford, Wed 1 September; Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Mon 6 September

Becoming successful in comedy is no walk in the park, as Jason Manford knows. And the former One Show presenter has some sage advice for wannabe comedians: "Don't take any of my work! I would also say to people, compare yourself to yourself. Don't think, 'Why has that guy got that?' or 'Why is Michael McIntyre doing so well?' or 'I'm really funny, so why is so-and-so doing that gig, not me?' You know what, just don't worry about it. If you're doing better now than you were six months ago, then you're doing well."



whatsonlive.co.uk 23



The Comedy Of Errors

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Tues 15 - Thurs 17 June; Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, Sat 10 - Sun 11 July; Avoncroft Museum, Bromsgrove, Sat 17 July

Zany funsters Oddsocks make a welcome return with Shakespeare's much-loved laughter-fest. And actually, by comparison with a number of the bard's other comedies, this one really does have the capacity to

tickle a modern-day audience's collective funny bone.
As indeed do Oddsocks, who've been touring the Midlands and beyond for 30 years. "Our inclusive approach means that varied communities across the UK are able to engage with theatre," say the company's founders and husband-and-wife team, Andy Barrow and Elli Mackenzie. "We aim to tell good stories in a fun, informative way, gently challenging people's perceptions and the way in which they react to theatre."

Macbeth

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 24 - Wed 26 May

Having been spurred into action by the prophesies 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 the award-winning Daniel Taylor Productions.



Old Herbaceous

The Core Theatre, Solihull, Sat 19 June



This well-reviewed one-man show brings with it a sense of nostalgia for a bygone age. Described as 'Downton Abbey with gardening tips' (a sure sign that it's offering something a little bit different!), it sees Giles Shenton playing Old Herbaceous - the legendary head gardener, Herbert Pinnegar - and presenting a humorous but poignant observation of relationships between the classes in a simpler time. As an added bonus, you may well return home with a much-improved understanding of all matters horticultural...

Absurd Person Singular

Malvern Festival Theatre, Tues 29 June -Sat 3 July; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry - Wed 23 - Sat 25 June

Alan Ayckbourn's Absurd Person Singular charts the progress - and decline - of three couples in three kitchens during three Christmas gatherings, with each couple ending up getting more than they bargained for. One of the playwright's most pleasing comedies, it's an enduring piece that's lost none of its biting edge and, typically, showcases human failings with hilarious results.



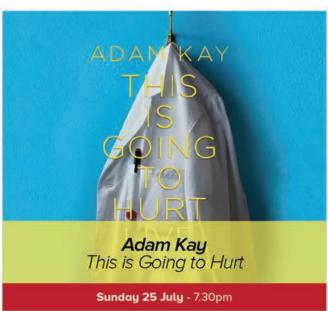


EXPERIENCE OF LIVE THEATRE AT THE GRAND











Judy & Liza

Huntingdon Hall, Worcester, Wed 19 May; Albany Theatre, Coventry, Sat 12 June; Lichfield Garrick, Sat 26 June.

In 1964 Liza Minnelli performed on stage with her mother, Judy Garland, for the one and only time.

Minnelli was on the threshold of great things, including winning a Tony Award a few months later and, a handful of years afterwards, the 'best actress' Academy Award for her performance in Cabaret. Garland, in stark contrast, was on an addiction-strewn pathway towards self-destruction that would ultimately lead to her untimely death before the decade was out...

Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, Judy And Liza showcases one of Hollywood's most famous and turbulent mother-daughter relationships, along the way boasting a playlist of memorable numbers including Cabaret, Maybe This Time, The Trolley Song and The Man That Got Away.

Constructed

The REP, Birmingham, Thurs 27 - Fri 29 May



Presented by Lightpost Theatre Company - an ensemble of young black men from the Midlands region - this brand-new play by CJ Lloyd Webley is set on a failing construction site and explores the culture of working-class black men in Britain.

Commenting on the play, CJ, who also codirects the show, said; "My inspiration first came when looking through some of history's most iconic structures; we are all aware of their existence, but who were the labourers behind these great landmarks? What is their story and how does this apply in the modern context? We almost never hear of, or celebrate, the skilled tradespeople who build our megastructures further than the architect who designed them.

"In the middle of writing the play, George Floyd was murdered, and the Black Lives Matter movement began. I started to think, where do we go from here and how can this inform some of the narrative in Constructed exploring 'the possible' and 'seemingly impossible' for working-class black men in modern Britain."

Petticoat Council

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Tues 15 - Thurs 17 June

Storytelling and dance combine with a playlist of timeless folk arrangements and dancehall classics in this fascinating new offering from local writer Frankie Meredith. Telling a true tale, it focuses on a group of women from Bishop's Itchington in rural Warwickshire, who, in the post-Second World War years, became the first female-majority council in Britain, aiming to bring about hope and change on a local level whilst also inspiring a nation.

The Turville Militant Pacifists

Albany Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 10 June
With its main claim to fame being that it was
used for outdoor scenes in both The Vicar Of
Dibley and Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, the
Buckinghamshire village of Turville is hoping
to be back in the news once again - by being
named home to the country's very best
pacifist group! Setting aside their predilection

to argue about all manner of matters, including whether a Bourbon biscuit trumps a custard cream for quality, Peter, Claire, Luke, Sarah, Eddie and Gary join forces in an attempt to bring home the coveted title - and they're certainly not afraid to fight dirty in trying to achieve their aim!

Third Time Lucky, Eric

New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, until Sat 29 May

Actor David Graham's delightfully dysfunctional character, Eric Smith, has certainly earned his place in the hearts of New Vic audiences since making his first appearance at the venue way back in 1999. The Staffordshire favourite here makes a welcome return with the aim of 'lifting spirits post-lockdown with toe-tapping '60s music and laugh-out-loud humour'.





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Birmingham Museums



FRESH AIR THEATRE

Blankets, chairs and picnics at the ready as the Midlands prepares for a summer of theatrical performances in the great outdoors

A long-time staple of the UK's summertime events calendar, open-air theatre productions are understandably even more in evidence in Covid-affected 2021. Whether in a purpose-built space such as the RSC's newly constructed Garden Theatre, or set against the majestic backdrop of a stately home or castle, there are outdoor performances galore for Midlanders to enjoy in the coming months.

Younger audiences

The Tale Of Peter Rabbit And Benjamin Bunny

Renowned for touring new adaptations of classic texts, London-based Quantum Theatre bring to life Beatrix Potter's much-loved tale of two mischievous rabbits and their adventures in Mr McGregor's garden.

Showing at: Stokesay Court, Onibury, South Shropshire, Sun 20 June; Bowring Park, Wellington, Shropshire, Wed 11 August

The Jungle Book

Immersion Theatre's adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's family favourite is being hailed the company's 'wildest show to date'. Expect original music and plenty of opportunities for audience participation.

Showing at: Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Thurs 22 July; Alderford Lake, Whitchurch, Shropshire, Sun 25 July

Alice's Adventures In Wonderland

Take a trip down the rabbit hole with Chapterhouse Theatre

Company and meet a host of colourful characters in a brandnew version of the Lewis Carroll classic.

Showing at: Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire, Fri 9 July

Mr Stink

Leamington-based Heartbreak Productions presents its version of David Walliams' bestselling children's book. Packed with fun and humour, this touching tale not only delivers a heartwarming message but also provides plenty of great family entertainment. Showing at: Tamworth Castle Grounds, Sun 30 May; Leamington Rugby Club, Fri 4 & Sat 5 June; The Green, Worcestershire, Sat 12 June; Bewdley Museum QEII Gardens, Sun 27 June; Eastnor Castle, Ledbury, Herefordshire, Sun 25 July; Brueton Park, Solihull, Tues 27 & Wed 28 July; Bosworth Battlefield, Nuneaton, Thurs 5 August; Bowring Park, Wellington, Tues 10 August; Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens, Thurs 12 August; Coventry Cathedral Ruins, Tues 24 August; Attingham Park, Shrewsbury, Thurs 26 August; Tamworth Assembly Rooms, Sat 4 September; The Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sun 5 September

Little Red And The Big Bad Wolf

Join Little Red as she sets off through the forest to visit Grandma, aiming at every step to outsmart the hungry wolf who'd very much like to make her his next meal... Presented by Folksy Theatre.

Showing at: Martineau Gardens, Edgbaston, Birmingham, Sat 10 July; The Dorothy Clive Garden, Market Drayton, North Shropshire, Sun 18 July; Biddulph Grange Gardens, Staffordshire, Sat 7 August; St John's House Garden, Warwick, Sat 14 August

Horrible Histories Live On Stage

The Gorgeous Georgians meet the Vile Victorians in this history of Britain 'with all the nasty bits left in'. Presented by Birmingham Stage Company.

Showing at: Soulton Hall, Wem, Shropshire, Sun 20 June



The Wizard Of Oz

A pantomime in May, y'say?... Immersion Theatre promises a faithful retelling of the story of Dorothy and her friends as they follow the Yellow Brick Road to the Emerald City...

Showing at: Alderford Lake, Whitchurch, North Shropshire, Sat 29 May - Fri 4 June

The Further Adventures Of Doctor Dolittle

Award-winning theatre troupe Illyria presents a brand-new musical adventure featuring Jip the Dog, Dab Dab the Duck, Gub Gub the Pig and Polynesia the Parrot.

Showing at: Sunnycroft, Wellington, Sun 29 August; Hanbury Hall, Droitwich, Mon 30 August

Twirlywoos Live

This theatrical adventure for younger audiences comes from the producers of The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show and Sarah And Duck Live. Expect mischief, music and delightful puppets.

Showing at: MAC's Outdoor Theatre, Canon Hill Park, Birmingham, Fri 25 -Sun 27 June



Wonder With Grimm

An evening of 'enchanting' storytelling full of magic, puppetry and music, this Heartbreak Productions show takes audiences into the fantastical world of the Brothers Grimm - complete with altered endings and modern twists.

Showing at: Jephson Gardens, Leamington Spa, Fri 11 - Sat 12 June; Coventry Cathedral Ruins, Fri 6 August; The Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Fri 3 September

Outdoor Shakespeare

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Shakespeare's tale of tangled lovers, warring fairies and hapless human-beings is another much-loved yarn to be taking its place in Heartbreak Productions' summertime line-up of shows. This particular production sees the company focusing on the importance of the environment and the need to make sensible use of the earth's resources. The costumes and sets are all made from recycled materials.

Showing at: Jephson Gardens, Leamington Spa, Tues 8 & Wed 9 June; Eastnor Castle. Ledbury, Herefordshire, Sun 13 June; Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens, Wed 23 June; Tamworth Castle Grounds, Fri 2 July; Brueton Park, Solihull, Tues 20 July; Warley Woods, Smethwick, Wed 4 August; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa. Thurs 2 September

Macbeth

Supernatural magic and unbridled ambition combine in Shakespeare's no-holds-barred examination of the dreadful consequences of one man's insatiable lust for power.

Presented by all-male theatre company The Lord
Chamberlain's Men.

Showing at: Winterbourne House & Garden, Birmingham, Fri 25 June; Shrewsbury Castle, Fri 16 July & Tues 3 August; Alderford Lake, Nr Whitchurch, Shropshire, Tues 17 August; Haden Hill House, Cradley Heath, Sat 21 August; Bantock House & Gardens, Wolverhampton, Fri 27 August



Much Ado About Nothing

The course of true love never runs smooth in one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies. Beatrice and Benedick conduct their courtship through sarcasm and verbal sparring. The younger Claudio and Hero, meanwhile, find their heady romance cruelly compromised by the villainous Don John, who's determined to stop them tying the knot. Presented by Ilyria.

Showing at: Attingham Park, Shrewsbury, Fri 16 July

The Twelfth Night

Following an acclaimed performance of The Two Gentlemen Of Verona in 2020, British Touring Shakespeare makes a welcome return to Shropshire to present one of the bard's best-loved romantic

Showing at: Soulton Hall, Wem, Shropshire, Sat 26 June

The Comedy Of Errors

Shakespeare's fairytale farce of everyday miracles and mistaken identity is here presented by the RSC....

Showing at: Garden Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Tues 13 July - Sun 26 September

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Set in a forest, Shakespeare's best-loved comedy is a perfect play for the great outdoors. Lysander and Demetrius both fancy Hermia, Helena's sitting on the shelf, Titania and Oberon are up to no good, and mischiefmaking Puck's got his fairy finger in more pies than Mr Kipling. Add in a group of rude mechanicals and the recipe for success is guaranteed...
Presented by Quantum Theatre.

Showing at: Stokesay Court, Onibury, South Shropshire, Sun 20 June; Bowring Park, Wellington, Wed 11 August

Macbeth

The HandleBards are a troupe of cycling Shakespearean actors who carry sets and props on the backs of their bikes. Here they present a farcical - and bicyclepowered! - retelling of Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedy.

Showing at: Coventry Cathedral, Thurs 22 July; Moira Furnace Museum, Swadlincote, Fri 23 July





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ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT



The Tempest

Folksy Theatre's multimedia adaptation of Shakespeare's final play fuses live performance, music and puppetry. Expect an evening of shipwrecks and supernatural magic.

Showing at: Biddulph Grange Gardens, Staffordshire, Fri 13 August; The Dorothy Clive Garden, Market Drayton, North Shropshire, Sat 14 August; Martineau Gardens, Edgbaston, Birmingham, Tues 17 August



Contemporary Classics

She Stoops To Conquer

Held in high regard for their outdoor renditions of classic comedies, Rain Or Shine Theatre Company here present Oliver Goldsmith's much-loved masterpiece.

Showing at: Honeybourne Village Hall, Evesham, Wed 4 August; Severn Valley Country Park, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, Fri 13 August; The Elms Hotel & Spa, Worcester, Thur 26 August; Evesham Golf Club, Worcestershire, Sun 29 August; Wenlock Priory, Shropshire, Fri 3 September; Stokesay Castle, Craven Arms, South Shropshire, Sat 4 September; The Dodington Lodge Hotel Lawn, Whitchurch, Shropshire, Sun 5 September

Animal Farm

National Youth Theatre present the George Orwell classic as a sharp-witted 'allegory for our own times', exploring the theme of revolution and asking questions about the price of sovereignty and power.

Showing at: Soulton Hall, Wem, Shropshire, Wed 16 - Sat 19 June

The Hound Of The Baskervilles

British Touring Shakespeare takes a break from performing the plays of Stratford Will to present a brand-new version of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's most famous Sherlock Holmes adventure

Showing at: Soulton Hall, Wem, Shropshire, Sun 27 June

All Mirth And No Matter

The RSC's Next Generation ACT company presents a fusion of new writing and Shakespeare's text which takes its inspiration from the wedding of Claudio and Hero in Much Ado About Nothing.

Showing at: Garden Theatre, RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon, Fri 23 July

Elsie & Norm's Macbeth

Worcester Repertory Company here presents John Christopher-Wood's 1990 comedy concerning a couple's attempt to make one of Shakespeare's most famous works 'snappier and more punchy'. Following a bit of judicious re-writing, the couple re-enact the Stratford bard's famous 'Scottish play', taking on all of the roles between them.

Showing at: The Commandery,

Worcester, Wed 30 June - Sun 11 July

HMS Pinafore

Gilbert & Sullivan's comic opera cheerfully mocks the British class system, the concept of patriotism, and the Royal Navy. Presented by Ilyria..

Showing at: Church Stretton Festival, South Shropshire, Sat 31 July

The Three Musketeers

Described as a 'swashbuckling adventure of epic proportions', Immersion Theatre's action-packed adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' classic tale combines 'excitement, danger and comedy'.

Showing at: Shrewsbury Castle, Sun 1 August; Alderford Lake, Whitchurch, North Shropshire, Mon 2 August



The Great Gatsby

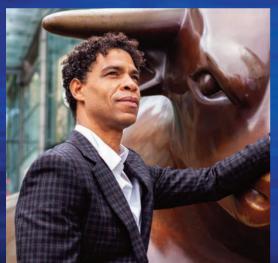
Heartbreak here partner with the Nick Carraway Quartet for an evening of hot & sultry jazz music - prohibition-style! The show transports audiences back to the summer of 1922, as Nick tells amazing tales of his next-door neighbour, the infamous Jay Gatsby.

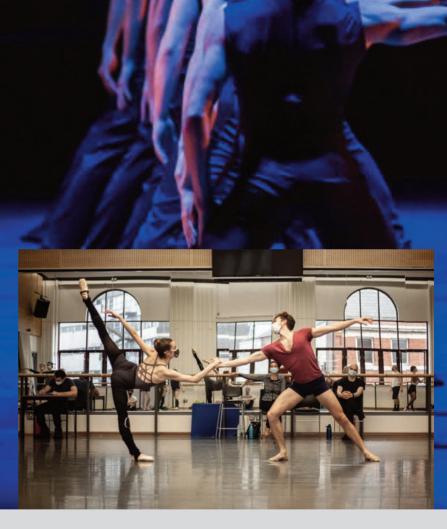
Showing at: Jephson Gardens, Leamington Spa, Wed 2 - Thurs 3 June; The Green, Worcestershire, Thurs 10 June; Bosworth Hall Hotel Walled Garden, Nuneaton, Wed 23 June; Hill Close Gardens, Warwick, Tues 13 July; Hanbury Hall, Droitwich Spa, Sat 7 August; Bewdley Museum QEII Gardens, Sun 8 August; Ryton Pools, Coventry, Tues 10 August; Attingham Park, Nr Shrewsbury, Sat 14 August; The Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sat 4 September



CONTEMPORARY CARLOS

Birmingham Royal Ballet's summer season features a world premiere dedicated to the city - and even a heavy metal score. And there's plenty more to come from BRB during the remainder of 2021 too, including Romeo & Juliet meeting Radiohead! Company Director Carlos Acosta explains how he's aiming to ensure that BRB is contemporary and cutting-edge...





Birmingham Royal Ballet is looking forward to presenting a summer programme - in partnership with Birmingham Rep - and then a 'spellbinding' autumn season back at its Birmingham Hippodrome home.

Cuban ballet and contemporary dancing star Carlos Acosta took over as Director of BRB in January 2020, just two months before the UK went into lockdown for the first time. It's fair to say that his first year in charge has been challenging in the extreme...

"We're working on two world premieres and one UK premiere for our Curated By Carlos triple bill, which runs for a weekend," he explains. "Then we also have the beautiful and popular classic, Cinderella. We can't wait for them to come to life with an audience. The future is looking very optimistic and the morale within the Company is high. We're getting into a creative mindset, despite all the chaos, and we're constantly looking for opportunities for both the Company and the Royal Ballet Sinfonia. I'm so positive about how our vision for the future is coming together and the goals we want to reach."

The first piece in the Curated By Carlos triple bill is Miguel Altunaga's City Of A Thousand Trades - a work dedicated to Birmingham, its history and its heavy metal heritage.

"City Of A Thousand Trades came about through our Ballet Now initiative," says Carlos. "The idea is that with the support of the Oak Foundation, we give up-and-coming designers, choreographers and musicians the leg-up they need. Miguel Altunaga is one of these talented choreographers. This is his big break. People used to call Birmingham 'the city of a thousand trades' because it was the shop of the world; everyone was making things. The city is largely fuelled by immigrants, and we think these legacies of industry, diversity and multiculturalism

should be celebrated. I'm incredibly happy with the result. The music by Mathias Coppens is beautiful and very different. It's a true love letter to the city. In my directorship, I want to capture the imagination of the local community - and also for that community to know that we're going to be reaching out to them. We're going to be collaborating with so many artistic institutions in creating ballets that resonate with communities, which is why City Of A Thousand Trades is so special."

Second on the bill is an abstract work inspired by the unstable times in which we live. Imminent touches on the subjects of the burning Amazon, democracy, and the rise of populism. "I've been taking a sneak peek into rehearsals, and choreographer Daniela Cardim is doing such a great job of tackling the topics," says Carlos. "This world premiere has a much larger score than City Of A Thousand Trades and is composed by Paul Englishby. Imminent is more of a classic piece, like the Company is used to - pointe shoes and all. It's great to present the full spectrum of what the Company can do in one single evening. City Of A Thousand Trades is much more contemporary, whilst Imminent is much more classically based. I really want BRB to be very versatile. I want to show we can do it all, and that we're current. I want us to be able to say 'we do ballet the best, but we can also expand into other areas'. This will bring the very best dancers, choreographers, musicians and more to us as well. By challenging the way things have been done at the Company before, I hope to raise the level."

The last work in the triple bill is Chacona, which will here be receiving its UK premiere and is choreographed by Spaniard Goyo Montero.

"Goyo is currently the principal choreographer at the Nuremberg Ballet. I've known him a long time, as he was studying at the ballet school in my home country of Cuba. I'd been following his career closely, so when I founded my own contemporary dance company, Acosta Danza, I made him the resident choreographer. We've worked on a lot of pieces together, and I really love his work. Chacona is set to Bach's Chaconne. It's really beautiful and a great way to close the triple bill."

The other half of BRB's summer season features Company classic Cinderella, which has been adapted for the current climate by its choreographer and former BRB Director, Sir David Bintley.

"Everybody thinks about the number of

dancers being the only consideration for social distancing, but actually the number of crew is important as well," Carlos points out. "Cinderella is a very large production, and David Bintley and John Macfarlane - the designer who's also behind the world famous creations for The Nutcracker - have been very gracious in readapting it. We had to make sure the production hadn't changed to the point that the narrative had been compromised. Also, as we're working within bubbles, we have two entire casts for just one production. Should a bubble need to be removed due to illness, then we have another there to carry on the show. We're not a company of hundreds of people, so this also made it an opportunity to ask for help from students and freelancers. We want to involve them in our work because they are the people who have been most affected by this situation. They weren't as able to travel to new auditions and get up to speed. There also weren't many contracts for hiring in general. An entire generation is in danger of being lost in the arts world, but we want to help create opportunities to stop that."

BRB will then return in the autumn...

"I'm calling it my very first season as Director again, because obviously all my plans for my previous first season had to be ditched. We're starting with a Romeo & Juliet celebration, including the magnificent traditional version and Radio & Juliet - a ballet set to the music of Radiohead from Slovenian choreographer Edward Clug. Then we'll also be collaborating with others on another production that we're not ready to announce vet, but the idea is to have a huge celebration of the story and its topics. After a long absence from Birmingham Hippodrome, it will be great to get back to our base. Of course we will be returning with The Nutcracker, and also have a show coming up in the spring. Next year will be a very important one for us and, with the Commonwealth Games, for the city."

Although Carlos is very much focused on the future, he nevertheless takes time out to reflect on BRB's achievements during the past extremely challenging 14 months: "I feel very proud that, despite the pandemic, we have achieved incredible things. Even while we were closed, we were creating and learning - Lazuli Sky and our first live stream of The Nutcracker. I think we've done a really good job at keeping the Company together and morale high. We keep reminding ourselves of the positive future to come, which lifts our spirits. Already there's massive interest in coming and working with

us. For me as Director, this is very encouraging. People are taking notice. I look forward to getting back to a place where I can be very mobile, getting out into the world, meeting up with other leaders at different companies, spreading the word about Birmingham Royal Ballet, and creating alliances. We want there to be this awareness that BRB has set itself a new path and identity going forward. I'm very proud of the team that's worked with me in establishing this direction. Achieving greatness isn't easy, but we will definitely get there."

With a government roadmap to reopening the country set out but not yet confirmed, Carlos is keen to see people returning to UK venues: "Streaming is a mechanism that we had to use constantly during the pandemic in order to keep our audience connected with us - and we hope to continue that in the future. I don't see why stage and streaming can't exist side by side for companies moving forward. But we have to do it in a way where they don't compete with one another. Nothing can top the thrill of going to see a live performance. But streaming is the next best thing if you're abroad in Texas, New York or even further. Throughout the pandemic, digital brought companies some essential cash to keep them going. With that money, we then have the means to dream bigger and make big investments into new productions. But streaming will never replace live performance.

"We don't want to send the wrong message to local people: that if they can log onto a show in their living room, there's no point bothering to come out to an actual venue. I would encourage everyone to go to their local theatres, their local institutions - anywhere they can - and consume art. Not only for their own spirit, but because this brilliant part of life is at risk if people don't. Going to a production and being totally invested in the music, the dance, the design and the thrill is something we all need. This last year has been traumatic. The arts is the perfect way for people to come together and heal."

BRB present Curated By Carlos at The REP, Birmingham, from Thursday 10 to Saturday 12 June. Cinderella shows at The REP, Birmingham from Friday 18 to Saturday 26 June.

For further details on Birmingham Royal Ballet, visit: brb.org.uk

Director Carlos Acosta

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Cinderella

18 - 26 June 2021



BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE

brb.org.uk/cinderella





ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Momoko Hiratu as Cinderellu.

Autin Dance Theatre: A Positive Life

Walsall Arena & Arts Centre, Wed 9 June

Project-based local company Autin Dance Theatre make a welcome return with a show that 'delivers an uplifting and engaging message on self-love, sexual health and sex education'. An immersive theatre experience inspired by the individual journeys of five characters around the issues of sex, love and relationships, the show brings together dance, physical theatre and spoken word. Birmingham-based Autin have been performing across the Midlands and further afield since 2013. "We draw on contemporary social issues and events to make work which is beautifully crafted, accessible and relevant," says founder Johnny Autin. "The company is gaining a reputation for creating powerful performances, catapulting audiences into intense dance-worlds which we hope will resonate with them long after they leave

the auditorium."





Transitions Dance Company: Triple Bill

Swan Theatre, Worcester, Wed 30 June Didy Veldman, Dog Kennel Hill Project and Rahel Vonmoos are the creatives behind the trio of impressively diverse contemporary works here being presented by Transitions Dance Company.

Comprising no fewer than 14 international dancers and working under the artistic direction of David Waring, Transitions has established a reputation for presenting daring and imaginative choreographic commissions, combining graceful precision with a trademark innovative approach.

Birmingham Royal Ballet: Curated By Carlos

Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Thurs 10 - Sat 12 June

Carlos Acosta is now into his second year as BRB Director, his first 15 months having been badly undermined by the impact of the pandemic. With that in mind, he will no doubt be hoping to get up a real head of steam in the next few months, starting with this eagerly anticipated show.

A triple bill well worth catching, it comprises two world premieres and one UK premiere... City Of A Thousand Trades celebrates the richly diverse cultural and industrial heritage of Birmingham...

Imminent, meanwhile, is a new and abstract work inspired by the feeling that 'something significant is looming' and that change is on its way...

The triple-bill is completed by Chacona, a 'thrilling, physical piece set to exhilarating music by JS Bach'...

Live music in the show is performed by BRB's highly acclaimed orchestra, the Royal Ballet Sinfonia.



Featuring acts including:

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Cruella CERT tbc (120 mins)

Starring Emma Stone, Mark Strong, Emma Thompson, Paul Walter Hauser Directed by Craig Gillespie

This is the story of Cruella de Vil before she set her evil sights on The Hundred And One Dalmatians. La La Land Academy Award winner Emma Stone stars as Cruella, back in the days when she was still Estella - a young grifter in punk-era London who's determined to make it big with her clever and creative fashion designs. An encounter with two young thieves takes her life in an unexpected direction, as does a meeting with fashion legend Baroness von Hellman (Emma Thompson), setting in motion a series of events that will soon see Estella embracing her wicked side...

Released Fri 28 May



Spiral: From The Book of Saw

CERT 18 (93 mins)

Starring Morgan David Jones, Samuel L. Jackson, Ali Johnson, Chris Rock Directed by Darren Lynn Bousman

This latest entry in the Saw horror franchise stars comedian Chris Rock as Ezekiel 'Zeke' Banks, a brash detective on the trail of a coptaunting serial killer whose modus operandi seems unsettlingly familiar. Samuel L Jackson adds gravitas as a veteran policeman, with Max Minghella in the role of Rock's rookie partner. Interestingly, the film is being compared not so much with previous entries in the franchise but rather with 1995 psychological crime thriller Seven, starring Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman.

Released Mon 17 May



A Quiet Place Part II

CERT 15 (97 mins)

Starring Emily Blunt, Millicent Symonds, Cillian Murphy, Noah Jupe, Djimon Hounsou Directed by John Krasinski

The massive success of A Quiet Place (2018) meant that a sequel movie was a no-brainer for Paramount Pictures. As with the first film,

this new release finds the Abbott family fighting for survival in a post-apocalyptic world inhabited by blind monsters with an acute sense of hearing. Basically, if they hear you, they hunt you. But on this occasion, Lee, Evelyn and the kids discover that the creatures who hunt by sound are not the only threats that lurk beyond the sand path...

Released Fri 4 June



Luca CERT tbc

With the voices of Jacob Tremblay, Maya Rudolph, Jack Dylan Grazer, Jim Gaffigan Directed by Enrico Casarosa



Pixar's latest animated offering tells the tale of a young boy named Luca and his new pal, Alberto, as they enjoy adventures in a seaside town on the Italian Riviera. But the pair are hiding a secret - they are both sea

monsters from a world beneath the ocean's surface. A coming-of-age comedy fantasy, Enrico Casarosa's movie is described by the director himself as both a homage to legendary Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini and a celebration of childhood friendship.

Released Fri 18 June (on Disney+)

In The Heights CERT tbc (143 mins)

Starring Stephanie Beatriz, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Anthony Ramos, Jimmy Smits, Ariana Greenblatt, Corey Hawkins Directed by Jon M. Chu

If this movie version of the hit musical of the same name enjoys a similar level of success as the stage version, its producers will be happy bunnies indeed. Opening on Broadway in 2008, the show was nominated for an impressive 13 Tony Awards, winning four, including the gongs for best musical, original score and choreography. Set over the course of three days in New York City's Latino neighbourhood of Washington Heights, the show boasts a score that features hip-hop, salsa, merengue and soul music.

Released Fri 25 June



Lights, camera, ACTION! 2021 is the year of the blockbuster...





Black Widow CERT the

Starring Scarlett Johansson, Florence Pugh, Rachel Weisz, William Hurt, David Harbour Directed by Cate Shortland

Black Widow has popped up in more Marvel movies than the Incredible Hulk owns pairs of pants, so it's nice to see her finally getting her very own film. This latest offering from the Marvel Cinematic Universe finds former

KGB assassin Natasha Romanoff (Scarlett Johansson) pursued by a force that will stop at nothing to bring her down. No wonder she's quick to reach for the spandex...

Released Fri 9 July

The Matrix 4 CERT tbc

Starring Keanu Reeves, Priyanka Chopra, Jonathan Groff, Carrie-Anne Moss, Jada Pinkett Smith, Neil Patrick Harris Directed by Lana Wachowski

Why let a couple of storyline deaths get in the way of popular characters making a return? That certainly seems to be the perspective of the production team behind this latest entry in the Matrix



franchise, with both Keanu Reeves's Neo and Carrie-Anne Moss's Trinity very much back in the saddle despite having met their demise at the end of The Matrix Revolutions.

Not much is known about the plot of this latest film, although according to one of its stars, Yahya Madul-Abteen II, it "touches on themes people should be talking about in 2020, 2021, 2022". Reeves, meanwhile, reveals that it has a "beautiful script that is a love story", adding that it's "another version of a kind of call to wake up. It entertains... it has some great action.
All will be revealed."

Released Wed 22 December



Starring Daniel Craig, Ana de Armas, Ralph Fiennes, Léa Seydoux Directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga

Daniel Craig picks up his Licence To Kill for the fifth and final time in an adventure that sees everybody's favourite British secret service agent pitting his now-fiftysomething wits against a mysterious villain armed with dangerous new technology.

Actually, in this one, Bond has become everybody's favourite *former* British secret service agent, having retired to an idyllic life of peace and tranquility in sun-kissed Jamaica. But what's a highly trained ex-double-O operative meant to do but put down his vodka martini (shaken, not stirred) and spring into action when CIA pal Felix Leiter turns up asking for help...

Craig has been a massive hit as Ian Fleming's famous super-spy, and is surely making the right decision by handing in his Walther PPK at the age of 52. Roger Moore played the role until he was nearly 60, a decision that did neither him nor the Bond legend any favours.

Released Thurs 30 September





Venom: Let There Be Carnage CERT tbc

Starring Tom Hardy, Michelle Williams, Woody Harrelson, Stephen Graham, Naomie Harris Directed by Andy Serkis

Despite almost universally being described as a train wreck of a movie, Venom was the seventh highest-grossing film of 2018 - hence this sequel. Tom Hardy's performance in the first film didn't exactly pull up any trees, but was nevertheless considered to be one of the movie's saving graces. The usually excellent

Hardy will no doubt be aspiring to better things in this second outing as the Marvel Comics character. He's joined by Woody Harrelson as Cletus Kasady, a psychotic serial killer who becomes the host of an alien symbiote known as Carnage

Released Wed 15 September

Top Gun: Maverick CERT tbc

Starring Tom Cruise, Jennifer Connelly, Miles Teller, Val Kilmer, Jon Hamm
Directed by Joseph Kosinski

It's certainly been a long time coming, but fans of Top Gun have finally got the sequel they've been wanting for the last 35 years. There's no Kelly McGillis this time - apparently she wasn't approached about appearing in the film - but Val Kilmer does return, as of course does the main man himself, Tom Cruise, as hotshot test pilot and flight instructor Captain Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell. Although information about the storyline is sketchy, it's reported that the film will focus on the end of the dogfighting era and the role of drones in modern aerial warfare. Expect breathtaking flight sequences aplenty.

Released Fri 23 July





VAN GOGH ALIVE

CUTTING-EDGE INTERACTIVE EXHIBITION RETURNS TO BIRMINGHAM HIPPODROME



Grande Exhibitions' Van Gogh Alive is a truly unique encounter with art, where 'you don't just look at his paintings, you step inside them and feel their power'.

This month sees the groundbreaking interactive exhibition reopening Birmingham Hippodrome for the second time in a year. After the show's UK premiere at the venue last autumn, the theatre then had to close in November when the country went into a second lockdown.

Visitors to Van Gogh Alive can find out all about the Dutch artist's evolution - from under-appreciated painter into celebrated genius - via the projections at their fingertips, above their heads and beneath their feet.



Families and art lovers alike get to wander through an immersive gallery of over 3,000 images of Van Gogh's legendary works, including The Starry Night, Sunflowers and Wheatfield With Crows. In the process, they come face-to-face with the vibrant colours and vivid detail that encapsulates his unique Post-Impressionist style.

Presented across the globe to great critical acclaim, Van Gogh Alive has been exhibited in a wide variety of locations - from a deconsecrated church in Florence, to the lake parks of Shanghai and the spectacular Louvre Abu Dhabi. The show is both a biography and an expansive anthology of masterpieces, specially tailored for each space it visits. Artworks are displayed in all their glory, broken down to showcase certain sections, or even magnified on a breathtaking scale. Photographs, videos and deeply philosophical quotes from Van Gogh himself have been entwined with images of his works to call attention to snippets of his real-life inspiration.

Paintings are shown in such detail (thanks to state-of-the-art technology) that observers will be given fresh insight into the carnival of colours and precise techniques used by the artist. This ethereal experience of feeling fully submerged in Van Gogh's canvas is

Van Gogh Alive is where technology and music meet forward-thinking art curation, boasting the title of most visited multi-sensory experience in the world...

interwoven with waves of carefully chosen classical symphonies and bursts of fragrance to pique all the senses.

In addition to the main exhibition, Van Gogh Alive also features hands-on art stations, interpretative areas, a life-sized recreation of Van Gogh's bedroom in Arles, and a captivating mirrored room adorned with hundreds of sunflowers - perhaps Van Gogh's greatest muse.

Van Gogh Alive was a big hit in the city last year, welcoming 28,000 socially distanced visitors in only one month.

Commenting on the show, Bruce Peterson, founder of Grande Exhibitions, said: "We visited a number of venues in the UK, but as soon as we entered the Hippodrome, we knew we had to bring our Van Gogh Alive here. It's a unique, iconic venue. Van Gogh Alive was met with such a heartwarmingly positive response by audiences at Birmingham Hippodrome. It's just brilliant that the doors can reopen once again. The global exhibition is a perfect Covid-aware experience for the whole family that will



provide some escapism and education. Adults and children seem to enjoy the experience in different ways, finding their own meaning in Van Gogh's work as they explore the galleries."

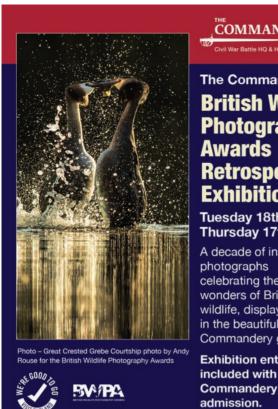
The venue and its patrons are just as thrilled by the return of the exhibition...

"Van Gogh Alive is incredibly important to us all at the Hippodrome," shares Fiona Allen, artistic director & chief executive at the theatre. "It was the only way we found to reopen the building during a year without any live performance. We were taken aback by the public response we had, both to the beauty and joy of this enriching cultural experience, and how safe our visitors felt with the timed entry and social-distancing measures in place. It's brilliant that we've found a way to reopen Van Gogh Alive for a limited run, as we know so many people were disappointed to miss out when we went back into lockdown last November."



Birmingham has a long history of championing arts & culture, and Van Gogh Alive is once again presenting an opportunity to support this important UK industry - as West Midlands Mayor Andy Street pointed out prior to the exhibition's premiere last autumn: "Many sectors are going through an incredibly difficult period due to the pandemic, and the arts is no exception. Birmingham Hippodrome has had its challenges, but it's a critical venue for the West Midlands, and it's great to see how it's adapting and thinking outside the box to overcome these challenges. Grande Exhibitions and Van Gogh Alive is not only a boost for the Hippodrome, but it will also be great for the wider West Midlands economy, helping to draw visitors back to our region.'

Van Gogh Alive shows at Birmingham Hippodrome from Tuesday 25 May to Sunday 11 July.



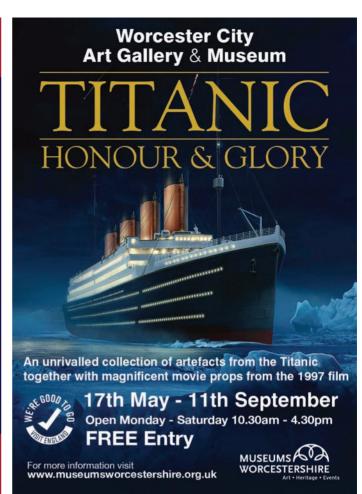
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2 Tone: Lives & Legacies

Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, until Sun 12 September

This sure-to-be-popular show marks the very first time the Midlands-born 2 Tone music movement has been the subject of a dedicated UK exhibition.

Originating in Coventry in the 1970s, 2 Tone derived from the same-named record label - founded by The Specials' Jerry Dammers - which referenced a desire to transcend and defuse Britain's much-inevidence racial tensions of the time. The exhibition examines the label's

philosophy, political and social message, its impact on the music charts of the day, and also highlights the bands that were part of the label - most specifically The Specials, The Selecter and other skainfluenced ensembles such as Madness, The Beat and The Bodysnatchers. Items and memorabilia featured in the show include the iconic 2 Tone suit, Roddy Radiation's pork pie hat, a Fred Perry polo shirt and the Harrington jacket.

British Wildlife Photography Awards Retrospective Exhibition The Commandery, Worcester, Tues 18 May - Thurs 17 June

Presented in celebration of the British Wildlife Photography Awards' 10th anniversary, this touring exhibition brings together all the overall winners, along with a selection of category winners and highly commended images. Although ostensibly created to celebrate photographic talent, the awards have also

served to highlight the great wealth and diversity of British natural history, in the process raising awareness about biodiversity, species and habitats. The main exhibition will be located outside in The Commandery's gardens, with a digital exhibition available to view inside the museum.



Grey seal photo by Kirsty Andrews for the British Wildlife Photography Awards



Red fox photo by Samuel Morris for the British Wildlife Photography Awards

Titanic: Honour & Glory

Worcester Art Gallery & Museum, until Saturday 11 September

Visitors to this national touring exhibition will find themselves coming face-to-face with one of the most famous and tragic events in 20th-century British history.

The Titanic was a passenger liner that sank in the North Atlantic Ocean on 15 April 1912 during its maiden vovage.

Honour & Glory features a diverse range of very rare artefacts from the vessel, as well as examples of the liner's luxurious interior fittings, and props and costumes from the 1997 James Cameron film, Titanic.



China: Through The Lens Of John Thomson 1868 - 1872

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, until Sun 22 August

Inspired by his fascination with Asia and its people, Edinburgh-born John Thomson produced a set of photographs that constitutes one of the 19th century's most extensive records of any region of the world.

The achievements of Thomson - who went on to be appointed photographer to the British royal family by Queen Victoria - are all the more staggering given the method via which photographs were being taken at the time of his travels to far-flung territories. Referred to as the wet-collodion process, the method entailed an exposure being made onto a glass negative. This had to be done in complete darkness, on location, and in a portable darkroom tent - a requirement which saw Thomson having to travel with large numbers of crates, glass negatives, and bottles of highly flammable and poisonous chemicals... This touring display of Thomson's photographic prints is complemented by an exhibition of Chinese artefacts selected from the museum's own collections.

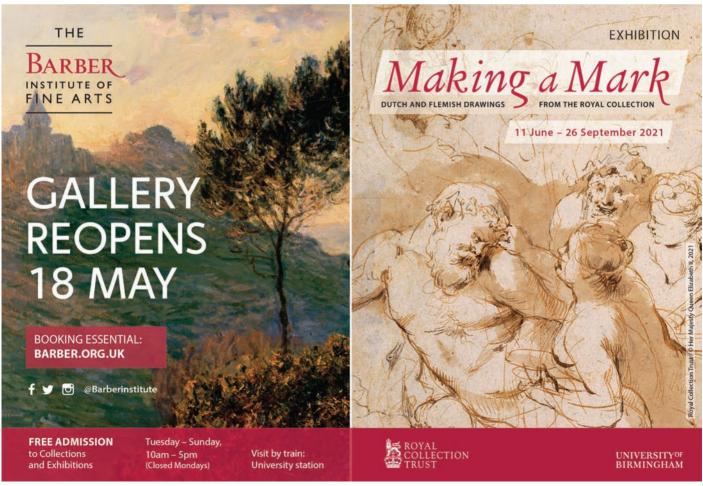


Rebecca Louise Law: Seasons

Compton Verney, Warwickshire, until Mon 30 August

Rebecca Louise Law's sitespecific installation aims to reflect the ebb-and-flow of life. Featuring thousands of preserved seasonal flowers and plants - collected by the artist over the last three years and here suspended on copper wires - the artwork takes the viewer on 'an undulating, physical and experiential journey through the year', concluding with natural materials foraged from Compton Verney's very own grounds.

An Instagram nature diary kept by Rebecca forms part of the exhibition.





Making A Mark: Dutch And Flemish Drawings From The Royal Collection

The Barber Institute, University of Birmingham, Fri 11 June - Sun 26 September

The Royal Collection Dutch and Flemish Old Master drawings here presented alongside some of the Barber's own masterworks on paper, have been selected for display by students from the University of Birmingham.

The exhibited artworks were chosen from

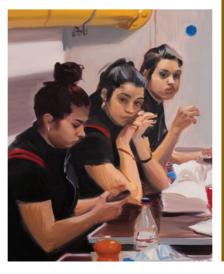
more than 700 drawings, among which are pieces by Golden Age 17th-century artists such as Rubens, Van Dyck, Goltzius and Avercamp. The collection also includes work from the 16th, 18th and early-19th century by talented artists whose names are nowadays less familiar.

Caroline Walker: Women's Work

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, until Sat 31 July

Caroline Walker's thought-provoking exhibition has been updated to reflect - as MAC's chief executive, Deborah Kermode, puts it - 'the chaotic time that we've been living in'.

Caroline's show comprises preparatory studies and both small and large-scale paintings depicting women at work. The pieces examine the often unseen jobs that women perform and the roles which they take, such as tailors and chambermaids. Journalist Maria Margaronis has produced a series of personal interviews with some of the women featured in Caroline's paintings. The interviews document the women's experiences and the journeys which have led them to the roles they now undertake.



Anj Smith: A Willow Grows Aslant The Brook

New Art Gallery, Walsall, until Sun 5 September

The creation of multiple, fragmented and complex narratives is the name of the game for British painter Anj Smith. The forty-three-year-old artist draws on a wide range of source material to achieve her desired outcomes, from designer

achieve her desired outcomes, from designer fabrics and jewellery, to the histories of art, literature and popular culture. Along the way, she explores issues including identity, eroticism, mortality and anxiety.

"I love the idea that painting - pointless technologically - can still hypnotise and seduce us," says Anj. "For me, this is where the uniquely profound nature of painting is located, as no other medium offers this specific legacy. Its multiple deaths, resuscitations and evolutions make it especially apt in negotiating the great global and personal uncertainties of now."



A Very Special Place: Ikon In The 1990s

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, Fri 18 June -Mon 30 August

Following on from three previous surveys, examining Ikon's artistic programme in the 1960s, '70s and '80s respectively, this latest exhibition focuses on the decade during which the gallery became more



internationalist, placing particular emphasis on the Americas and Australia.

The '90s also saw the venue presenting a greater amount of work by black and minority ethnic artists, many of whom were locally based. Significant British artists featured at Ikon during the decade included experimental practitioners Georgina Starr and Mark Wallinge (pictured), and painters Basil Beattie and Lisa Milroy.









Steam engines, interactive technology displays, spectacular planetarium shows and the child-sized world of MiniBrum await visitors to Birmingham's award-winning Thinktank science museum post-lockdown.

As indeed does Our Changing Planet - a 'fun and informative' gallery opening to the public for the first time.

The new and permanent fixture is ideal for older children and adult visitors, and explores 'how humans have changed the world, and how these changes are affecting the wildlife around us'.

Highlights of the gallery's 150-item exhibition include pre-historic tools, the first plastic invented in Birmingham, the first prototype vehicle to travel under its own power on Britain's roads, and part of the first computer used at the Longbridge motor factory.

In stark contrast to the man-made inventions featured in the gallery, Our Changing Planet also investigates how pollution, habitat destruction, species extinction and climate change are radically altering landscapes and people's lives all over the world.

Commenting on the venue's reopening, Thinktank Museum Manager Laurence Butler said: "We're over the moon to be able to welcome back visitors. Our steam engines will be pumping, the city of MiniBrum will be open for play, and the new Our Changing Planet gallery will be ready to explore.

"We've got four floors, 10 galleries, a science garden and a planetarium. There's a lot to see, but we've created a safe, fun and inspiring experience for as many people as we can. We're limiting capacity, and admission is by 'pre-booking only', to ensure our visitors have a safe and fun-packed day out."

Before the pandemic forced Thinktank to close its doors, the museum had just enjoyed

one of its most successful-ever years, with more than 243,000 people and 45,500 school children visiting. Those impressive figures were due in no small part to the opening of the child-sized world of MiniBrum, which proved to be a huge hit with visitors.

Featuring some of Birmingham's most iconic landmarks - the canals, Selfridges and the University of Birmingham's Old Joe Clock Tower being among them - the gallery also boasts various play zones, including a home area where children can build a den, a burrow in which kids can find hidden animals, a race-track inspired by Birmingham's upcoming Commonwealth Games, a construction zone with a climbing tower and slide, a post office and a salon.

OUR CHANGING
PLANET EXPLORES
HOW HUMANS HAVE
IMPACTED ON THE
WORLD, AND HOW
THE CHANGES ARE
AFFECTING THE
WILDLIFE AROUND US.

As well as 200-plus interactive displays, Thinktank also showcases a selection of items from the city's science & engineering collection, including the Smethwick Engine the world's oldest working steam engine.

Other attractions to enjoy at the popular venue include the planetarium, where visitors 'can journey to the stars and learn about the wonders of the night sky', and an outdoor 'science garden', providing the opportunity to explore the science behind

energy, mechanics and mobility.

Visitors also get the chance to take home a memento from the museum, courtesy of a brand-new shop. From space and science, to animals and Birmingham-inspired gifts, the outlet offers a range of products chosen to reflect the venue's collections.

Safety is Thinktank's top priority, and visitors are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the guidelines before arrival.

Visitors can still enjoy a variety of hot and cold lunches at Signal Box Cafe, including the signature Signal Box Burger.

New for 2021 is Platform 2, an outside kiosk serving up tasty treats for people preferring to eat outdoors.

Thinktank Science Museum reopens on Saturday 29 May. It will open Wednesday to Sunday between 10am and 5pm during term time, and seven days a week from 10am to 5pm during Birmingham school holidays. For further information about the venue, visit:

birminghammuseums.org.uk/thinktank





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Step Back To The 1940s

Severn Valley Railway, Sat 26 & Sun 27 June & Sat 3 & Sun 4 July

Always one of Severn Valley Railway's most popular annual events, Step Back To The 1940s encourages visitors to dress in period costume and relive the decade through music, food, dance and 'a whirlwind rail adventure'.

Features include a 1940s wedding, rifle training, vintage vehicles, marketplaces, living history displays and military encampments.

There'll be re-enactors in evidence as well, complete with a surprise or two!



Circus Week at Blists Hill

Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge, Shropshire, Mon 31 May - Fri 4 June

Roll Up! Roll Up! The Circus is in town - and a Victorian one at that.

Visit the award-winning Blists Hill Victorian

Town during the half-term holiday and try your hand at period circus skills and routines with Leo Locus Circus. The event is one of many taking place at the venue in the coming months. Other highlights include a sport-themed weekend, the return of the ever-popular Steampunk gathering and a Victorian dog show.

National Metro & Mini Show

British Motor Museum, Gaydon, Warwickshire, Sun 6 June

The main event of the year for Metros and both classic and modern MINIs, this ever-popular show features hundreds of models, including 621 AOK - the first Mini produced in 1959 - and X411 JOP, the last ever classic Mini to be produced at Longbridge (in the year 2000).

For visitors wanting to make a weekend of it, camping is available on Saturday 5 June.



Weston's Spring Fling

Weston Park, Shropshire, Sun 30 - Mon 31 May

Live music, homemade Pimm's Picnics to savour, local crafters selling their wares, food stalls providing all manner of culinary delights, and more than 1,000 acres of gardens and parkland for visitors to enjoy at their leisure... Weston Park's brand-new Spring Fling! should certainly make for a relaxing and enjoyable day out over the bank holiday weekend. Youngsters are well catered for too. courtesy of the woodland adventure playground and maze. ensuring that this first-of-its-kind two-day event will most definitely boast a family-friendly feel.





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Circus Extreme

NEC, Birmingham, Thurs 20 May - Sun 6 June A brand new death-defying show featuring extreme stunts and classic clown escapades inside the UK's largest socially distanced circus big-top.

Merging modern and contemporary styles of performance, Circus Extreme features the high-wire Danguir Troupe, the Extreme FMX team, aerial artist Laura Miller and Henry, the Prince of Clowns.



Mardi Gras

Alton Towers, Staffordshire, Sun 22 May - Sun 20 June

This carnival-inspired 'takeover' is new for 2021.

Visitors can expect an explosion of colour and sound, plus 'plenty of high-energy entertainment', as they enjoy the theme park's rollercoasters and rides until sunset.

A selection of food from around the world will also be available to enjoy.

Midsummer Garden Life Festival

Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Wed 23 - Fri 25 June

The sounds, tastes and smells of the Caribbean, Mediterranean and Far East all feature in this brandnew three-day gathering.
Celebrating the summer solstice via theatre, poetry and talks in a spacious outdoor area, Midsummer Garden Life Festival features specially constructed zones taking visitors to far-flung places, and alfresco dining opportunities provided by artisan food producers.
Gardening guru and RHS Malvern favourite Carol Klein (pictured)

Gardening guru and RHS Malvern favourite Carol Klein (pictured) hosts music and musings sessions.



Midlands Air Festival

Ragley Hall, Warwickshire, Fri 4 - Sun 6 June

This year's event features 'the largest display of special shape character hot-air balloons in Europe'.

Other aerial attractions across the weekend include World War One air displays, World War Two Warbirds, fast jets, helicopters, gyroplanes, aerobatic displays, aerial ballet, flying circus acts, and parachute & formation display teams.





After joining in with Sir Gadabout's school for ambitious Knights as a final challenge, Zog will be available for a meet-and-greet to hand out golden stars and to pose for a photo with every child.

Zog and The Quest for the Golden Star is available every day until 5 September 2021 and is included in the price of your Warwick Castle entry ticket.

Book online at warwick-castle.com





A big roar for Zog

What's On checks out Warwick Castle's latest family attraction...

Warwick Castle is open for business, with outdoor activities and single-household stays at the Knight's Village Woodland Lodges having been available to enjoy since April.

Also on offer is a brand-new themed activity trail: Zog And The Quest For The Golden Star. The trail is based on Julia Donaldson's bestselling children's book and has seen Warwick Castle team up with Magic Light Pictures.

With a map and Dragon School Stamp Activity Card in hand, participants meander through the grounds to undertake five different tasks in order to qualify as a fullyfledged dragon.

A flying Zog greets you upon entry to the grounds, not only creating a perfect photo opportunity but also providing a chance to collect a first stamp.

On heading towards the world's first ever Horrible Histories adventure maze, you find the second and third tasks, which, through clever installations, allow youngsters to try and make Axel Scheffler's instantly recognisable dragon illustrations roar and breathe fire.

Journeying to the mighty trebuchet, at the far side of the castle on the River Avon, you must then find Pearl in order to capture a princess and complete the fourth task, after which you have to learn to fight on the Oak Tree Lawn with Sir Gadabout.

Once all five stamps have been collected and the training completed, a golden star is awarded to each successful participant.

A meet-and-greet with Zog, available at various times during the day, provides the perfect end to a thoroughly enjoyable experience.



Now that Warwick Castle has fully reopened, there's even more to enjoy at the venue across the summer months, including the return of the UK's largest birds-of-prey show - The Falconer's Quest.

Roaming actors, who interact 'in character' with visitors, further add to the overall Warwick Castle experience. Currently they're assuming the guise of knights on horseback and, so we're told, Georgians from the Bridgerton era!

Extremely friendly staff, intrinsic Covid-19 safety measures and (if you're lucky the day you go) beautiful sunny weather ensure that a late spring or summertime visit to Warwick Castle makes for a safe, relaxed and extremely enjoyable day out.

Zog And The Quest For The Golden Staravailable every day until Sunday 5 September - is included in the price of your entry ticket to Warwick Castle. Zog Play-and-Stay packages are also available. For further information, visit: warwick-castle.com

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Treetop Adventure Golf

Bullring Shopping Centre, Birmingham, B5 4BU adventuregolf.com/birmingham

A brand-new mini golf experience opens its doors at Birmingham's Bullring Shopping Centre this summer.

Set within 'a mighty rainforest', Treetop Adventure Golf features two 18-hole indoor courses.

Participants can choose to tackle the Tropical Trail's Mystic Wood or the ruins of the Ancient Explorer. There's also a bonus 19th hole that gives players the chance to win a free round should they achieve a hole-in-one.

Commenting on the new visitor attraction, Treetop Adventure Golf's co-founder & CEO, Elizabeth Stanway, said: "Our jungle will be open seven days a week, for everything from family days out to student hangouts, date nights, work get-togethers and celebrations. Birmingham has always been a landmark location, and we're so excited to be launching in the heart of the city centre."

Cadbury World

Linden Rd, Bournville, Birmingham, B30 2LU cadburyworld.co.uk Tel: 0121 393 6004

A veritable wonderland of chocolate delights and related activities, Cadbury World remains one of Birmingham's most popular family attractions. A visit to the Bournvillelocated venue kicks off with a chocoholic's dream journey in Aztec Jungle, where visitors travel back more than 1,000 years to the tropical rainforest of the Mayan Indians

and discover the origin of the cocoa tree. A stop-off in Europe follows, to find out about the arrival of cocoa in England, after which there's the chance to drop in on Birmingham's Bull Street, where John Cadbury opened his first shop.

Other highlights include a 4D Chocolate Adventure, Cadabra Ride, Purple Planet, African Adventure Play Area and, perhaps most magically of all, the world's biggest Cadbury shop. Tastebuds at the ready...





Ackers Adventure

Golden Hillock Road, Birmingham, B11 2PY ackers-adventure.co.uk Tel: 0121 772 5111

Ackers Adventure offers a wide range of outdoor activities, all taking place within a green wildlife haven just two miles away from Birmingham city centre.

Whether you're visiting on your own or as part of a family or group, there's plenty to enjoy. Visitors can scale the heights of three climbing walls, explore the Grand Union Canal by canoe, kayak or bellboat, whizz down a 100-metre ski slope or 25-metre toboggan slope, aim for a hole-in-one on the woodland disc golf course, or maybe test their team-working abilities with the obstacle course or bushcraft survival skills sessions.





National SEA LIFE Centre

The Water's Edge, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2HL visitsealife.com/birmingham

As well as featuring more than 2,000 creatures - including a colony of gentoo penguins, black-tip reef sharks and a giant green sea turtle - National Sea Life Centre Birmingham is now also home to a worldclass rescue facility. As part of a pioneering education & conservation project, the centre welcomed the UK's first ever sea otters, Ozzy and Olain, early last year. Other Sea Life Centre highlights include the 4D cinema, the zebra shark in Shark Lagoon and the Clownfish Kingdom tunnel. The centre also boasts the UK's only 360° Ocean Tunnel, in which visitors can marvel at hundreds of underwater creatures swimming overhead and underneath as they enjoy the truly unique experience of 'walking through the sea'!

Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum

Millennium Point, Curzon Street Birmingham, B4 7XG birminghammuseums.org.uk/thinktank Tel: 0121 348 8000

Thinktank features over 200 interactive exhibits on science and discovery, a programme of workshops, shows and demonstrations, and a digital planetarium. It also boasts its very own mini city:

MiniBrum. A child-sized world created with children under the age of eight in mind, MiniBrum features several different play zones, including a transport area, shops, a park and a construction site with slide. There are also specifically designed sensory areas for babies.

New for 2021: Our Changing Planet is a brand addition exploring how humans have changed the world and how these changes are affecting the wildlife around us.



LEGOLAND Discovery Centre

Utilita Arena Birmingham, King Edwards Road, Birmingham, B1 2AA legolanddiscoverycentre.com/birmingham



Legoland Discovery Centre is a great place to share creative play time with your little ones.

The centre houses a city builder area, a duplo farm, two rides - Kingdom's Quest and Merlin's Apprentice Ride - and a 4D cinema. But perhaps the most impressive attraction at the venue is Lego Miniland. Built from more than 1.5 million Lego bricks, Miniland is a replica of Birmingham. The model includes Lego constructions of the Library of Birmingham, Bullring, the BT Tower and The Mailbox. It also features interactive elements; children can entertain themselves by racing boats along the canal or getting stuck into a game of football at the 'mish-mash' of Aston Villa's and Birmingham City's stadiums.



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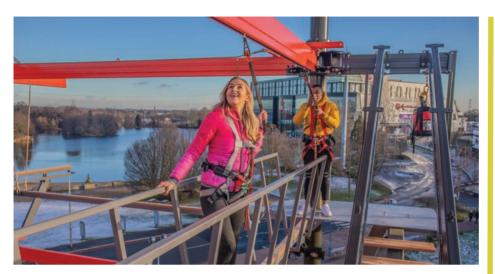
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Bear Grylls Adventure

National Exhibition Centre, Marston Green, Birmingham, B40 1PA beargryllsadventure.com Tel: 0121 725 2616

Celebrity adventurer Bear Grylls has certainly pulled out all the stops with this popular visitor attraction.

Activities include high ropes, indoor archery, indoor climbing, escape rooms and a Royal Marines-inspired assault course.

For the 'more courageous' (as if some of the above didn't require courage!), The Fear Zone challenges you to 'sharpen your mind and

find your inner strength' by taking on the challenge of navigating the area in complete darkness.

Alternatively, try venturing to the depths of the deep blue sea with Shark Drive. The site's tropical tank allows adventurers to get 'up close and personal' with black tip reef sharks and cownose rays.

Fancy experiencing the thrill of free-falling at 12,000ft without having to jump out of a plane? Then iFly is for you. This weightless adventure takes place in a wind tunnel and comprises two one-minute flights to get the adrenaline pumping.



Birmingham Botanical Gardens

Westbourne Rd, Edgbaston, B15 3TR birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk Tel: 0121 454 1860

Set in 15 acres of landscaped greenery, Birmingham Botanical Gardens was established in 1829, since which time it's been one of the city's top attractions.

With four glasshouses - tropical, subtropical,
Mediterranean and arid - there are plenty of
unusual and amazing-looking plants to
discover.

The site also has its very own playground, tearoom and garden gift shop, all of which are surrounded by some of the most beautiful gardens in the UK.

Rush Trampoline Park

Unit 6 Avery Dell, Lifford Lane, Kings Norton, Birmingham, B30 3DZ rushuk.com

This state-of-the-art trampoline park has 11 zones in which to keep fit and enjoy jumping to your heart's content - regardless of age.

Fancy having a go at Dodgeball? The rules are simple: grab a ball, pick a side and start jumping.

Or maybe you're a budding gymnast? In which case, the super-long tumble lanes will be perfect for you.

Want to test your hand-eye coordination? Then check out Wipeout; ducking under or jumping over the rotating arms in this inflateable arena is certain to get the heart pumping.

And if you fancy taking things to the next level, you should give the Rush High Performance Area a try - ideal for tumblers, parkour experts and tricksters wanting to master fancy freestyle flips.



Birmingham Back To Backs

Address: 55-63 Hurst Street, Birmingham, B5 4TE Tel: 0121 666 7671 nationaltrust.org.uk/birmingham-back-tobacks

A carefully restored courtyard of 19th-century workers' houses - the last of its kind in the Midlands - the Back To Backs offer an atmospheric glimpse into the lives of working-class people in Birmingham across a period of 130 years.

Coming complete with crackling fires and pans bubbling away on stoves, the popular visitor attraction comprises four houses, each decorated and furnished to represent a different era: the 1840s, 1870s, 1930s and 1970s.



Warwick Castle

Warwick, Warwickshire, CV34 6AH warwick-castle.com Tel: 01926 406610

Boasting history tours, detailed exhibits, programmed activities and 64 acres of landscaped garden, Warwick Castle offers a winning combination of attractions that makes for a thoroughly enjoyable family day out.

The UK's biggest bird of prey show, The Falconer's Quest, makes a welcome return for the summer. Featuring up to 60 magnificent birds, with huge wingspans of up to nine feet, the display showcases species from across the globe.

Other attractions at the castle include the Horrible Histories Maze.

New for 2021: Themed activity trail Zog And The Quest For The Golden Star - based on Julia Donaldson's bestselling children's book.

Shakespeare's Birthplace

Henley St, Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 6QW shakespeare.org.uk Tel: 01789 204016

Find out what life was like for the world's most famous playwright during his growing-up years in Stratford-upon-Avon.

The venue's attractions include numerous rare objects, one of which is an original folio of Shakespeare's complete works.

Visitors can also hear stories of the bard's family life, check out his father's glovemaking workshop, and take a stroll through gardens which may well have inspired some of Shakespeare's most poetic writings.

There are four other Shakespeare Family Homes & Gardens in the Trust's care: Anne Hathaway's Cottage, Shakespeare's New

Place, Hall's Croft and Mary Arden's Farm.



West Midland Safari & Leisure Park

Spring Grove, Bewdley, DY12 1LF wmsp.co.uk Tel: 01299 402114

West Midland Safari & Leisure Park offers a great opportunity to enjoy seeing animals roaming freely - and to do so from the safety of your own car!

The 100-acre venue is home to a variety of exotic and unusual species, many of which

you're sure to encounter during the course of

the four-mile drive-through safari.

Expect to see (take a deep breath at this

point, if you're reading this out loud to somebody!): elephants, rhinos, giraffes, lions, wallabies, tigers, emus, camels, zebras, gnus, elands, ankole cattle, yaks, przewalski's horses, Asian buffaloes, wolves, llamas and all manner of antelope! The venue also boasts an adventure theme park - Land Of The Living Dinosaurs - and an Ice Age attraction.

New for 2021: Luxury accommodation is now available at the site's Safari Lodges where guests can have an 'up-close and immersive overnight wildlife experience like no other.'







Blists Hill Victorian Town

Legges Way, Ironbridge, TF7 5UD
Tel: 01952 433424
ironbridge.org.uk/explore/blists-hill-victorian-

One of 10 award-winning museums that make up the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, Blists Hill Victorian Town offers visitors the chance to step back in time to the days of Queen Victoria. Set over 52 acres, the museum has plenty to offer and is very much

an interactive experience.

There are general drapers, blacksmiths, a pharmacy (also home to a particularly gruesome dentist room) and the bank, where you can exchange your new money for old and try to manage with pounds, shillings and pence.

Thankfully Victorians liked food & drink just as much as we do(!) - so if you're feeling peckish, pay a visit to the fried fish dealer and enjoy traditionally cooked fish & chips.

Alternatively, pop into the New Inn - not only does it serve a fine ale, it also has a tearoom upstairs with some healthier-eating options. Blists Hill has a funfair, too - complete with carousel, chair-o-planes and game stalls - a funicular train and a clay mine ride to enjoy.

New for 2021: An exciting outdoor adventure experience with elevated walkways, a log-style basket swing, seesaw and lookout tower with a coal chute slide.

Severn Valley Railway

Kidderminster: Station Dr, Kidderminster DY10 1QX Bridgnorth: 2 Hollybush Rd, Bridgnorth WV16 4AX svr.co.uk Tel:01299 401776

Operating mainly steam-hauled passenger trains between Bridgnorth, Bewdley and Kidderminster, this much-loved railway transports visitors on a journey of about 16 miles along the beautiful Severn Valley. The journey includes a stop-off at The Engine House Visitor Centre at Highley, where passengers can enjoy an exhibition telling the story of how the Victorians constructed the viaduct at Falling Sands.

Those starting their journey at Bridgnorth will also have the option of stop-offs at Bewdley and Kidderminster, the latter of which boasts a railway museum.

New for 2021: Enjoy 15 months' unlimited visits for the price of 12 with the all-new Severn Valley Railway Loyalty Pass, including free entry to the Engine House Visitor Centre.



22 THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2022

TWENTY-TWO TERRIFIC REASONS FOR MIDLANDERS TO LOOK FORWARD TO NEXT YEAR...

There's every chance that 2022 could well see a return to something resembling our pre-pandemic way of living. And if that proves to be the case, there'll be plenty of fantastic events to attend, shows to enjoy and places to visit right here in the marvellous Midlands! Here are 22 things we're looking forward to most...



1. Birmingham Commonwealth Games

The most anticipated event to take place in the UK in 2022, Birmingham Commonwealth Games not only presents a highprofile platform on which Britain's best athletes can demonstrate their talent, it also provides a fantastic opportunity for the region to showcase its always-impressive cultural offer. The latter comes via the Culture Festival, an event being produced in association with the Games. More detailed information about its content will be made available in the forthcoming months, so watch this space...

2. Minions: The Rise of Gru

This much-anticipated film is the fifth installment in the Despicable Me franchise. The story follows on from 2015 spin-off prequel Minions and brings together a starstudded cast of voice actors. The 1970s-set plot sees 12-year-old Gru hoping to join a supervillain group known as the Vicious 6. But things go badly awry, and when Gru steals a precious object from the 6 with the help of Kevin, Stuart, Bob, Otto and the other Minions, he suddenly finds himself the mortal enemy of the apex of evil...



4. Reopening of the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

This much loved space will remain closed for the remainder of 2021 while essential electrical works are undertaken. During the closure, BMAG's iconic Round Room will be transformed, ready for reopening ahead of the Commonwealth Games with a new display reflecting the people of 21st Century Birmingham.





3. Matthew Bourne's The Nutcracker

Featuring family-sized helpings of the choreographer's trademark wit and pathos, Matthew Bourne's The Nutcracker takes inspiration from the lavish Hollywood musicals of the 1930s. The story follows Clara's bittersweet journey from a darkly comic Christmas Eve at Dr Dross' orphanage, through a shimmering, ice-skating winter wonderland, to the scrumptious candy kingdom of Sweetieland. Expect a sprinkling of delicious new surprises in this reinvented production for 2022.



5. New industrial quarter at Black Country Living Museum

The first stage of BCLM's Forging Ahead project will come to a conclusion in 2022 when the museum reveals its new industrial quarter - an attraction dedicated to Black Country industry and its post-war manufacturing success. A town featuring an NHS clinic, a record shop, a barbers and a Co-operative supermarket will provide visitors with an immersive experience of everyday life as it was lived during the mid-20th century. A visitor centre and learning spaces will also be included in the industrial quarter.

6. The Commitments bring soul to Wolves Grand

Back out on tour following a record-breaking run in the West End, The Commitments musical is adapted from Roddy Doyle's award-winning book. It tells the story of Jimmy Rabbitte, a young working-class music fan who shapes a bunch of amateur musicians and friends into the finest soul band Dublin has ever produced.



22 THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2022...



7. Dreamgirls for Christmas

Direct from the West End and based on the film of the same name, Dreamgirls tells the story of singing trio The Dreams - Effie, Lorrell and Deena - as they aim for fame and fortune, discover the ruthless realities of showbusiness, and find their friendships tested to the very limit. Nicole Dennis stars as Effie, with further casting yet to be announced.

8. World debut of Akram Khan's Jungle Book

Akram Khan's reimagining of Rudyard Kipling's iconic tale is described as 'a deeply personal interpretation', with the celebrated dance practitioner having played the part of Mowgli in an Indian dance production at the age of 10. Decades after this pivotal moment in his life, Khan explores the story from a different perspective, viewing it through the lens of modern-day youngsters.



9. Return of the Krazy Races

Previously called Wacky Races, this fun family day out brings the zany 'sport' of soapbox racing to four Midlands locations next year. After a successful debut in Shrewsbury in 2019, the event returns to the town's Quarry Park next year in May. The Krazy Races calendar for 2022 also includes stop-offs in Northwich in June, Wolverhampton town centre in August, and Sandwell Park Farm in September.

10. James Martin Live at Symphony Hall

Whipping up culinary treats along the way and with some very special and yet-to-be-announced guests in tow! - the celebrity chef and former Saturday Kitchen host is set to visit 18 towns and cities across the UK next year.



11. The Make 'Em Ups Bumper Blyton

'Chock full of innuendo and lashings of puns', this homage to Enid Blyton aims to take audience members 'of a certain age' back to their childhoods, in the process presenting satirical takes on such literary classics as The Famous Five and Mallory Towers.



12. Reopening of the RSC's Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon

Early in the first lockdown, the Royal Shakespeare Company announced that it would be keeping the Swan Theatre closed for the forseeable future. Although no reopening date has yet been confirmed, it's hoped that this intimate venue will be back up and running some time in 2022.

13. Les Miserables at Birmingham Hippodrome

One of the world's most popular theatrical productions, Cameron Mackintosh's acclaimed version of Boublil & Schönberg's musical returns to Birmingham having enjoyed a sell-out run in the city in spring 2019.



14. Shropshire Kids Festival

Promising to be bigger and even better in 2022, Shropshire Kids Festival offers youngsters the chance 'to let off steam and have fun by the bucketload'. Taking place completely under cover, the festival caters for kids up to the age of 14. It includes baby changing and breastfeeding areas, a dedicated zone for the under-fives, and a quiet zone for children with additional support needs.

15. Swingamajig at Birmingham Botanical Gardens

Bringing a modern twist to the sights and sounds of the 1920s, Swingamajig fuses music, dance and cabaret to create one big high-energy party. In addition to its eclectic programme of musical performances - vintage swing, rock & roll, hip-hop & jungle - the festival also boasts a fine array of street food, a vintage market and some of 'the best dressed ladies and gents' in Brum.





16. Singin' In The Rain at Birmingham Hippodrome

Journey back to the Roaring '20s and the glamour of Hollywood in Jonathan Church's acclaimed adaptation of this all-time classic. The new tour sees Adam Cooper star as Don Lockwood - the role made famous by Gene Kelly in the original 1952 movie version.



17. British Art Show at Wolverhampton Art Gallery

Originally planned to take place in 2021, British Art Show 9 will now launch in Wolverhampton in January 2022, ahead of touring to three other UK venues. Introducing visitors to 40-plus artists working in Britain over the past five years, the exhibition is recognised as a significant marker of recent developments in contemporary art.

22 THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2022...



18. The Snowman at Birmingham Repertory Theatre

Raymond Briggs' much-loved children's book will once again be brought to life next January. A staple of The REP's festive programming for the past 25 years, this enchanting live show continues to delight audience members of all ages. Its dancing penguins are a particular highlight.



19. Forest Live

This outdoor summer concert series is presented by Forestry England and sees some of the music industry's biggest names perform in spectacular woodland locations across the UK.

Dates for all gigs at Cannock Chase in Staffordshire have been postponed until 2022. Jess Glynne will now play on Thursday 9 June, Rag'n'Bone Man on Friday the 10th and Keane on Saturday the 11th.

20. Crowded House at Genting Arena

With new album Dreamers Are Waiting due for release on 4 June, New Zealand five-piece Crowded House recently announced a rescheduled date of 14 June 2022 for their Birmingham Utilita Arena performance.



21. Planet Earth Live II In Concert

This live concert features specially selected footage shown in 4K ultra high-definition on a gigantic LED screen. Accompanying the film will be the City Of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra, playing music by film-score composers Hans Zimmer, Jacob Shea & Jasha Klebe. Science & natural history TV presenter Liz Bonnin hosts.



22. Shrewsbury Flower Show

This prestigious event is once again being presented online in 2021 - only the third time in the show's 133-year history that it hasn't taken place in the town's Quarry Park. Organisers have promised that the event will be bigger and better when it returns next year (on Friday 12 & Saturday 13 August).



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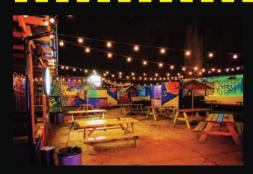
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