

Worcestershire

ISSUE 414 JULY 2021

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Art • Heritage • Events

inside:

OH WHAT A DRAMA!

must-see shows coming to the Midlands this autumn



DOCTOR DOLITTLE

adventures with Illyria at
Hanbury Hall



THE GOOD LIFE

brand-new show comes to the
Three Counties Showground



WEST MIDLAND
**SAFARI
& LEISURE
PARK**

WMSP.CO.UK

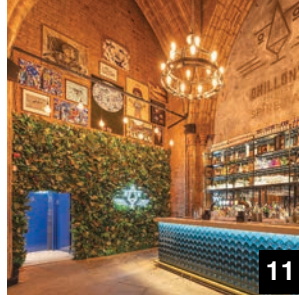
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A WILD DAY OUT



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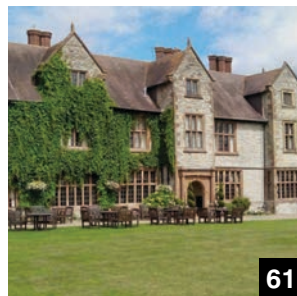
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What's On

MEDIA GROUP

Managing Director: **Davina Evans** davina@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281708

Sales & Marketing: **Chris Horton** chris@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281704

Editorial: **Lauren Foster** lauren@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281707 : **Brian O'Faolain**

brian@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281701 : **Abi Whitehouse** abi@whatsonlive.co.uk

01743 281716

Subscriptions: **Adrian Parker** adrian.parker@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281714 Contributors: Graham Bostock, Lauren Cole, Katherine Ewing, Marianne Peterson, Ellie Hutchings, Patsy Moss, Sue Jones, Steve Taylor

Publisher and CEO: **Martin Monahan** Accounts Administrator: **Julia Perry** julia@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281717

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Coventry Belgrade Theatre announces autumn season

A touring production of *Dirty Dancing* and Mischief Theatre's *The Play That Goes Wrong* are among the shows being presented at Coventry's Belgrade Theatre later this year.

The venue's autumn-season line-up also features a series of live music acts - including *The Best Of Take That* and *The Illegal Eagles* - and performances by *The Russian State Ballet*. The Belgrade's annual Christmas treat for children aged between two and six is *Santa's Magical Mystery Guest*, presented by *Imagine Theatre*.

The main festive-season offering, meanwhile, sees *Broadchurch* and *Game Of Thrones* actor David Bradley starring in a production of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*...

For more information and to book tickets, visit belgrade.co.uk

Art Night event comes to Warwickshire venue

A London art event is this year 'going national' for the first time - with Warwickshire visitor attraction *Compton Verney* being one of the venues taking part. *Art Night*, which transforms iconic and unexpected public spaces, will see *Compton Verney* playing host to *The Male Graze*, the biggest-ever UK commission by the *Guerrilla Girls* - an anonymous group of feminist, female artists devoted to fighting sexism and racism within the art world.

The Male Graze project, exploring bad behaviour, both historically and in the present day, comprises a website, an online gig and a series of billboards - one of which is on show in the grounds at *Compton Verney*. The commission is available to view until 18 July.

The venue's involvement with *Art Night* also includes a new sound work by Isabel Lewis. To find out more, visit comptonverney.org.uk



BBC Gardeners' World Live goes outdoors

Next month's *BBC Gardeners' World Live* at Birmingham's NEC (Thursday 26 - Sunday 29 August) will take place outside. The special edition of the popular event will feature show gardens, plants to buy, gardening advice, the *BBC Good Food Market* and live entertainment. Special guests include *Monty Don* and *Adam Frost*. To find out more, visit thenec.co.uk



Coventry orchestra on the lookout for new recruits

Coventry musician *Seb Farrall* is starting a brand-new orchestra as part of *Coventry Central Hall's City of Culture Artists in Residence* programme (AiR). Membership of the orchestra is open to all. Rehearsals begin in September, working towards a large-scale celebration concert at *Central Hall* in April next year. For more information about the project, visit coventryorchestra.co.uk/seb

Summer of Culture line-up of events announced

Great Alne Park, which is owned by later-living operator *Inspired Villages*, is celebrating friends and family reuniting after a year of restrictions by hosting a summer of cultural events.

The village, which is nestled in 78 acres of parkland just outside *Alcester*, will host theatre performances, concerts, gardening demonstrations and literary events, some of which will be presented in association with *Stratford Literary Festival*.

To find out more and to book tickets, visit: stratfordliteraryfestival.co.uk/summer-at-great-alne-park

The Enchanted Treasure Trail comes to Stratford

Popular *Stratford-upon-Avon* visitor attraction *The Enchanted Manor* has transformed itself into *The Enchanted Treasure Trail* for the summer months. The interactive quest, which runs until the beginning of September, invites visitors to explore a magical world of dragons, fairies, wizards, time travel and pirates.

The attraction is suitable for children over five years of age. Tickets can be booked in advance at magicalleystratford.com. Pre-booking is vital for weekends and school holidays.

Classically Queer at the Cathedral

Coventry Pride, in association with Coventry City of Culture Trust, is this month presenting a special performance of classical and contemporary music by new music ensemble Classically Queer.

Celebrating local LGBTQI+ musicians, the concert takes place in the spectacular setting of Coventry Cathedral Ruins on Saturday 17 July. The event forms part of Summer of Surprises - an initiative supported by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport.



New show brings George Eliot's novel to life

A new musical theatre version of Nuneaton-born George Eliot's *Silas Marner* is being presented in the grounds of St John's Church of England Academy School in Allesley this summer, as part of Coventry's ongoing City of Culture celebrations.

The Allesley Silas has been adapted by local playwright Alan Pollock.

The show runs from Thursday 29 July to Sunday 1 August. For more information, visit coventry2021.co.uk



Warwickshire dance stars Motionhouse hitting the road

Leamington Spa dance organisation Motionhouse will visit numerous Midlands venues with its brand-new show later this year and into 2022.

Entitled *Nobody*, the fast-moving and highly physical production 'explores the tension between our inner lives and how we make sense of the world around us'.

The show visits MAC Birmingham from Friday 22 to Monday 25 October and Malvern Theatres on Tuesday 2 November.

It then returns to the region next year, playing Birmingham Hippodrome in February and Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, in April.

For more information, visit motionhouse.co.uk

Coventry arena to host snooker's best



Ricoh Arena in Coventry will play host to some of snooker's greatest stars later this year when the Cazoo World Grand Prix is staged at the venue for the first time.

The world ranking event will be held in the 6,000 square metre indoor arena at Ricoh, which, from this summer onwards, is known as the Coventry Building Society Arena. Taking place from 13 to 19 December, the event will feature the top 32 players on the 2021/22 one-year ranking list. Tickets are now on sale at wst.tv/tickets

Lavish Living at Hartlebury Castle

A new permanent exhibition at Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury Castle is providing visitors with the chance to take a nostalgic look at life back in the mid-20th century.

Lavish Living: Worcestershire In The 1950s opens on 4 July and features immersive interior sets - including a 1950s Milk Bar - and numerous items from the museum's collection.





City of Culture Trust raises £225,000 in funds

The Coventry City of Culture Trust has secured £225,000 in grant funding from a range of funders.

The funding will enable the Trust to support mental health and wellbeing projects, expand its digital programme, commission local spoken word & visual artists, and support the local music sector throughout Coventry's year as UK City of Culture. The funders are: The Severn Trent Community Fund (£75,000), the Linbury Trust (£50,000), Jerwood Arts (£50,000), the Art Fund (£40,000) and The Radcliffe Trust (£10,000).

Belgrade in team-up with Cardboard Citizens

Coventry Belgrade Theatre has teamed up with Cardboard Citizens - an organisation that makes theatre with homeless people - to deliver a bespoke programme of work which will culminate in the staging of a brand-new musical - The Ruff Tuff Cream Puff Estate Agency.

The show, which will feature a cast of professional actors and a chorus of Coventry citizens who have 'lived experience' of homelessness, will be staged at the Belgrade from Saturday 9 to Saturday 16 October. For more information, visit belgrade.co.uk



Temporary exhibition to open at motor museum

A temporary exhibition opens at the British Motor Museum on 22 July. Bringing together archival material, artefacts and oral-history videos, Factor Us In is the culmination of a two-year project to uncover the fascinating stories behind the motor industry.

The exhibition will look at the societal impact of the factories and the highs and lows of their production, as well as the everyday lives of the people who worked there.



Movies by Moonlight

Compton Verney is next month presenting four outdoor cinema nights (19 - 22 August). The venue's Movies By Moonlight series will feature screenings of Mamma Mia!, Dirty Dancing, Bohemian Rhapsody and The Greatest Showman. For more information, visit comptonverney.org.uk.

Royal Shakespeare Company completes work on Costume Workshop

The restoration and redevelopment of the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) Stratford-upon-Avon-located Costume Workshop has now been completed. The RSC has the largest in-house costume-making department of any British theatre. Its future has been secured through a mix of public and private support. A 30-strong team of costume makers has now moved into the new workshop, which is located opposite the Royal Shakespeare and Swan theatres. For the first time, the workshop will be open to visitors.

Olivier Award-winning production to return to Midlands theatre

Olivier and Tony Award-winning West End, The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time, will visit Birmingham Hippodrome next year as part of a 10th anniversary UK and Ireland tour. The hit show, which has so far been seen by more than five million people worldwide,

stops off at the venue from 29 March to 2 April.

A programme of activity, including discussions on depictions of neurodivergence in fictional characters, will be available online to coincide with the production's Birmingham stop-off.

For more information about the show, visit birminghamhippodrome.com



Vintage transport on show at Severn Valley Railway

Severn Valley Railway is providing train enthusiasts with the opportunity to check out some classic vehicles next month.

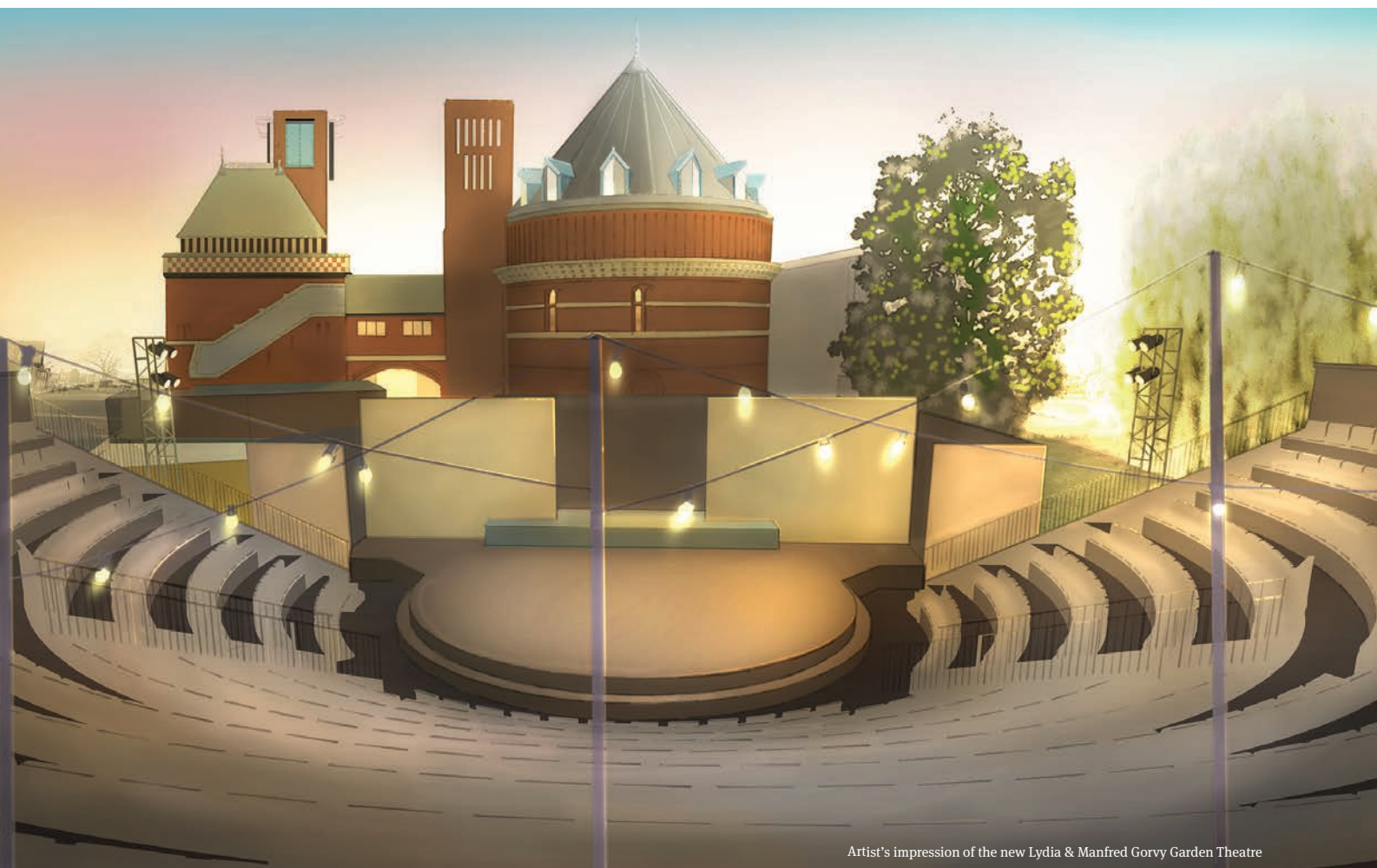
The railway's Vintage Transport Extravaganza (Saturday 7 & Sunday 8 August) will feature 'traction engines, buses, cars and lots more' at stations along the line. To book tickets, visit svr.co.uk



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Artist's impression of the new Lydia & Manfred Gorvy Garden Theatre

A COMEDY FOR OUR TIME

The Comedy Of Errors opens the Royal Shakespeare Company's brand-new outdoor Garden Theatre this month. The production's director, Phillip Breen, chats to What's On about the play and its relevance to life in the 21st century...

Bringing together farce and humour in a terrific tale of mistaken identity, *The Comedy Of Errors* - one of Shakespeare's earliest works - challenges its audiences on the subjects of love and the self. And whilst never fully providing answers to the questions it poses, the play nonetheless ably reflects its author's deep understanding of human nature.

Phillip Breen, who helms the Royal Shakespeare Company's latest version of the play, believes that it's the lack of definitive answers and endings in Shakespeare's

comedies that makes them less favoured by the masses. But this, he says, is the exact reason why we should be paying more attention to them...

"In tragedy, someone makes a mistake then dies, so it's all wound up at the end. Tragedies give people answers. One of the problems of comedy is that they don't really end - and the ending they do come to is ambiguous and tricky. With no direct, definite moral message or ending, comedies are much more like real life and pose difficult problems. Shakespeare's comedies are so

great because they're transgressive and say difficult things about human nature, who we are and our relationships. But people are much more comforted by a tragic end to the universe - whether that be nuclear war, climate change, or an asteroid hitting the earth - and less comforted by, over the course of one billion years, all the molecules just unhooking and us floating off into this post-mordial soup. But being comforted by the idea of tragedy doesn't make the plays themselves better or worse.

"The way I see it with Shakespeare is that

there are plays that are considered to be popular now - but that wasn't always the case. Even Shakespeare in general wasn't popular and went out of fashion for 200-odd years until he was revived by the Victorians. Only 100 years ago, he had nowhere near the ubiquity he has now. Karl Marx wrote that there was more life in Act One of *The Merry Wives Of Windsor* than there was in the entirety of German literature. Giuseppe Verdi could have chosen any work to make into his final opera, but he chose to make Falstaff based on *The Merry Wives Of Windsor*. I'm interested not just in which plays are popular at a certain time, but also which plays aren't so popular, and what that says about us. I think these more knotty comedies pose really interesting questions to audiences. I'm interested in why certain plays get done and why others don't."

Phillip believes *The Comedy Of Errors* is woefully underappreciated. Indeed, it's viewed by many as proof that even the bard himself could have an off-day.

"A lot of Shakespeare's plays have certain reputations - often ones that are unhelpful. I don't think people should be fooled by the reputation of *The Comedy Of Errors* - light, accessible, short, funny - because it's all those things but also an incredibly profound play, particularly for our times. It's about the nature of the self, who we are, and the soul. It's one of Shakespeare's earlier plays and maps out a lot of the themes that he then uses throughout his career; things that he encounters for the first time, it seems, and then carries forward as inspiration for his other plays. This is the first time we encounter twins in Shakespeare's work. This is the first time we get one of those great Act Five scenes in Shakespeare's comedies, where all the strands come together in that really satisfying Shakespearean way. We have so many sketches for future plays and productions in *The Comedy Of Errors*, from *The Merry Wives Of Windsor* to *Macbeth*.

"It's a play that's very admired by real Shakespeare-heads. A lot of academics who really know Shakespeare think this is the place to start if you're a fan of his work. So many people rate the play - and it's not him having an 'off day' because it's not like *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Othello*. Because this is a comedy and all the characters have northern accents, those characters have often been forbidden from having complex psychologies, as opposed to if they were princes in a tragedy. If something doesn't work in *Hamlet*, a director assumes it's their fault. If something doesn't work in *The Comedy Of Errors*, it gets cut. Again, that's

not actually the fault of the play itself, but of the unearned reputation of others. It's actually a major piece of work and a great flower in the canon. It's funny, truthful, accessible, and has some really interesting things to say about the way we live now - both in pandemic times and the digital age. It's deep, and leaves a lasting mark on you."

The humour is, of course, a great draw too.

"One of the best things about the play is that none of the characters think they're in *The Comedy Of Errors*. All the characters are being absolutely tortured. That's kind of fun, both for the audience and for the actors to play. The driving force of something like *Fawlty Towers* is a sense of sadism towards the main character, which *The Comedy Of Errors* definitely has. *Trading Places*, the Eddie Murphy and Dan Aykroyd film, has a lot of *The Comedy Of Errors* in it, too. Comedy is an extraordinarily funny play because it's completely bonkers but beautifully plotted. Modern sitcoms are dealing in types and tropes from comedies that have been around for a very long time, so they're things everyone can relate to.

"A lot of the plot is both funny and sad at the same time. The great comedies of any age always have that interplay between laughter and tears. We remember the end of *Only Fools And Horses*. We remember Gavin And Stacey. Everyone goes mad about *The Royle Family*, but the episode we really remember is the birth of baby David on the bathroom floor. We're comedians at heart, but it's often much more gratifying when audiences cry during a comedy. When done properly, it's like nothing else."

And why will *The Comedy Of Errors* resonate with its audiences?

"This play follows the seven hours in which two sets of twins, separated at birth, find each other through various situations of mistaken identity. Shakespeare discusses the idea of knowing yourself through others, which is the brilliant and profound message at the heart of *The Comedy Of Errors*; one that I think will really resonate with the times. The play stops because they all find each other. And these people become sane through their relationships with others; by standing with other people, sharing the same space and talking.

"Plays change with every tick of the clock, and that's the beauty of them. They change depending on what's happened in the news that day. Every single night without fail, a play changes. But *The Comedy Of Errors* feels very apt at the moment. We can only make meaning through fully interacting with other

people and shared imagination. It's hard to will that into being online, however much we try.

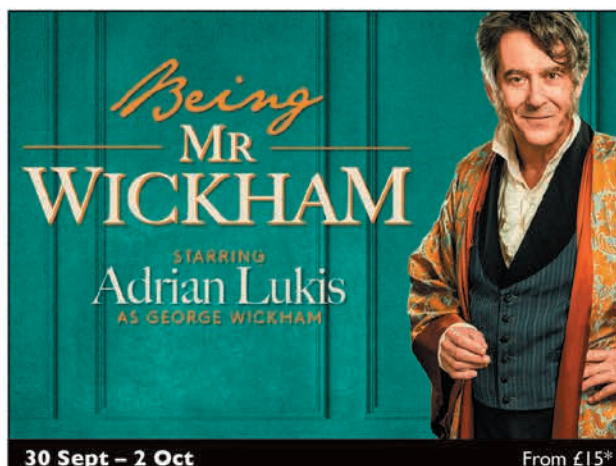
"Increasingly I feel an evangelical zeal from working in the theatre, because it's one of the last places that people get together to meditate on a poem; to think about something that's difficult and knotty, but in a collective way. The great thing about great art is that it makes you feel less alone in the world. It gives you ultra-specificity of a feeling or aspect of life to consider, but in a universal way - and suddenly you feel less alone and much more forgiving. To go and see ourselves on the stage *as we are*, rather than what we want to be, is great. Looking at humanity as we are - flawed, longing, complex, happy and sad, all at the same time - is relatable. You clap really hard at the end and smile at people on your way out, as if to say, 'Wasn't that great?'. The opportunities to do those sorts of things are few and far between. Collective imagination, collective consciousness and sympathy are things that only theatre can give us to such an extent."

It's that collective experience and imagination that will bring people back to the theatre time and time again...

"We've been telling stories for as long as there's been civilisation, and we've been making theatre since the time of the Ancient Greeks. This isn't to make light of Covid. It's been incredibly difficult for professionals working in the business, and for our audiences who love to see our work. We don't take any of that for granted, and we know people are absolutely screaming to get back out there and come and see us. Historically, though, there have been countless hard times for theatres. Even in Shakespeare's own career he was able to write a good chunk of his sonnets, *King Lear* and, probably, *Measure For Measure*, in times of plague. These times sometimes lead to new flowerings. I think the idea of having 500 people in one place - watching one thing and experiencing it all together - has been around for as long as there have been people. It'll be going on for the rest of time. I've got no worries whatsoever about the theatre's ability to bounce back."

.....

The Comedy Of Errors shows at the RSC's new Lydia & Manfred Gorvy Garden Theatre which is located in the Swan Gardens, Stratford-upon-Avon. The production opens on Tuesday 13 July and runs until Sunday 26 September



BOOK NOW www.belgrade.co.uk

*Ticket price includes a £1.50 booking fee. No fee applies if booking online.

Ready to wine and dine?

Six of Coventry's bars and eateries you've got to visit...

The Telegraph

157 Corporation Street, CV1 1GU

The iconic Telegraph building was home to the city's newspaper for more than 50 years. It's now a chic hotel boasting Forme & Chase, a restaurant, bar & lounge bringing back some authentic 1950s glamour, and seasonal rooftop bar Generators - the perfect place to enjoy a cocktail, or two, whilst watching the sun setting over Belgrade Plaza. A selection of hot and cold tapas is also available.



Earlsdon Supper Club

Earlsdon, CV5 6PN

Earlsdon Supper Club has established itself as *the* unique dining experience in Coventry. 'Drawing from time spent in Michelin kitchens and life on the rolling hills of Tuscany', they create menus that subvert expectation and bring fun back into dining. Using organic produce from their allotment and garden, their Italian philosophy of using only the best fresh ingredients shines through in their dishes.



Twisted Barrel

FarGo Village, Far Gosford Street, CV1 5ED

Twisted Barrel is an artisan vegan brewery making hand-crafted flavourful beer in small batches. Located in FarGo Village, it sells a selection of core, regular and seasonal beers, including oatmeal stout God's Twisted Sister, session IPA Sine Qua Non, vanilla mild Beast Of A Midlands Mild and Belgian Blonde Lonely Souls.



Gourmet Food Kitchen

FarGo Village, Far Gosford Street, CV1 5ED

Gourmet Food Kitchen is a small, independent restaurant serving artisan fresh food made on the premises every day by chef Tony Davies.

Tony cures and smokes his own salmon, bacon and pastrami. Sample menu options include hickory smoked pork belly, fennel-infused tenderloin, sweetcorn runnerbeans, cider fondants and calvados jus.



Dhillon's Spire Bar

New Union Street, CV1 2PS

Dhillon's Spire Bar is an atmospheric and conspiratorially cosy space housed in the historically recognised Christchurch Spire. The award-winning brewery makes exclusive and beautifully crafted ales with a slight hint of madness, using a combination of traditional and modern brewing methods. Tasty street food and cocktails are also on offer, and the venue boasts an outside space that's perfect for the summer months.



Coombe Abbey

Brinklow Road, Binley, CV3 2AB

Dining at Coombe Abbey is a feast for the senses, whatever the occasion. Whether it's breakfast, afternoon tea, private dining, a casual lunch or celebratory meal, the venue creates delicious dishes made using locally sourced ingredients.

With subtle lighting, lavish furnishings and unobtrusive yet attentive service, dining at Coombe is a truly memorable food experience.



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PETER RABBIT

A MIDSUMMER
NIGHT'S DREAM



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COMPANY

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THEATRE
BEGINS

IN THE LYDIA & MANFRED GORVY GARDEN THEATRE

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ENGLAND**

Cidery welcomes first visitors to new taproom

Award-winning family business Napton Cidery has welcomed the first visitors to its new taproom in Southam, Warwickshire - 14 months on from its planned launch.

As well as cider, the taproom sells perry, juices, spirits and vinegars. The venue is open Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm and on Sunday from 12pm to 5pm. For more details, visit: naptoncidery.co.uk



Popular food festival returns for 10th year

The annual Great Malvern Food Festival is back for its 10th year.

Boasting the Malvern Hills as its backdrop, the festival will take place on 10 & 11 July at Priory Park. The new location will enable market stalls to be spread across a larger area. The Cookery Demonstration Theatre will be located in an open-air bandstand.

Restaurant-quality dining... at home!

Husband-and-wife team Richard and Claudia Bramble are offering customers a unique dining experience.

As well as catering for weddings and events, Bramble Dining brings restaurant-quality cuisine into people's homes courtesy of three five-course menu options and a selection of food for younger diners.

The Brambles promise to leave your kitchen as they found it - and will even do the dishes!... For more information, visit brambledining.com



Gin Trains return to Severn Valley Railway for the summer

Severn Valley Railway has announced the return of its popular Gin Trains on selected dates in July and August.

The award-winning attraction has partnered with The Little Gin Company to offer visitors a tasting experience with a difference. The Gin Trains leave Bewdley station on Friday 23 July, Saturday 14, Sunday 15 & Friday 20 August.

Passengers will be welcomed with a refreshing cocktail as they steam towards Bridgnorth, enjoying samples from a summer-themed

menu along the way. Also on board to share their knowledge and answer questions will be experts from The Little Gin Company.

A 45-minute stop in Bridgnorth will provide just enough time to visit The Railwayman's pub and refreshment room, both on platform one of the station.

The return journey to Bewdley includes two more tastings, followed by a glass of your favourite gin from the tasting sequence, served with premium tonic and garnish. Additional drinks will also be available to purchase.

Gin bar opens in Warwick

A new gin bar has opened on Swan Street in Warwick.

Offering 'a unique experience' for gin lovers to enjoy, That Gin & Cocktail Bar stocks more than 100 different gins.

Commenting on the new bar, its owner, Steve Bazell, said: "We want to enable people to explore different flavour profiles by talking to us about what they enjoy so that we can serve the right drink for them from our extensive range." A food menu is also on offer, with sharing-board options, afternoon teas and a range of homemade cheesecakes (including a G&T-flavoured one!) all featuring.

That Gin & Cocktail Bar is open 4pm to 11pm on Wednesday and Thursday, 11.30am to midnight on Friday and Saturday, and 11am to 7pm on Sunday.





Photos by Andrew Moore

POWERING CREATIVITY

HOW ONE OF COVENTRY'S HISTORIC BUILDINGS WILL PLAY ITS PART IN SUPPORTING THE ARTS...

After working tirelessly ahead of Coventry's year as UK City of Culture, creative company Imagineer are finally ready to open their newly redeveloped workspace in the Daimler Powerhouse. What's On caught up with Chief Executive Jane Hytch to talk about the future of Coventry's creative industry...

Creative company Imagineer formed in 2005 with a vision to bring together artists, engineers, architects and innovators to deliver dynamic performances in and around Coventry.

The last year or so has perhaps required more innovation than ever before, as lockdown put a stop to Imagineer's usual ways of working. But Chief Executive Jane Hytch is able to focus on the positives: "I think some of the digital work that we've been developing probably wouldn't have happened without

Covid," she explains. "We were due to deliver a major performance of Bridge - which is our big touring project at the moment - but when lockdown happened, we delivered it online. We realised that we could still reach people, engage people and do meaningful things through digital projects. There are all kinds of ways in which we started to develop our work, which I know will have a lasting impact on creative development."

When Coventry won the bid to be the UK's City of Culture 2021, no one could have

predicted the impact a global pandemic would have on the city's preparations for its year in the spotlight. But now that the programme of events is well and truly under way, the future looks bright for Jane and her team: "You can feel the city starting to ramp up and open its doors, showing what it can do. I think Coventry is going to have a really great year."

Imagineer will be playing a big part in the festivities, having led the development of the purpose-built Daimler Powerhouse Creation

Centre, the opening of which takes place as part of the City of Culture events programme.

“The redevelopment of the Daimler Powerhouse wouldn’t have happened without City of Culture. So the opening weekend in August is very much set within a whole outdoor arts festival programme.”

The project has seen the site transformed into a creative hub, boasting aerial training space, rehearsal rooms, rigging points for lighting, projection & sound, as well as offices and meeting rooms.

The Powerhouse is all that remains of the Daimler site, which was destroyed in the Blitz during World War Two. Imagineer hopes to celebrate the building’s history.

“We’ve been working with local historian David Fry, and he told us that, to industrialists, the Daimler Building is as important as Coventry Cathedral.

“Daimler was the first car factory in Britain and considered to be a centre of engineering excellence, until it was bombed in the Blitz. The powerhouse withstood that, but it’s been empty for a long time. It’s been great to breathe life back into it.”

Formally opening over the August Bank Holiday weekend, the redevelopment will provide a dedicated space for artists and resident creative companies. An extensive programme of events and activities accompanies the opening, the central element of which is a collaborative project titled The Brightest Moon.

“We decided that we would do a central installation, into which all the resident Daimler arts companies would feed, and that’s what The Brightest Moon is.

“On the night of the Coventry Blitz, it was reported that the moon shone at its brightest. We were able to find an original image of the moon from that night, and we wanted to recreate it inside the Daimler building.

“We’re in the process of what we’re calling ‘a big weave’, where members of the

community weave metre-square panels which will all be joined together to create an image of the moon.”

Ribbon-weaving was formerly Coventry’s main industry. The Brightest Moon incorporates this into its celebration of the city.

“We’ll also be creating the 28 strikes that hit the city that night, by composing a sound effect. Outside the building, the audience can put headsets on and see where the strikes hit the city.

“It’s an exhibition that people can come and see, but it’s also part-live, because the space will be transformed into a beautiful green ribboned environment.

“We’re trying to capture the night of the Coventry Blitz but also look towards what the building is about, which is the future of creativity and collaboration with other sectors, shown through the interweaving of the ribbons.”

Looking towards the future is integral to Imagineer’s ethos. They are hoping their home in the Daimler Powerhouse will provide a much-needed space in which creative industries can collaborate to deliver innovative programmes.

“More work needs to be done to encourage cultural engagement, and I think Daimler will do that. Hyperlocal work is really important to us, so a lot of our work will be inspired by the community work we do, and the relationships we forge with communities and across sectors.

“City of Culture will end this time next year, and the Daimler building will provide an important legacy for continuing all that work.”

The opening of the Daimler Powerhouse is a huge event in Imagineer’s calendar, but their endeavours don’t stop there. Currently in development is their major City of Culture project, FLOW, which culminates next April. The event focuses on exploring our

responsibility to the ocean, combining aerial performance and art installations with an international conference of young people curating activity around the ocean’s wealth. FLOW will be part of the crossover with the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

With plenty more bold and impressive plans in development, it’s clear that Imagineer doesn’t shy away from adventurous projects.

For Jane and her team, it’s all in a day’s work: “Our job is to do ambitious things. That’s what Imagineer does. There’s always a lot of adrenaline, because we do large-scale work, and it’s often very risk-taking. We’re so lucky to be able even to think about doing some of the things that we do.”

The new Daimler Powerhouse Creation Centre will no doubt enable Imagineer to continue to produce extraordinary work. The on-going redevelopment has been one saving grace for the company during the lockdown period, and finishing it on time and on budget is an impressive feat.

The building played an important part in Coventry’s past, and Jane is confident that the new and improved space will hold a valuable role in the city’s future: “The key thing about Daimler is the support it will give to emerging artists and companies. City of Culture inspires and supports younger creatives, and there’s going to be a community of people who are hungry to make and develop their own work. Seeing young people come through is really important to us, but the support needs to continue. Daimler will be a place in the city where people can come and expect an open door.”

.....

The Daimler Powerhouse Opening Weekend takes place 28 - 30 August from 12noon to 4pm. Ticketed events will also take place on Saturday and Sunday evenings. For further details, visit: imagineer-productions.co.uk



Imagineer's Bridge



Godiva: The Homecoming



Festival of Imagineers 2017

As we welcome the world.
We look at Coventry's influence on
global music in Music City, Coventry.



GHOST TOWN 2 HOST TOWN

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Explore Coventry's recent past and bright future
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Pete Chambers
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Great gigs coming up in the second half of 2021. Get those tickets booked NOW!

Gigs

David Rodigan

Leamington Assembly, Fri 12 November

A highly respected and long-serving reggae and dancehall DJ, David Rodigan's unsinkable passion for reggae music first flickered into life back in the early 1960s, when, while still a schoolboy, he heard ska music for the very first time. David got his big break in 1978 after landing a spot on Radio London, moving to Capital Radio a year later. Having since presented shows on Kiss FM, BBC 1Xtra and BBC Radio Two, the 69-year-old is now an MBE, an honour he received in recognition of his services to broadcasting.



Roddy Woomble

The Tin Music & Arts, Coventry, Thurs 7 October

Known for his enigmatic lyrics and warm baritone voice, Roddy Woomble has been the frontman of much-loved Scottish alternative rock band Idlewild for the past two decades. As well as recording nine studio albums with them, Roddy has also released six of his own, including *My Secret Is My Silence* (2006), *Listen To Keep* (2013) and *The Deluder* (2017). He's touring to the Midlands in support of his latest offering, *Lo! Soul*, released this year.



Maximo Park

HMV Coventry Empire, Wed 1 September

Best known for their emotionally rich lyrics, vocal melodies and atmospheric guitar playing, Maximo Park features vocalist Paul Smith, guitarist Duncan Lloyd and drummer Tom English.

Initially a quintet, the group's debut album, 2005's *A Certain Tiger*, was nominated for a Mercury Prize - and both it and 2007's *Our Earthly Pleasures* went gold in the UK. The trio are back on tour later this year in support of their seventh album, *Nature Always Wins*.

John Grant

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Fri 1 October

"Grant's magnificent velvety howl of a voice needs to be consumed at close quarters," wrote *The Times*. "So too his light-footed wit... It's hard to think of a more loveable performer." American singer-songwriter John Grant here takes a stripped-back approach, performing classics from across his career on just piano and keys, alongside long-time piano player Chris Pemberton.

Martin Simpson

Huntingdon Hall, Worcester, Fri 12 November

In the late 1980s, guitarist Martin Simpson waved a fond farewell to his successful career on the British folk circuit to start a new life in the States, where he improved his blues technique and worked with some famous names.

Back home on this side of the pond, he's best known for his work alongside the likes of June Tabor, Steeleye Span, The Albion Band and Richard Thompson.

A virtuoso guitarist, Simpson's exploration of the innovatory always gives his audience something to chew on.

Beans On Toast

Kasbah, Coventry, Mon 6 December

"A collection of songs written during, and inspired by, the 2020 shitshow," is how Beans On Toast describes his latest album, *The Unforeseeable Future*. Emerging from the London folk scene over a decade ago and singing mainly about sex, drugs and politics, the artist otherwise known as Jay McAllister is a surefire bet for an entertaining evening out.

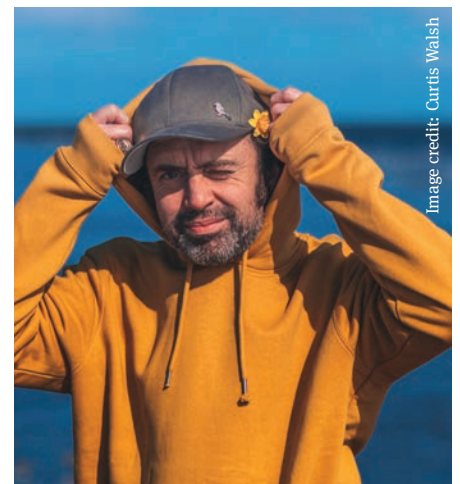


Image credit: Curtis Walsh

“ Music will play a powerful role in reuniting communities after the isolation and hardship of the past year. We hope that Symphony Hall will be a beacon for that reconnection... ”





The Symphony Hall experience just got even better...

The past 14 months has seen one of the UK's premier performance venues undergo a massive £13.2million transformation of its public spaces, thanks to funds raised prior to the pandemic.

Since its opening in 1991, Symphony Hall's 2,262-seater auditorium has hosted some of the UK's - and indeed the world's - top musicians, comedians, dancers, wordsmiths and actors, its eclectic line-up drawing audiences from across the Midlands region and beyond.

The charity responsible for Symphony Hall - and also for Birmingham Town Hall - has been renamed. Previously called Performances Birmingham Ltd, it has now rebranded to B:Music, a name which it believes better reflects its mission to 'inspire a love of music through performance, participation and learning'.

Away from the main stage, the Symphony Hall foyer has provided a platform for many local artists to showcase their talent across the years - and it's this area which has benefitted from the recent transformation.

Entrances to the building are now sited on either corner of the venue - in addition to access via the International Convention Centre (ICC).

New seating areas and upgrades to bars and cafe spaces give the foyer a sparkling new look. But it's the new Jennifer Blackwell performance space that will make the biggest impression going forward, as the music industry begins to recover from the devastating impact of the pandemic.

Nick Reed, Chief Executive of B:Music, said: "Music will play a powerful role in reuniting communities after the isolation and hardship of the past year. We hope that Symphony Hall will be a beacon for that reconnection."

The Jennifer Blackwell space will offer local artists more opportunities to perform as part of a daily programme of free and affordable

events and activities. The space is this month being showcased during a free open weekend (16 & 17 July). Performers will include: BBC Young Jazz Musician 2018, Xhosa Cole; Europe's finest female a cappella quintet, Black Voices; and queer pop sensation Tom Aspaul.

Aiming to turn up the volume on Black Birmingham artists during its opening weekend, B:Music has invited musical responses on the theme of individual and systemic racism. These will be presented under This Is Not The Time For Silence banner. Birmingham-based singer-songwriter Relley C is one of the artists contributing to the project: "I can't wait to share my original material with a live audience again. Just to be in the same space, share the same vibe and actually feel the music together at the same time is an experience that no virtual set-up could ever buy. I'm keen to get back on stage and present my earlier, recent and most exclusive songs with those lovely faces on 17 July. It's going to be an amazing night!"

On Monday 2 August, Symphony Hall's first non-socially distanced performance of 2021 will take place in the auditorium, when music icon Robert Plant takes to the stage with his band, Saving Grace.

"These two majestic venues (Town Hall as well as Symphony Hall) are such an inspiration," says Robert, "not only to play in, but to enjoy the amazing mix of artists passing through. From the mid-1960s and the American folk blues packages with Sonny Boy, Son House and Bukka White, right through to John Prine and Lucinda Williams, an evening at these venues is a remarkable adventure for artists and audiences alike."

Other new and notable events coming up at Symphony Hall include the first-ever B:Jazz Festival, presented in partnership with Jazz FM. Taking place from 23 to 28 August, the festival features Birmingham-born pianist and singer Reuben James. Regarded as one of

the most exciting and creatively assured artists to have emerged in recent years, Reuben is delighted to be returning to his home town to perform: "I'm very excited to be coming back to perform at B:Jazz Fest in front of my family, friends and a real audience. After the last year, I'm sure it's going to feel totally surreal. I have such a beautiful relationship with B:Music's Jazzlines programme - I was one of the educators at the very first Jazzlines Summer School back in 2012, so I very much feel like I've come full circle to now be performing on the Symphony Hall stage at their first B:Jazz Fest."

The Jazzlines Summer School, as mentioned by Reuben, also takes place in August. This non-residential free-to-attend event is open to young musicians (aged 11 to 19) from Birmingham and the surrounding areas who want to develop key skills in aural training, ensemble musicianship, jazz repertoire and harmony. Application forms are available by emailing jazzlines@thsh.co.uk

Later-year highlights at Symphony Hall include piano maestro Jools Holland teaming up with R&B favourite Ruby Turner and pop legend Lulu for two pre-Christmas concerts on 20 & 21 December.

Birmingham-born Ruby is excited at the prospect of once again performing at the venue: "It's going to be a wonderful year ahead with the return of live music to Symphony Hall. I'm really looking forward to getting back to performing live music - and I know my fellow musicians are, too. I can't wait to see the beautiful Symphony Hall auditorium full of people enjoying themselves once again."

We've here covered just a small sample of what B:Music is offering in the coming months. For full listings on all future events, visit: bmusic.co.uk



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Adam Kay

Malvern Theatres, Fri 23 July;
Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Sun 25 July;
Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Sun 12
September; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury,
Thurs 14 October

After watching an Adam Kay performance, Stephen Fry declared, "This made me very, very happy." Numerous sell-out years at the Edinburgh Fringe and tens of millions of YouTube hits later, former obstetrician and gynaecologist Adam is this month visiting the Midlands with his hugely popular tour, *This Is Going To Hurt: Secret Diaries Of A Junior Doctor*.

The show features one hour and one minute's-worth of humorous material based on his bestselling book of the same name. Expect splendidly silly spoof songs and some seriously shocking stories from the NHS frontline...



The Noise Next Door

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, Sun 4
July; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Wed 6
October; The Roses, Tewkesbury, Fri 5
November

Praised for presenting their audiences with 'a superior kind of chaos', The Noise Next Door is a quartet of improvising comedians who've been garnering critical praise for a good few years now. Big in Edinburgh at festival time, they pride themselves on their originality and quick-wittedness (the latter being pretty much essential in the world of improvisational comedy!).

Their previous on-stage endeavours have included a mini-musical embracing the uncomfortable bedfellows of pantomime, folk music and death-metal, and a surreal adventure in which the Magic Roundabout's Zebedee leads the forces of good against Darth Vader, who's holed up in Worcester Cathedral. Check 'em out.



Mark Watson

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, Thurs 8 July; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sun 3
October; The Brewhouse, Burton-on-Trent, Fri 12 November; Festival Drayton Centre, Market
Drayton, North Shropshire, Sat 13 November; Bilston Town Hall, Sat 22 January; Foxlowe Arts
Centre, Leek, Staffs, Sun 23 January; The Old Rep, Birmingham, Sun 15 May; The Place, Telford,
Thurs 21 July

Well established on the UK comedy circuit, Mark Watson was born in Bristol to Welsh parents and initially delivered his act with a Welsh accent, claiming he felt "more comfortable talking in a voice that I didn't quite recognise as my own".

A regular contributor to the Edinburgh Fringe, Mark has the curious distinction of having performed standup shows which

have lasted for a period in excess of 24 hours. "Comedy is certainly a time-consuming element of my life," he admits, "but then while I'm out touring and on stage, there are people at home doing far less glamorous things. There have certainly been times when I've been very happy to say, 'Of course I'd like to stay and help out with that plumbing crisis, but the Midlands awaits!'"

Frank Skinner

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Thurs 22 & Fri 23 July

A 24-carat class act if ever there was one, Frank Skinner here returns to his Midlands roots to present *Showbiz*, a set that's already scored a big hit in the London West End.

The dark days of his alcoholism, his allegedly dwindling sex-drive and his unbridled love affair with West Bromwich Albion Football Club all combine to ensure the Black Country-born 64-year-old is never short of a story to tell.

Some less-enamoured reviewers of this latest offering complain that despite the show being the length of a football match, it lacks anything much on which to hang one's hat. Frank Fans won't care too much about that, though: 90 minutes of high-quality gags are sure to leave them begging for extra-time.



MARK THOMAS

**on calling his watermelon radishes Herbie Hancocks
and how spending lockdown with his mum was like an
episode of Mrs Steptoe And Son...**



Comedian Mark Thomas is hugely witty and as savage as a rabid dog when it comes to putting hecklers in their place. His latest touring show, 50 Things About Us, is a fast and furiously funny journey through our national memory. Expect gongs, bungs, guns and unicorns...

Tell us about 50 Things About Us, Mark...

The show is about things that do or should influence who we think we are. A state-of-the-nation address following Covid 19 and Brexit. But it's also a big old celebration of being together. There are gags, stunning facts, quiz questions and singalongs, as well as me running around like a mad thing doing my funny stuff.

How did you decide on the 50?

I did one show called 100 Acts Of Minor Dissent, and it was a lot harder than I thought it would be, so I thought I'd cut down the work load on this one and only do 50 things. It didn't work out as planned.

What's the most fascinating fact you discovered when researching for the show?

The UK is an archipelago.

And the most surprising?

The most surprising fact is a very personal one. I was brought up in the church, and the family used to go to the Wilberforce Church on Clapham Common - it was regarded as the anti-slavery church and is celebrated for it. I didn't know until recently that one of the key movers behind keeping slavery going and making sure compensation was paid to the slave owners, George Hibbert, also worshipped at the same church. In fact, he donated to the church, which was in receipt of money from slavery. His home on the Common, again built on slavery, is now a hospice. I have lived in this area most of my life, born and bred, but strangely none of that was mentioned in school, church or local events and history.

Tell us something about you that even your most devoted fans wouldn't know?

I grow my own watermelon radishes and call them Herbie Hancocks... after his seminal song Watermelon Man. Also I love foraging, especially during wild garlic season.

How do you foresee the future of the UK?

The UK has 20 to 30 years. A united Ireland is going to be a force to be reckoned with; likewise an independent Scotland. England... we'll have to see.

What could change the country for the better?

If John Betjeman's friendly bombs did not fall upon Slough but landed to the south... Come, friendly bombs and fall on Eton, The rich must not remain unbeaten.*
* please note this refers to the class system rather than individual pupils, who I am assured are regularly beaten.

Are you ever concerned that the serious political and social issues you discuss might outweigh the comedy element of your shows?

Don't be daft. I've been doing this for 36 years - well, 35; like most of us, I've had a forced year's sabbatical recently - and I've managed to earn a living during that time and picked up loads of awards, so I've not f*cked up too badly.

It's unusual for a comedian's touring show to lead to an art exhibition. How did that come about?

Ah, the 100 Acts Of Minor Dissent exhibition. It was part of the bet that started the show. I would commit 100 acts of minor dissent in a year, and if I managed to do so then I would put on a free art show featuring the artworks, posters, sculptures and weird rubbings that helped create the show. If I lost and didn't commit the 100 Acts in a year, I would donate £1,000 to UKIP as a forfeit. I did actually send a cheque to UKIP for £1,000 but from a bank account with no money in it... it was the 100th Act.

Do you see the pandemic influencing your material in the future?

If you're a satirist then having a lying, overblown, freeloading oaf leading a country through a crisis is going to influence your material.

Have you found much to laugh about during the past 12 months?

No. I've walked around looking like a dour Victor Meldrew zombie (*sarcasm alert*) You're going to find out if you come to the show, but I spent the first five months in lockdown with my 85-year-old mum. It was like an episode of Mrs Steptoe And Son, except she didn't bathe in the kitchen sink.

Who made you laugh most growing up?

Dave Allen and Steptoe And Son. My dad was very strict and quite the patriarch. The only times we could really relax and let our hair down was watching those programmes. My dad, who would finish work on the building site, would have his bath in the morning... and in order to keep his favourite leather armchair clean, he would undo his belt, drop his trousers and sit watching Steptoe And Son with his trousers around his ankles, laughing at how common they were. How could that not impact on a young comedy mind.

QUICKFIRE QUESTIONS:

Best heckle you've ever received?

"Get on with it!" Shouted before I had even opened my mouth at the start of my first ever one-man show. The heckler was my dad.

Worst moment on stage?

Being asked up to be the volunteer when I'd been performing for only a year and ritually humiliated by a double act that doesn't exist now.

Finally, which fellow comedian would you pay to see in 2021?

So many. Kitson, obviously. Josie Long, Bridget Christie. Shazia Mirza is my favourite. Imran Yusuf, Tez, Johnny And The Baptists, James Acaster. Always Mark Steel. Can't wait to see people like Bryony Kimmings, Victoria Melody and all the fab performance artists too. Plus my favourite writer-performers, like Gary McNair; top, top performer.

.....

Mark Thomas' 50 Things About Us visits Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, on Sat 9 October, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, on Sat 15 October, Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton, on Sat 13 November, and MAC, Birmingham, on Wed 24 & Thurs 25 November.



Miss Julie

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 8 - Sat 10 July

August Strindberg's 1888 play - exploring issues including class, love, lust and the battle of the sexes - is widely considered to be the

author's greatest work. It's set on Midsummer's Eve on the estate of a Count in Sweden, where, during a party, the aristocratic Miss Julie finds herself drawn to the kitchen - and to her father's socially ambitious valet, Jean. But harmless flirtation soon turns into something more, and a ferocious power struggle ensues.

Coppelia: A Mystery

New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Fri 16 July - Sat 7 August



On a wintry Victorian street, a young girl is determined to discover the curious secret of the mysterious Doctor Coppelius' magical toshop...

Inviting its audience on a journey 'across an enchanting Victorian world, from outdoors and indoors and back again', this hour-long production was originally scheduled to show at the New Vic (pictured) late last year.

These Hills Are Ours

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, Thurs 15 July

Writer and theatre-maker Daniel Bye here collaborates with Chumbawamba founder member Boff Whalley to present an original and thought-provoking show about 'running away'. Performed via story and song, the piece focuses on Dan and Boff's decision to put on their running shoes and head for the hills. In so doing, they hoped not only to escape the restrictions of upbringing, class and politics, but also to celebrate 'wild places

and our freedom to roam them'.

The show runs for 90 minutes and is suitable for audience members aged 14 and older.



Avenue Q

Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham, Various dates between Tues 27 July & Sat 21 August

This Tony Award-winning musical focuses on subjects including dating, racism, being gay and finding your purpose in life.

At the centre of the story is Princeton, a bright-eyed college graduate with a tiny bank balance who, as he sets out on a voyage of self-discovery, finds himself being easily distracted by a busty blonde and a plethora of weird and wonderful friends.



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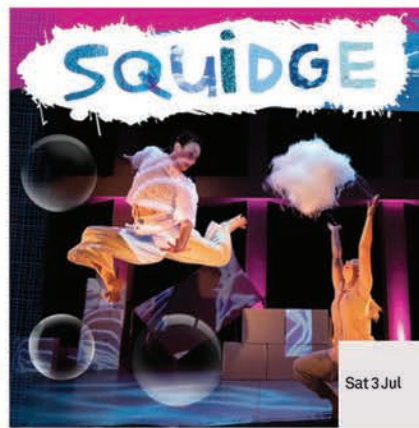
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Thu 15 -
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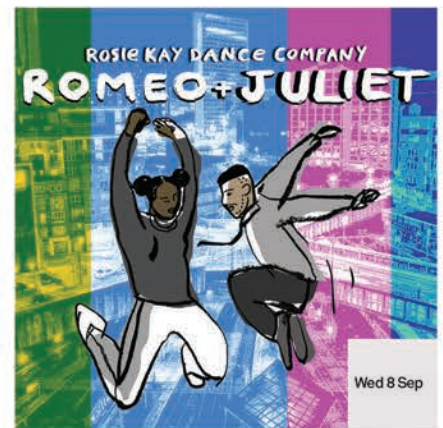
STREAMED PERFORMANCE



Tue 24 -
Sat 28 Aug



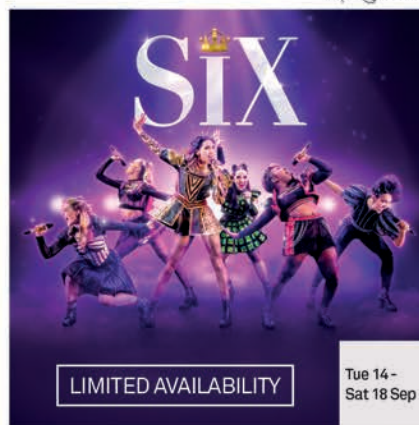
Mon 30 Aug
- Sat 4 Sep



Wed 8 Sep

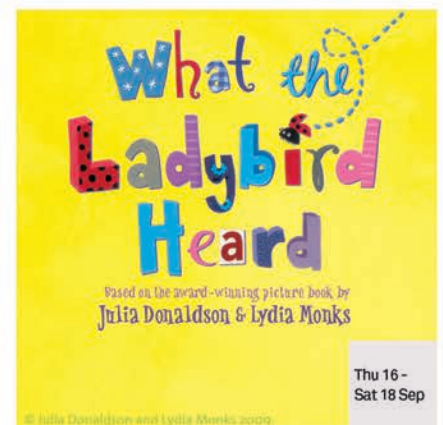


Sat 11 Sep



Tue 14 -
Sat 18 Sep

LIMITED AVAILABILITY



Thu 16 -
Sat 18 Sep



Tue 21 &
Wed 22 Sep



Fri 24 Sep



Sat 25 &
Sun 26 Sep

LIMITED AVAILABILITY



Copenhagen

Malvern Theatres, Mon 5 - Sat 10 July

This award-winning offering from Noises Off playwright Michael Frayn is set in the Danish capital of the title in 1941 and focuses on a clandestine encounter between two old friends, both of whom are Nobel Prize-winning physicists. But with war raging, the Danish Niels Bohr and the German Werner Heisenberg find themselves on opposite sides of the divide...

Copenhagen is a challenging piece - themes under discussion by Bohr and Heisenberg include atomic science and moral philosophy - so you'll need to stay focused and concentrate hard during the periods of exposition. As such, the play certainly won't be to everybody's taste, but there's nevertheless plenty to enjoy here, as its clutch of prestigious awards makes perfectly evident.

The Comedy Of Errors

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, Sat 10 & Sun 11 July; Avoncroft Museum, Bromsgrove, Sat 17 July; Abbey Vicarage Gardens, Tewkesbury, Sun 25 July; Mary Arden's Farm, Wilmcote, Stratford-upon-Avon, Fri 27 August

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 funnybone.

As indeed do Oddsocks themselves, 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."



Jane Eyre

Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, 14 - Sat 17 July

Wed

Blue Orange Arts is the latest ensemble to bring Charlotte Bronte's classic novel to the stage.

For those not up to speed with the story, it follows the orphaned Jane as she's sent by her cruel Aunt Reed to the bleak Lowood School. Later, on securing a position as governess at Thornfield Hall, Jane finds herself falling for the charms of the enigmatic Edward Rochester, unaware that the new object of her affection harbours a dark and terrible secret...

The 50-minute show is being presented as a double bill with Charles Dickens' The Signalman (running time, 40 minutes). You can see the productions separately or enjoy both on the same evening (for a discounted price).

Black Love

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Wed 28, Sat 31 July, Wed 4, Fri 6 - Sun 8 August

Real-life stories combine with imagined worlds and new songs inspired by an R&B heritage in this thought-provoking and form-busting new work. Focusing on Orion and Aurora - a brother & sister looking after each other in their small London flat, "filled with the memories of their parents' Black Love" - the show is here being presented as part of Roundabout, a festival of new plays and

community-led activities forming part of Coventry's ongoing City of Culture 2021 programme.



Elsie & Norm's Macbeth

The Commandery, Worcester, until Sun 11 July

Worcester Repertory Company present 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, Elsie and Norm re-enact the Stratford bard's famous 'Scottish play', taking on all of the roles between them.

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Oddsocks' The Comedy of Errors

Sun 25 July 6.30pm



80's Mania

Fri 30 July 7.30pm



Wonders of the West End

Fri 13 & Sat 14 Aug



Country Superstars

Fri 20 Aug 7.30pm



Woman Like Me: The Little Mix Show

Thur 26 Aug 7pm

Box Office: 01684 295074

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 Wed 7 Jul **Joker** dark Oscar-winning drama
 Thu 15 Jul **Green Book** set in 1962 in the US Deep South
 Wed 21 Jul **Blinded by the Lights** feat. music of Bruce Springsteen
 Look out for our family films in August then a full September programme.

Tickets
only £8 each
7.30pm
start

Summer Solidays! Children's fun in Solihull

Park Fundays Weds in August at four Solihull parks - family activities & rides. www.solihull.gov.uk/About-Solihull/events

Amazing Art Tues to Fri in libraries and at The Core during August. Extended fun art classes aimed at ages 6-10 & 11-16.

Storytime Sessions with Sohan Kailey & Kate's Storytree. Throughout the holidays at many local Libraries and The Core. See www.solihull.gov.uk/libraries

Summer Reading Challenge Wild World Heroes A nature-themed challenge for ages 4-11. Linking to the WWF for environmental reading fun. Complete it online or in libraries.

Live Theatre in Parks

Live outdoor performances of Mr Stink & Shakespeare's A Midsummer Nights Dream in Brueton Park, Solihull - See full details.



www.thecoretheatresolihull.co.uk
 Box Office: 0121 704 6962 (9.30-2.30pm Mon - Fri)



Howerd's End

Lichfield Garrick, Sat 24 July; Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham, Wed 6 - Sun 10 October; Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, 12 November

This is a brand-new offering from Mark Farrelly, whose previous plays, *Quentin Crisp: Naked Hope* and *The Silence Of Snow: The Life Of Patrick Hamilton*, enjoyed huge critical and public acclaim.

As with those earlier endeavours, this latest work steps behind the curtain to examine the private life of a public figure. On this occasion, the well known name under the spotlight is comedian Frankie Howerd, one of the biggest stars in the UK's light-entertainment firmament during the latter half of the 20th century.

Although the play's focal point is Howerd's clandestine relationship with Dennis Heymer, the production also provides plenty of opportunity to enjoy a full-flight Frankie doing what he did best - making people laugh. Mark Farrelly himself takes on the role of Dennis Heymer.

For younger audiences...

Sarah & Duck's Big Top Birthday

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, Thurs 29 - Sat 31 July

Young fans of BAFTA award-winning CBeebies programme *Sarah & Duck* seem certain to cry fowl - er, sorry, foul - if you fail to take them along to this live-on-stage version of the show.

Puppetry, storytelling and music are imaginatively combined as seven-year-old Sarah and her somewhat manic companion set out on another adventure. This one sees them planning a birthday party for Scarf Lady, ably assisted in their endeavours by fabulous friends The Ribbon Sisters, The Shallots, Flamingo & John and Umbrella....



Dragons And Mythical Beasts

The Place, Telford, Fri 23 - Sun 25 July; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 5 - Sat 7 August; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Thurs 1 - Sat 3 Sept, 2022

From the creators of West End favourite *Dinosaur World Live* comes this brand-new puppet extravaganza featuring a veritable smorgasbord of magnificent and mythical monsters - including a unicorn and a griffin. But wait, there's more... the colossal Stone Troll, the mysterious Indrik and the Japanese Baku are also present and correct, as indeed is the somewhat unpleasant Tooth Fairy. And as the title of the show makes perfectly clear, there's a dragon in attendance, too - although word has it the fiery beast is busy enjoying a well-earned kip, so wake it up at your peril...

Horrible Histories: Gorgeous Georgians & Vile Victorians

Swan Theatre, Worcester, Tues 27 July; Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Thurs 26 August; Palace Theatre, Redditch, Sat 9 October

If you love the *Horrible Histories* series - and why the heck wouldn't you?! - then this two-for-one presentation is a show well worth catching. Featuring both *Gorgeous Georgians* and *Vile Victorians*, the production asks such

searching questions as: Are you ready to swing with a Georgian king? Can you see eye to eye with Admiral Nelson? And does the Duke of Wellington get the boot?

All will be revealed in a show that advertises itself as 'a horrible history of Britain, with all the nasty bits left in!'.

The Three Musketeers

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, Sun 18 July

Get set for some serious swashing of bucklers as three of literature's finest rapier-thrusting heroes comically cavort in the great outdoors this month, courtesy of the always-amusing Morgan & West. Alexandre Dumas' legendary trio of fictional fighters here focus their attention on providing an hour's-worth of frivolous family fun, along the way serving up 'a cavalcade of whimsy, wit, and (s)wordplay'.

Summertime slapstick at its finest, we venture to suggest...



Outdoor theatre across the region this summer

A Dog's Tale

Mikron Theatre Company explore the extraordinary world of heroic hounds, pampered pedigrees and naughty nobblers through the halls and history of Crufts.

Showing at: St Mary's Allotments, Leamington Spa, Fri 2 July; Raphael's Restaurant, Evesham, Sat 7 August; Bishampton Village Hall, Pershore, Sun 8 August; The Wharf Inn, Southam, Warwickshire, Sun 15 August; The Folly, Napton on the Hill, Warwickshire, Thurs 19 August; Camp House Inn, Nr Worcester, Sun 22 August; The Bridge House, Solihull, Wed 25 August; Tontine Gardens, Stourport on Severn, Sun 29 August; Springfield Park, Kidderminster, Tues 31 August; Bantock House Museum & Park, Wolverhampton, Wed 1 September; The Navigation Inn, Stafford, Thurs 2 September; St Thomas & St Andrews, Stafford, Fri 3 September

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Shakespeare's tale of tangled lovers, warring fairies and hapless human-beings takes 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: 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



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 mischief-making 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: Bowring Park, Wellington, Wed 11 August; Beacon Park, Lichfield, Sun 22 August

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 brand-new version of the Lewis Carroll classic.

Showing at: Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire, Fri 9 July



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

Atlanta Forever

Join Atlanta FC as they tackle new football skills, master the offside rule and kick back at the doubters...

New show presented by Mikron Theatre.

Showing at: The Two Boats Inn, Southam, Warwickshire, Sat 21 August; Camp House Inn, Nr Worcester, Sun 22 August; The Bridge House, Solihull, Wed 25 August; Springfield Park, Kidderminster, Tues 31 August

The Comedy Of Errors

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

Showing at: Lydia & Manfred Gorvy Garden Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Tues 13 July - Sun 26 September

Emotion In The Ocean

Hotbuckle Theatre present a nautical tale for younger audiences, using humour and a variety of characters to explore feelings and emotions.

Showing at: Shrewsbury Castle, Sun 25 July

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

HMS Pinafore

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

Showing at: Attingham Park, Shrewsbury, Fri 16 July; Church Stretton Festival, South Shropshire, Sat 31 July

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 & Fri 27 August

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; Wightwick Manor Gardens, Wolverhampton, Sun 11 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

Little Red Riding Hood & The Three Funky Pigs

Theatre2U puts a modern spin on two classic fairytales... A show packed with fun and songs for all the family to enjoy.

Showing at: Beacon Park, Lichfield, Sun 8 August

Mac/Beth

Following their critically acclaimed production of Lord Of The Flies in 2020, Let Me In theatre company this year present a new version of Shakespeare's famous tragedy.

Showing at: Woodhouse Farm & Garden CIC, Lichfield, Tues 20 - Sat 24 July



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 bicycle-powered! - retelling of

Shakespeare's 'Scottish play'.

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

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: Shrewsbury Castle, Fri 16 - Sat 17 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

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 heart-warming message but also provides plenty of great family entertainment.

Showing at: Eastnor Castle, Ledbury,

Herefordshire, Sun 25 July; Brueton Park, Solihull, Tues 27 & Wed 28 July; Shugborough Estate, Stafford, Wed 4 August; 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; Kingsbury Water Park, Sutton Coldfield, Fri 3 September; Tamworth Assembly Rooms, Sat 4 September; The Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sun 5 September

Pride And Prejudice

The Pantaloons bring Jane Austin's witty and romantic masterpiece to life with an innovative and 'hilarious' new adaptation.

Showing at: Shrewsbury Castle, Sat 24 July

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: The Wolseley Centre, Wolseley Bridge, Stafford, Sat 7 August; Bowring Park, Wellington, Shropshire, Wed 11 August; Beacon Park, Lichfield, Sun 22 August

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; Wightwick Manor Gardens, Wolverhampton, Thurs 19 - Fri 20 August

The Tempest

Join The Pantaloons as they embark on a voyage to an

enchanted island full of adventure, romance, magic and monsters!

Showing at: Beacon Park, Lichfield, Thurs 29 July

Tess Of The D'Urbervilles

Hotbuckle Theatre bring Thomas Hardy's moving masterpiece to life.

Showing at: Shrewsbury Castle, Wed 14 - Thurs 15 July

Three Men In A Boat

Join in the fun as Giles Shenton expertly takes the helm and pilots you through the ridiculous tale of men behaving badly while messing about in boats!

Showing at: Beacon Park, Lichfield, Sun 8 August

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; Shrewsbury Castle, Sun 1 August; Birmingham Botanical gardens, Wed 11 August

Treasure Island

Quantum Theatre's swashbuckling new adaptation

of the classic pirate tale promises an action-packed adventure for the whole family.

Showing at: Shrewsbury Castle, Tues 10 - Wed 11 August

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

Wonder With Grimm

An evening of 'enchanted' 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: Coventry Cathedral Ruins, Fri 6 August; The Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Fri 3 September



Ilyria's The Further Adventures Of Doctor Dolittle - Sunnycroft, Wellington, & Hanbury Hall, Droitwich

A portrait of Director Iqbal Khan, a middle-aged man with a grey beard and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue turtleneck sweater under a dark blue jacket. The background is a dark, out-of-focus brick wall with warm, bokeh light spots.

COMING HOME

Director Iqbal Khan talks about bringing Ayub Khan-Din's highly acclaimed comedy-drama, *East Is East*, back to the Birmingham Rep, where it world-premiered 25 years ago...

As theatres in the region open up after the Covid-19 hiatus, the Birmingham Rep has announced it will be reviving Ayub Khan Din's *East Is East* in September. So it's fitting that when *What's On* catches up with Iqbal Khan - the director of the upcoming production - it's the day after he's finally been able to enjoy the simple thrill of sitting in an audience once again.

"I came to see the Birmingham Royal Ballet triple bill at the Rep yesterday," says Iqbal. "There was at least 60% of people in there; it was absolutely extraordinary."

Birmingham-born Iqbal is very much looking forward to returning to the city to direct one of his favourite plays. Set in early-1970s Salford, *East Is East* world-premiered at the Rep in 1996 and focuses on the Khan family: George, a pre-war immigrant from Pakistan, his English wife, Ella, and their children.

The play examines the challenges faced by each character as George battles to maintain his traditional Pakistani values in the face of ever-changing forces, both in the home and further afield.

"*East Is East* is a play that everybody will connect to," explains Iqbal. "It's not just about the race differences and the experience of being bi-racial in England, it's also about families and young people having their dreams, their parents trying to guide them or control them, whilst also allowing them freedom."

"One of the children is an artist, one of them wants to be a good son, the other one wants to be a revolutionary. It's a great play about families that everyone who's seen the film or the play connects to directly."

"Ayub has placed it at a time when Pakistan is losing East Pakistan to the Indians, so George feels like someone who is losing himself. He's having this crisis of identity and is therefore trying to hold his world together and force it into a certain kind of shape."

While George as portrayed in the 1999 film version of *East Is East* is a difficult man for viewers to warm to, Iqbal recognises the light and shade of the character: "The drama is of a man who's going through an identity crisis, and his wife understands that. His wife is very strong, really tough, and ultimately very generous. She accedes to him, not because she's a put-upon wife - she respects him and loves him - but she knows that he's going through challenging times. He's very vivid and vibrant, and yes, he can be belligerent, but he's a great storyteller, very colourful and a lot of fun to be around."

While George is a dominant character in the play, Sajit, the youngest member of the family, performs a crucial role, spending most of his time on stage hiding behind an iconic item of '70s clothing: the parka.

"The play was written out of Ayub's experience. A lot of it is inspired by his own family, and Sajit, that little boy in the parka, is Ayub. I think he's looking back on his life, thinking about his father and thinking about those challenges, trying to make sense of it with objectivity, but also with compassion."

The parka was a ubiquitous anorak with a fur-lined hood that was worn by young boys in the early 1970s. It is one of several details in the play that places *East Is East* in that time period; in 1971, to be precise. Others, such as a popular inflatable toy - the Space Hopper - and a particular brand of biscuit - Maryland Cookies - are also evocative of the decade.

For Iqbal, this is a key point: "Those details are important. It's one of those plays that I don't think you can update, because it's very much about a certain time in history and a very real experience, because a bi-racial couple was a very unusual thing back then. But if you tried to update that experience, you'd lose the potency and the unusualness of that. It was a very interesting, vibrant time, so yeah, it's great to honour all the details of 1971 Salford."

"Growing up, my family were exactly the same in terms of how we were embracing western culture, music and freedoms, and the tensions that went with that - as well as the notion of a homeland, and traditions that didn't seem appropriate here anymore, but which were, in some way, still important as a part of our identities."

"The play feels even more relevant now, in terms of what George is going through, what the kids are going through, in terms of identity politics now; what tribes we belong to and what it means to be British. What are your responsibilities to some old idea of homeland, when you've actually been unpacked fully here for a generation or two now? All these questions are rising again. The play deals with it very seriously, in a very nuanced way, with great joy and with great humanity."

For any audience member who saw Iqbal's 2009 revival of *East Is East* at the Rep, this new production - marking the 25th anniversary of the play's world premiere at the Centenary Square venue - will be a distinctive piece of theatre.

"It's the same play but a completely different version of it, because I'm 10 years older, it's a new company, Birmingham is not the Birmingham it was 10 years ago, we're coming out of a certain time, and there's an ache for being together, sharing a laugh and telling important stories. Design-wise, it'll look very different, so I'm convinced that, if anyone saw it 12 years ago, they'll have a very different experience this autumn."

East Is East shows at Birmingham Repertory Theatre from Friday 3 to Saturday 25 September

BIRMINGHAM

Director Carlos Acosta

2021/22 Season

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ROYAL BALLET

Céline Gittens and Brandon Lawrence.
© Richard Battye

Anton Du Beke & Giovanni Pernice: Him & Me

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sun 11 & Mon 19 July; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 20 July

Are you in urgent need of a Strictly booster-jab while waiting for normal service to be resumed? Then this is most definitely the production for you. Two of the hit BBC TV series' biggest and all-time best-loved professional dancers join forces to present a show that's being described as a true dance extravaganza. A 'world-class cast of dancers and singers' further add to the magic.



Here Come The Boys

Symphony Hall, Birmingham & Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent - rescheduled dates tbc

Not one, not two, but *three* Strictly Come Dancing superstars for the price of one is the deal on offer in this fast-moving, high-energy production.

Scoring a sell-out hit back in 2019, Here Come The Boys sees Aljaž Škorjanec

teaming up with Pasha Kovalev and Graziano di Prima.

The fellas are joined by a cast that includes three internationally acclaimed female partners, a world-champion beatboxer and a team of commercial street dancers.

Samarpan Mahotsav: A Celebration of Indian Classical Dance

Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton, Sat 24 July

Wolverhampton-founded arts organisation Jaivant Patel Dance here presents a celebration of British South Asian arts, heritage & culture. The show features Pagrav Dance Company, an ensemble dedicated to invigorating kathak dance 'with modern context and renewed presentation, while encouraging new thinking and understanding of the discipline'.

As well as being Jaivant Patel Dance's first live curated performance of 2021, the show is also part of a special programme to mark the organisation's 15th anniversary. Visit jaivantpateldance.com for further information.



Ballet Central

Crescent Theatre, Birmingham, Thurs 8 July


Works by renowned choreographer Sir Matthew Bourne and upcoming talent Charlotte Edmonds feature in a mixed bill presented by young dancers on the cusp of their professional careers.

Act Two of Bourne's Highland Fling, a witty gothic fable complete with winged fairies, takes its place alongside a 'new creation

jigsaw' by Edmonds, presented to a commissioned score by Ballet Central's resident composer, Philip Feeney. Completing the programme is the first act of classical ballet *Le Corsaire*, a thrilling work combining high-seas romance and adventure with dashing pirates and magical pas de deux.



Blue Orange Arts

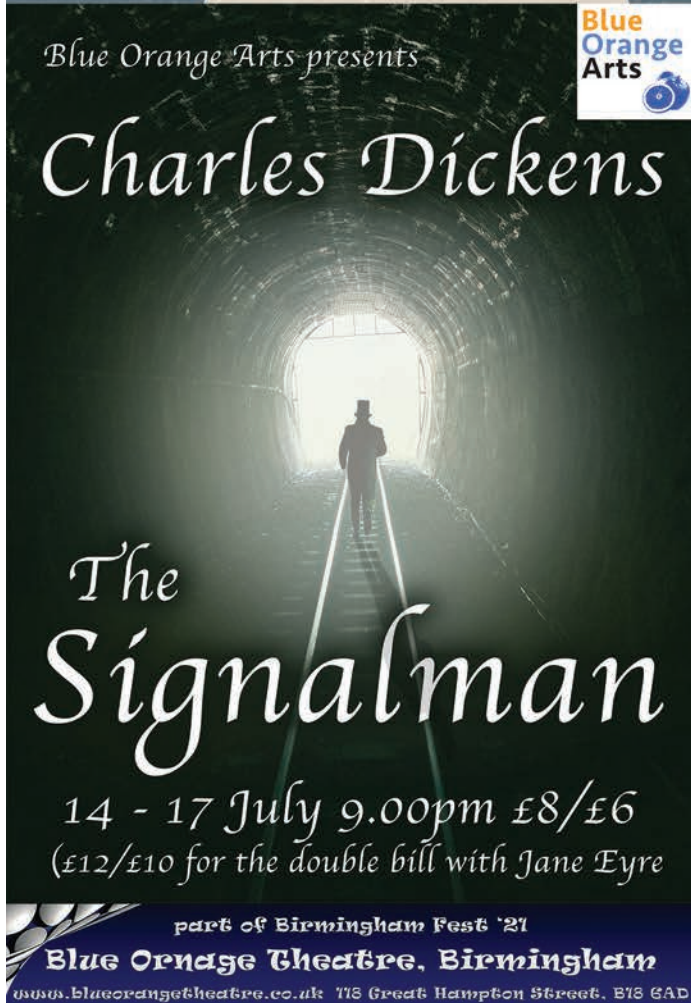


CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S
JANE EYRE

14 - 17 July 7.30pm £8/£6
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Blue Orange Arts presents

Charles Dickens



The
Signalman

14 - 17 July 9.00pm £8/£6
(£12/£10 for the double bill with Jane Eyre)

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TALKS: JEREMY VINE
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?
Friday 24 September
Tickets: £17, (£10 stu) 7pm

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RUSSELL KANE, DARREN HARRIOTT, JONNY COLE, WAYNE BEESE
Saturday 25 September
Tickets: £22 8pm

BOOTLEG ABBA
Saturday 2 October
Tickets: £16 7.30pm

BILLY MEETS CLIFF
Thursday 7 October
Tickets: £17.50 7.30pm

SOUNDCLASH SKA VS NORTHERN SOUL
Friday 8 October
Tickets: £10 7.30pm

ULTIMATE COLDPLAY
Saturday 9 October
Tickets: £14 8pm

TALKS: JESS PHILLIPS MP
Thursday 14 October
Tickets: £17, £10 (stu) 7.30pm

DOWN FOR THE COUNT
SWING ORCHESTRA
Friday 15 October
Tickets: £17.50 7.30pm

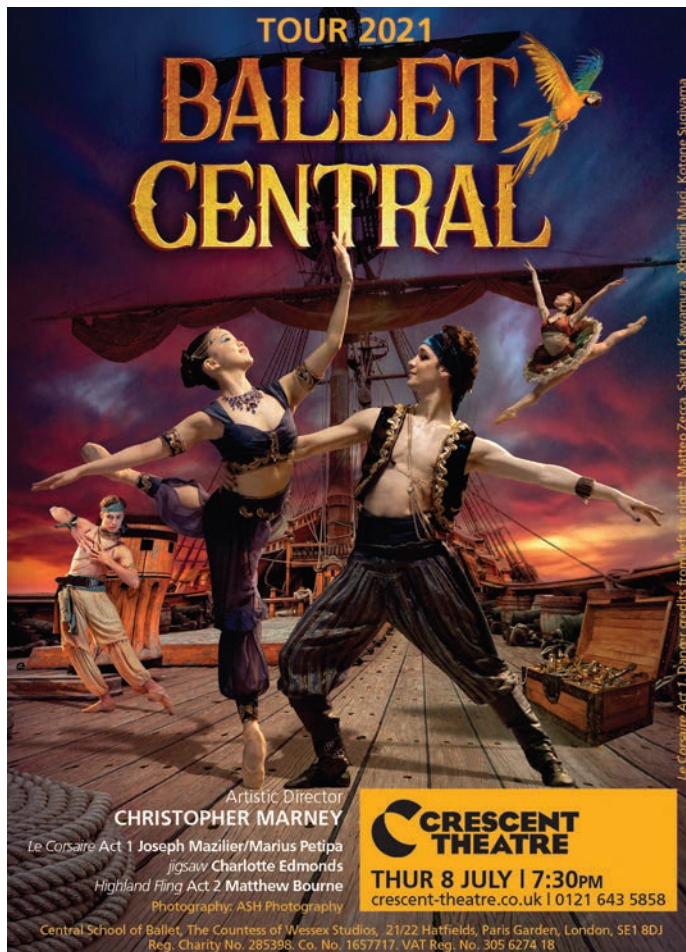
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TOUR 2021

BALLET CENTRAL



Artistic Director
CHRISTOPHER MARNEY

Le Corsaire Act 1 Joseph Mazilier/Marius Petipa
jigsaw Charlotte Edmonds
Highland Fling Act 2 Matthew Bourne
Photography: ASH Photography

CRESCENT THEATRE

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Central School of Ballet, The Countess of Wessex Studios, 21/22 Hatfields, Paris Garden, London, SE1 8DJ
Reg. Charity No. 285398. Co. No. 1657717. VAT Reg. No. 305 6274 18

Le Corsaire Act 1. Dancer credits from left to right: Matteo Zeca, Sakura Kawamura, Xolindi Mud, Kotone Sugiyama

Oh what a drama, oh what a show...

14 must-see productions coming to the Midlands this autumn and beyond

Blood Brothers

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury,
Tues 26 - Sat 30 October;
Birmingham Hippodrome,
Tues 2 - Sat 13 November

If you haven't yet caught up with Willy Russell's hit show, then here's a perfect opportunity to do so.

The story of twins separated at birth who're brought up in different social circumstances but remain inextricably linked, *Blood Brothers* isn't so much a musical as a play with music. Highlights include memorable songs *A Bright New Day* and *Marilyn Monroe* - plus, of course, the emotionally charged hit, *Tell Me It's Not True*.



The Revlon Girl

Crescent Theatre, Birmingham,
Mon 23 - Sat 30 October

Neil Docking's play is here presented to mark the 55th anniversary of the Aberfan Disaster. The tragic event, which took place on the 21st of October 1966, saw a colliery spoil tip collapse and engulf a junior school and row of houses in the nearby village, killing 116 children and 28 adults.

Set eight months after the disaster and based on a true story, the play focuses on a group of bereaved mothers who regularly meet above a hotel in Aberfan to provide support for one another.

Coming to realise how much their grief has taken its toll on their appearance, they

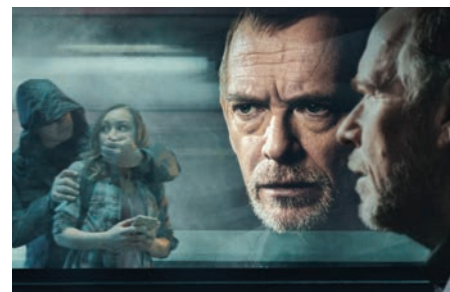
secretly arrange for a representative from Revlon to give them a talk on beauty tips. But the rep is soon to find that this will be no ordinary assignment for her...

Looking Dead Good

Malvern Theatres,
Mon 30 August - Sat 4 September

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

popular novels. On this occasion, Grace is called in when a man who finds a USB memory stick on a train inadvertently becomes a witness to a vicious murder... *EastEnders* stalwart Adam Woodyatt (Ian Beale) and *Emmerdale* & *Coronation Street* actress Gaynor Faye star.



Oh what a drama, oh what a show... 14 must-see dramas coming to the Midlands this autumn and beyond...



Dial M For Murder

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 6 - Sat 11 September;
Malvern Theatres, Mon 29 November - Sat 4 December

Tom Chambers stars in Frederick Knott's erotic tale of betrayal, passion and murder - best known, of course, from its 1954 Alfred Hitchcock-directed film version starring Ray Milland and Grace Kelly. When Tony becomes convinced that wife

Margot is having an affair, he devises a means of having her murdered while at the same time ensuring he has a watertight alibi. But not everything goes according to plan...

The Cat And The Canary

The Alexandra, Birmingham,
Tues 3 - Sat 7 August

Erstwhile sex symbol, former Mrs Peter Sellers and one-time 'Bond girl' Britt Ekland heads the cast of this famous murder-mystery, a story that's been adapted for the cinema on three separate occasions, most famously with Bob Hope taking top billing. When the descendants of the late Mr West gather at a remote mansion to find out who will inherit his fortune, events take an unexpected and deadly turn... Presented by the Classic Theatre Company.



By The Waters Of Liverpool

Albany Theatre, Coventry, Wed 13 & Thurs 14
October; Malvern Theatres, Fri 5 - Sun 7
November

Helen Forrester's autobiographical play - from her same-titled bestselling book - is set in the 1930s and finds the teenage Helen fighting a bitter battle with her parents for the right to educate herself and go out to work. Following her family's fall from grace, she finds herself taken from school to work as an 'unpaid slave' looking after her siblings. But with Britain on the brink of war, the arrival in her life of a tall, strong seaman provides Helen with the chink of light for which she's been so desperately searching...

Loop

Albany Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 9 September

Tackling themes including depression and suicide, Peter Mulligan's short drama is not for the faint-hearted.

The action unfolds in a bar, where hopeless bartender Chris is desperate for his shift to end. Presumptuous regular Steve wants one more drink, though, and as the two men get chatting, 'last orders' becomes a lock-in. Chris' evening is certainly not going according to plan - and things get even stranger when bewitched hobo Paul puts in an appearance, determined to provide the bartender with some potentially life-changing enlightenment.



The Unremarkable Death Of Marilyn Monroe

Henry Sandon Hall, Worcester, Wed 22
September; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Tues
5 October

Marilyn Monroe was widely considered to be the sexiest female movie star of the 20th century - except maybe by Tony Curtis, who once said that making love to her was like 'kissing Hitler'.

The woman who began life as Norma Jeane Mortenson courted controversy throughout her Hollywood career, her troubled life coming to an end at the tragically young age of 36.

Dyad Productions' play aims to take a peek behind the glitz and glamour of the Marilyn phenomenon, presenting the Some Like It Hot star as she contemplates her life in the hour before her death.



Dead Lies

Malvern Theatres, Tues 21 - Sat 25 September;
Lichfield Garrick, Tues 28 September - Sun 3 October

Holby, Casualty and Game Of Thrones trouper Clive Mantle takes top billing in this stage adaptation of the novel by bestselling crime writer Hilary Bonner.

A fast-moving, hard-hitting political thriller, Dead Lies focuses on the character of politician Peter George, a man admired by the British people for his determination to restore trust in a political system badly damaged by an era of sleaze and spin. But Peter has a shocking secret in his past; one that threatens to derail him during a fiercely fought election campaign... Expect an evening of terrific twists and turns, right to the very last scene.



Fatal Attraction

The Alexandra, Birmingham,
Mon 28 February - Sat 5 March

Although James Dearden - who wrote the screenplay for the famous 1987 movie on which this is based - penned this stage adaptation almost a decade ago, this is its first-ever UK tour. For those who've never seen the film starring Michael Douglas and Glenn Close, the story revolves around married New York attorney Dan Gallagher, who, on a night out in the city, meets and beds charming editor Alex Forrest. For Dan, it's a one-night stand; for Alex, it means so very much more - as he's soon to find out...

The Da Vinci Code

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 7 - Sat 12 March; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 6 - Sat 11 June; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 20 - Sat 25 June; Malvern Theatres, Mon 12 - Sat 17 September 2022

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

brutally murdered curator of the Louvre...

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

East Is East

The REP, Birmingham, Fri 3 - Sat 25 September



Ayub Khan-Din's highly acclaimed play, set in Salford in 1971, received its world premiere at The REP in 1996. Made into a hit movie in 1999, it's an insightful and charming exploration of the way in which a clash of two cultures threatens to tear one family apart. The play is here being presented to mark the 25th anniversary of its Birmingham premiere.

Pepper And Honey

Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton,
Wed 3 November

The conflict between upholding the traditions of the 'old country' and embracing those of the new lies at the heart of this thought-provoking play.

Young Croatian Ana is trying hard to settle into life in post-Brexit Britain, but doing so comes with sizable challenges. There are cultural differences to overcome for starters, not to mention that hard-to-shake feeling of being a foreigner in her adopted land. Then there's her grandmother, whose voice haunts her, calling for her to stay true to her national identity and yearning for her to return home...

Pepper & Honey is written by a Croatian playwright, performed by a Croatian actor, and has a running time of 70 minutes.



The Woman In Black

Malvern Theatres, Mon 9 - Sat 14 August; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury; Mon 16 - Sat 21 August; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent; Mon 27 September - Sat 2 October

Adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from Susan Hill's same-titled book, The Woman In Black is a classic ghost story first performed in 1989. It has since become one of the West End's most successful plays.

Solicitor Arthur Kipp believes that his family have somehow been cursed by a mysterious woman in black. In an attempt to tell his story, and to exorcise the evil curse which he's convinced hangs over him, he hires a young actor to assist him in recounting his experiences...



Films released in July...

Jungle Cruise CERT 12a

(127 mins)

Starring **Emily Blunt, Dwayne Johnson, Jesse Plemons, Paul Giamatti, Edgar Ramirez, Jack Whitehall**

Directed by **Jaume Collet-Serra**

Based on Walt Disney's theme park attraction of the same name, Jungle Cruise has been in development, to one degree or another, for the better part of two decades. At one stage slated to star Toy Story duo Tom Hanks and Tim Allen, it was eventually redeveloped with Dwayne Johnson in mind. When a riverboat captain named Frank takes a scientist and her brother on a mission into a jungle to find the Tree of Life, which is believed to possess healing powers, they find themselves facing all manner of challenges, not only from dangerous wild animals but also a competing German expedition.

Released Fri 30 July



Voyagers CERT tbc (108 mins)

Starring **Tye Sheridan, Lily-Rose Depp, Fionn Whitehead, Chanté Adams, Colin Farrell**
Directed by **Neil Burger**

With Earth slowly becoming uninhabitable, a group of young men and women are specially bred for an 86-year-long expedition to colonise a distant planet. But when it's discovered that the crew mates are being fed a cocktail of chemicals to keep them subdued, two of their number 'go rogue', rejecting the drug and their training in favour of accessing the emotions which the weirdy blue potion has previously denied them...

Voyagers may have been described as 'Lord Of The Flies in space', but it's no modern classic. Power struggles abound, just as they do in William Golding's 1954-published novel. But there's no escaping the feeling that this is a routine exercise in chaos-by-numbers, with none of the characters being sufficiently fleshed-out for audiences to give that much of a damn. **Released Fri 2 July**



Mosley: It's Complicated

CERT U (96 mins)

Starring **Max Mosley, Jean Todt, Bernie Ecclestone, Flavio Briatore, Gerhard Berger**
Directed by **Michael Shevloff**

Max Mosley's recent death at the age of 81 inevitably changes the context in which cinema-goers will view this film - a warts-and-all expose of one of Formula One's most famous, controversial and influential figures. Featuring interviews with the man himself, the movie follows Mosley's F1 career, from one of his earliest races in the 1960s - during which legendary driver Jim Clarke lost his life - to his later behind-the-scenes involvement in the sport, as president of Formula One governing body the FIA.

Mosley's 21st-century skirmishes with the tabloid press are also well documented... This is a film with plenty to offer, whether you're a rabid petrol head or simply a fan of well made celebrity-focused documentaries.

Released Fri 9 July

The Croods: A New Age

CERT U (95 mins)

With the voices of **Nicolas Cage, Emma Stone, Ryan Reynolds, Catherine Keener**
Directed by **Joel Crawford**

Released back in 2013, the first Croods film proved to be a huge and wholly unexpected half-billion dollar hit - so a sequel was always on the cards. The wonder is that it took the better part of a decade to deliver it! With a star-studded cast - including Nicolas Cage returning as the prehistoric pa, Grugg - and a still-quite-basic animation style, A New Age finds the Crood clan heading off in search of, and eventually finding, the 'promised land' of Tomorrow, which proves to be a lush and richly coloured paradise-on-earth. The only problem is, it's inhabited by the Betterman family, who are less than delighted to be sharing their idyllic space with a group of grubby little cave dwellers...

Released Fri 16 July





The Suicide Squad CERT 12a

Starring **Margot Robbie, Joel Kinnaman, Alice Braga, Idris Elba, John Cena, Peter Capaldi, Viola Davis** Directed by **James Gunn**

A stand-alone sequel to 2016's *Suicide Squad*, *The Suicide Squad* is the 10th film in the DC Extended Universe and follows a task-force of imprisoned convicts on a mission to destroy a Nazi-era prison and laboratory.

The film sees Margot Robbie reprising the role of crazed criminal and former psychiatrist Harley Quinn, with Britain's very own Idris Elba starring as Bloodsport, a mercenary with a technologically advanced suit. Fingers crossed the movie fairs better with critics than its predecessor.

Released Fri 30 July



Space Jam: A New Legacy

CERT U

Starring **LeBron James, Sonequa Martin-Green, Don Cheadle**, with the voices of **Zendaya, Jim Cummings and Gabriel Iglesias** Directed by **Malcolm D Lee**

Twenty-five years after the original film was released comes this stand-alone sequel starring basketball legend LeBron James. As with the 1996 offering, *A New Legacy* blends live-action with animation and

features favourite cartoon characters from the classic Looney Tunes series. Trapped with his son in a virtual universe controlled by a rogue AI, James finds that his only chance of escape is to go into action on the basketball court and win a game against the Goon Squad - a team of powered-up virtual avatars of professional basketball players.

The only trouble is, James' teammates are the Looney Tunes gang...

Released Fri 16 July

Wrath Of Man CERT 15 (119 mins)

Starring **Jason Statham, Holt McCallany, Rocci Williams, Josh Hartnett, Jeffery Donovan, Scott Eastwood** Directed by **Guy Ritchie**

Teaming up once again, Guy Ritchie and Jason Statham here provide evidence that there's plenty of life in the old dogs yet. A remake of 2004 French film *Cash Truck*, *Wrath Of Man* sees Statham's character of H working for an armed vehicle company, searching for the killer of his son, and causing all manner of traditional Statham-style mayhem in the process.

Ritchie's best days are considered by many to be behind him, but the *Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels* director is actually in pretty fine form here, deftly handling his material to ensure fans of B-movie actioners have more than enough routine violence, gore and brutality to sink their teeth into.

Released Fri 23 July



Limbo CERT 12a (104 mins)

Starring **Sidse Babbett Knudsen, Kenneth Collard, Amir El-Masry, Vikash Bhai** Directed by **Ben Sharrock**

Deprived by the pandemic of the praise it undoubtedly would've received at last year's Cannes Film Festival, *Limbo* has nevertheless garnered plenty of plaudits elsewhere. Helmed by Ben Sharrock, it's a wry drama about a group of refugee men who're being kept 'in limbo' on a bleak Scottish isle while their asylum claims are being processed...

An offbeat and beautifully observed entry from a director whose star is very much in the ascendant, *Limbo* is a movie well worth 104 minutes of anybody's time.

Released Fri 30 July





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The Quest for the Golden Star

BRAND NEW FOR 2021, an exciting new 3D interactive trail starring Zog the lovable dragon has landed at Warwick Castle.

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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.

*PARENT AND TODDLER OFFER

Tickets are available on selected dates in 2021, and include Warwick Castle admission for one adult and one toddler (child up to 5 years)

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

Zog © 2010 Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler. Licensed by Magic Light Pictures Ltd.

**WARWICK
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& KNIGHT'S VILLAGE

Made of BRICK

fantasy toy brick trail comes to Wolverhampton Art Gallery...



This summer, come face-to-face with BRICKLIVE Fantasy Kingdom's medieval characters and mythical inhabitants as they embark on a gallant quest to save their kingdom.

BRICKLIVE's Fantasy Kingdom promises a thrilling tale of chivalrous knights, brave princesses, duelling wizards and deadly dragons. Experience 'an astounding display of toy brick models, stunning backdrops' and an accompanying audio story, available via headphones or a scannable QR code.

The exhibition promises to be fun for the whole family: from adults reminiscing about their own days of toy building-blocks, to youngsters who are budding builders, fantasy adventure enthusiasts or lovers of princesses and unicorns. With over 500,000 toy bricks used and thousands of hours spent building, information cards with insights into the construction of each exhibit will help visitors further appreciate the artistry behind the spectacular display.

Author Cath Edwards (a West Midlander who specialises in local folklore and fantasy writing) is the wordsmith behind the audio narrative that guides visitors through the exhibition. The names of characters have changed from previous BRICKLIVE Fantasy Kingdom locations, but the premise of the story remains the same: one of a princess and a hunter going on a quest to save their kingdom.

By moving between each of the three themed rooms, visitors will get the chance to be fully immersed in the scene before them. The interplay between bright building-brick art and thrilling audio story allows audiences to use their imaginations to conjure up their own mind's-eye visuals, truly bringing the narrative to life.

The journey starts in a grand castle inhabited by royalty, knights, and the original class clown - the court jester. Marvel at the lifesize models created by brick artists - and then kickstart the adventure...

The second exhibition space hides an enchanted woodland, waiting to be discovered. Here, mythical creatures roam, as well as those who practise magic.

Finally comes the exhibition every visitor, big and small, is waiting for - the dragon's lair. Approach the scattered baby dragons at your peril - complete with glaringly lit eyes, roaring sound effects and eerie flame-coloured lighting, their mother is keeping a close watch...

BRICKLIVE's exhibitions are globally renowned for championing interactive play. Despite a lot of these elements being

temporarily on hold due to current restrictions, deciphering magical runes and a build-your-own-model activity still take pride of place in the exhibition.

The show's special 'make and take' treasure-chest money boxes are inspired by the dragon's love of gold. Participants can purchase one from the gallery and then sit at allocated tables to construct their keepsake.

Commenting on BRICKLIVE Fantasy Kingdom, Stephen Simkins, City of Wolverhampton Council Cabinet member for City Economy, said: "This exhibition is an opportunity for all ages, across the city and further afield, to come together and enjoy these amazing models. Art has been an escape for many during the pandemic. We are excited that the art gallery is back open with this superb summertime exhibition that everyone can explore."

BRICKLIVE Fantasy Kingdom shows at Wolverhampton Art Gallery from Saturday 3 July until Sunday 5 September

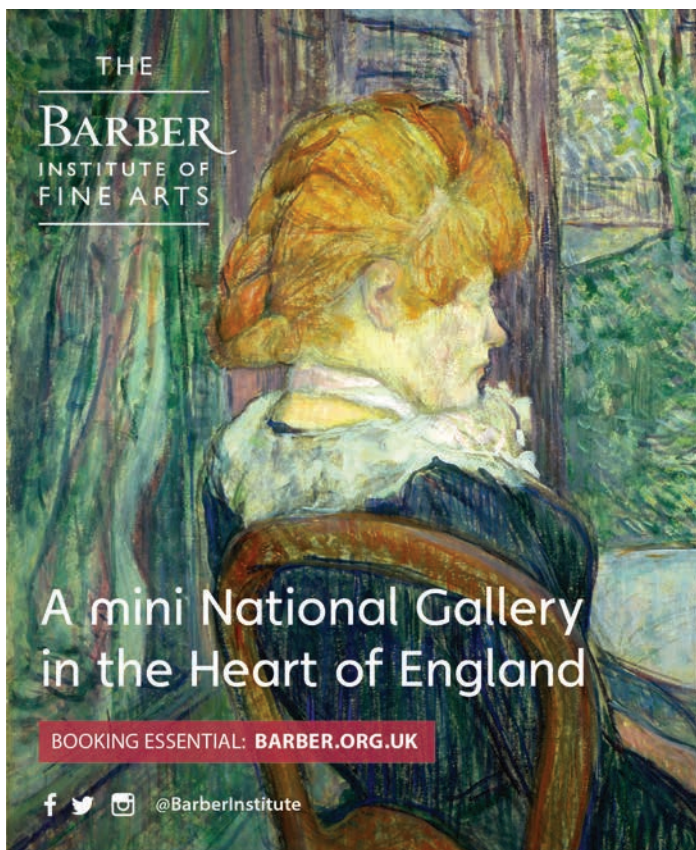


Maxine Walker: Untitled

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham,
until Mon 30 August

Active as a photographer for 12 years, from 1985 to 1997, Maxine Walker is here presenting not only her first solo exhibition in more than two decades but also her first ever in the city of her birth. Engaging with the politics of Black female identity and aiming to challenge racial identity stereotypes, *Untitled* sees Maxine transforming herself into numerous characters and using the medium of photography to interrogate the intricacies of skin, Blackness and being.

The photographs are on loan from the V&A, which acquired them as part of its *Staying Power* project. Presented in partnership with Black Cultural Archives, the project aimed to explore Black British experience from the 1950s through to the 1990s.



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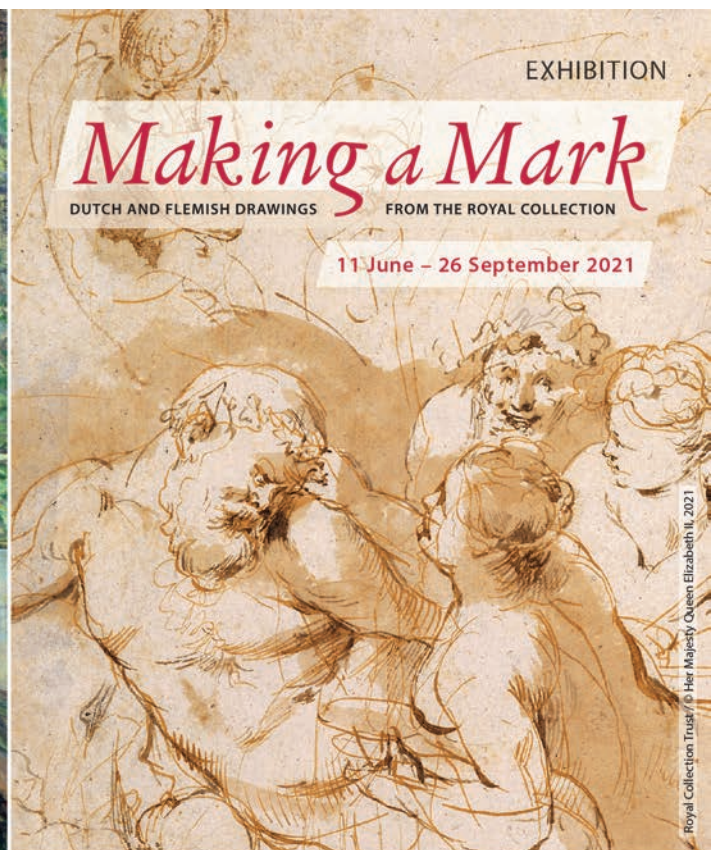
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Mary Newcomb: Nature's Canvas

Compton Verney Art Gallery, Warwickshire, until Sun 5 September

The most extensive-ever survey of Mary Newcomb's work, Nature's Canvas shows at Compton Verney 99 years after the artist's birth. Self-taught and, for the main part, living in rural East Anglia, Mary was also a natural scientist, a farmer and a writer, with her written output being closely aligned with her art.

Focusing, in her beautifully subtle paintings, on the rituals of the unfolding seasons and the countryside around her, she was eager for people to take time to stop and appreciate the natural world. "In our haste," she once wrote in her diary, "in this century, we may not give time to pause and look - and may pass on our way unheeding." The exhibition features more than 50 of Mary's works, presented alongside extracts from her writing and works by artists who inspired her.



Yasmin David: Into The Light

New Art Gallery, Walsall, 3 July until December

This first solo exhibition by the late landscape painter is close to the gallery's heart - Yasmin was the niece of Kathleen Garman, who donated Walsall's prestigious Garman Ryan Collection in the 1970s.

In the decade-plus since Yasmin's death, her daughter, filmmaker Clio David, has unearthed hundreds of hidden works around the family's farm, a selection of which are here exhibited alongside her wider family's collection.

"Her paintings are dramatic, emotional

and often turbulent," wrote her son, Julian, soon after her death, "conveying the drama in the landscape as she saw it, and perhaps resonating human dramas within them. Her preoccupation was with the huge polarities of light and dark, the sky and the land, and inner and outer states of being.

"She tried to capture the molten, ever-changing quality of nature. Her paintings are forceful expressions of landscape in a constant state of flux, of becoming."

Titanic: Honour & Glory

Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum, until Sat 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 voyage.

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





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

The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham, until 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, Rembrandt and Brueghel. The collection also includes work from the 16th, 18th and early-19th century by talented artists whose names are nowadays less familiar.

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Dubmorphology, Colony, 2021. Courtesy of the artists. Photographed by Garry Jones.

Ghost Town 2 Host Town

Coventry Music Museum, until December

Presented as part of Coventry's UK City of Culture programme, Ghost Town 2 Host Town documents the city's fluctuating fortunes, both in terms of its social history and its music scene.

"You can find out about Coventry's fascinating post-war story," says the Music Museum's director & curator, Pete Chambers, "from 'boom town' to 'ghost town' and now 'host town' for the City of Culture - and how Coventry put itself on the map as a city."

Exhibition highlights include the classic Vauxhall Cresta used by local 2 Tone band The Specials in the video for their 1981 chart-buster, Ghost Town, and a focus on the city's role in the burgeoning progressive-rock scene of the early 1970s.

There's also a celebration of Coventry-born Delia Derbyshire, the woman responsible for realising Ron Grainer's memorable theme tune for Dr Who.



Unlocking The Severn

Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery,
Sat 3 July - Tues 31 August

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

Created by conservation and river engagement group Unlocking The Severn, this fascinating Shropshire-touring exhibition focuses on an endangered herring-species fish called the twaite shad, telling the story of its epic River Severn migration.



UnNatural History

Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, until Sun 22 August

An 'out of place' sculpture of a rhino and a time-travelling lab form part of this major new exhibition, curated by art & environment organisation Invisible Dust. Featuring works by international naturalists and artists, the installation looks at the link between art and science in terms of natural history, exploring its

contribution to 'our understanding of ecology, climate change, extinction and threats to biodiversity'.

Drawings, paintings, sculptures, installations, photographs, film, digital media and new technologies all feature in the show.



Drawn To Antiquity: Works On Paper From The Lawrence Alma-Tadema Collection

The Barber Institute, Birmingham, until Tues 21 September

Dutch artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema is well known for his paintings of classical scenes featuring languorous and beautiful figures presented against lavish marble settings. What he's less well known for, however, is providing the inspiration for the design of Ridley Scott's Hollywood blockbuster, Gladiator. Scott's production manager on the movie, Arthur Max, dubbed the film's design ethos 'Black Tadema', reflecting Gladiator's

dark twist on the artist's interpretation of antiquity. The drawings featured in this exhibition form part of the Lawrence Alma-Tadema Collection at the University of Birmingham's Cadbury Research Library. The collection comprises 584 drawings, 5,000 photographs, 4,000 books on antiquity and more than 300 items of the artist's personal correspondence.



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War Of The Roses Live

Warwick Castle, from Sat 24 July

Perilous stunt riders, fearless jousting and state-of-the-art special-effects bring the iconic history of the War of the Roses to life this summer at Warwick Castle.

It's the year 1455, and rival houses the House of Lancaster and the House of York are set to clash for the prize of the throne...

Featuring horseback battles and sword fighting, this action-packed live show is sure to entertain the whole family. The big question is, though... which house will you side with?

Sarehole Mill BioBlitz

Sarehole Mill, Birmingham, Sun 25 July

Birmingham's Sarehole Mill is this month hosting a family-friendly BioBlitz.

Exploring outdoor spaces, including the historic courtyard and Woodland Realm, families will record the plants, animals, and insects they find, helping collect important information for regional wildlife data-collecting programmes.

With a natural science curator on hand to help identify species, each ticket-holder will receive a 'bug collector' to take home, to help study their finds, as well as a spotter's guide and worksheet.



Steampunk Festival

Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge, Shropshire, Sat 17 & Sun 18 July

Grab your goggles and get dressed up in your finest finery as the Ministry of Steampunk once again takes over Blists Hill, transforming the popular visitor attraction into The Town That Never Was.

This year's theme is 'crime, detection, fantasy and fun'. Can you become a great Victorian detective to rival Sherlock Holmes and work out the puzzles and trails?

Families can take part in the child-friendly Teeny Dinosaur Hunt, witness a comical bank robbery, or enrol in the Steam Wizard's School.

Steampunk makers and traders will be on site too, selling their wares, while performances and musical entertainment will be much in evidence around the town throughout the weekend. And at the end of each day, visitors get the chance to join in the socially distanced parade.



Camper Jam

Weston Park, Shropshire, Fri 2 - Sun 4 July

After a year off, Camper Jam returns 'with more family fun than ever before'.

Attractions include stalls to shop in, bars to cool off in, and plenty of live entertainment to enjoy across the three-day weekend. Not only can visitors check out a variety of VW vehicles, they can also sample entertainment including the disco shed and the Panic Family Circus.

Music performances across the weekend include Massaoke, Artful Dodger and a variety of tribute acts.



THE GREAT BRITISH STAYCATION

July and August



A promotional poster for the BBC Gardeners' World Live Special Edition. The poster features three hosts (a woman and two men) standing in front of a lush garden. The text 'BBC Gardeners' World Live Special Edition' is prominently displayed. Below it, it says 'Sponsored by: LEXUS'. The dates '26 - 29 August' and location 'Birmingham NEC' are listed. A circular badge says 'Adapted outdoor layout!'. A wooden sign in the bottom right corner says 'Featuring the BBC goodfood Market'. A pink banner in the top right corner says 'Book early to avoid disappointment!'. The entire poster is framed by a border of colorful flowers and foliage.

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*10% off advance adult/over 65s standard tickets. Offers not valid on Saturday tickets or with any other offer. Ends 03/08/21. £3.50 transaction fee per e-ticket order and £4.50 per postal ticket order.

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1940s Weekend

Black Country Living Museum, Dudley,
Sat 17 & Sun 18 July

The Black Country Living Museum is this month stepping back in time to the 1940s, to present the sights and sounds of wartime Britain. Vintage vehicles and 1940s civilians and army

personnel will be much in evidence across the two days, with attractions including live music from the D-Day Darlings, wartime variety shows and austerity-busting make-do-and-mend workshops.

Street reenactors and special live demonstrations are also included in an imaginative and wide-ranging programme of entertainment.

Gaydon Land Rover Show

British Motor Museum, Gaydon, Warwick,
Sat 31 July & Sun 1 August

This two-day celebration of the iconic Land Rover brand marks the 51st birthday of the Range Rover. Land Rover fans and owners alike can explore a selection of trade stands, listen to special technical talks from journalist Emrys Kirby and take a look at a selection of on-display Land Rovers (including the showpiece HUE 166 - aka Huey - the first Land Rover ever produced). Live music and food outlets also feature, as does the Mini Me kids trial, with mini vintage and modern Land Rovers touring around the show arena.



Life On Lockdown

Now on display at Thinktank Science Museum,
Birmingham

An exhibition based on the same-named project, Life On Lockdown features hundreds of photos and videos telling the story of Birmingham during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The project began in May last year, when Birmingham Museums Trust began collecting digital images and recordings of people's first-hand experiences of living in lockdown. The new exhibition reflects the lives of the citizens of Birmingham during the Covid era, from Big Issue sellers on empty streets to babies born into a world that was barely functioning.

Three Counties Good Life Show

Three Counties Showground,
Malvern, Wed 21 & Thurs 22 July

This brand-new event celebrating the best of country living comes complete with live music and premium rural shopping. Foodies can explore the Cider Show, stock up on local produce and experience a world of street-food flavours.

Those looking for a more hands-on engagement can learn how to 'grow their own' in the Grow & Cook Theatre.

Competitions and displays featuring livestock distinctive to the local area also feature.



Battle And Tribute

Tamworth Castle, Staffordshire

Dedicated to the area's rich Anglo-Saxon history, Tamworth Castle's brand-new exhibition, Battle And Tribute, has transformed the top floor of the popular visitor attraction into an interactive experience for visitors of all ages. Featuring items from the legendary Staffordshire Hoard (as well as other artefacts from the Anglo-Saxon age), the exhibition also boasts immersive attractions including a combat film experience and a unique touch-table strategy game.



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Historic Holiday Fun

Blakesley Hall, Birmingham, from Sat 21 July

The timber-framed Elizabethan Blakesley Hall was built over 430 years ago, making it one of Birmingham's oldest buildings. Today, visitors can travel back in time to discover what life was like for one of the city's leading merchant families.

As well as exploring the fine Tudor house and beautiful gardens, younger visitors can enjoy a range of specially programmed activities. These include: an outdoor Summer Holidays Superhero Trail (21 July - 29 August); an interactive Tall Tales Goldilocks Family Story event (5, 12 & 19 August); and a chance to take part in a real scientific BioBlitz, looking at nature and wildlife (22 July).



The Octonauts

National Sea Life Centre, Birmingham, until Sun 11 July

Captain Barnacles has gone out on a solo mission to check on the local coral - and he's gone missing! The Octonauts need little ones and their families to step in as captains for the day,

learning lots about the ocean and how to protect it along the way.

A fun activity trail and treasure hunt-style activities throughout the aquarium provide lots of opportunities to meet the Octonauts gang, with everyone receiving a reward at the end of the trail.

Kidztopia

Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, Sat 3 & Sun 4 July

Described as 'a world of fun for kidz', Kidztopia this month takes over Stoneleigh Park for a whole weekend, offering fun-packed activities for children aged from two to 12.

Appearances by TV characters, live shows, an inflatable fun zone, VIP guests, real-life farm animals, a gaming area, a dance/gym academy and a selection of sports activities are among the attractions on offer. The theme for this year's event is 'Learn How To Be A...', with lots of jobs and professions on show, including police officers and paramedics.



Festival Of Quilts

NEC, Birmingham, Thurs 29 July - Sun 1 August

Europe's largest celebration of patchwork and quilting is back at the NEC this month.

The show features thousands of quilts, hundreds of workshops and more than 300 suppliers.

Quilters are encouraged to enter their work into competition, where it will be displayed alongside over 800 other entries, with huge cash prizes to be won.



Festivals taking place across the region this summer - check relevant websites for updates...



Mostly Jazz, Funk & Soul Festival

Moseley Park, Birmingham,
new date tbc

Brought to you by the masterminds behind Moseley Folk and the Lunar Festival, Mostly Jazz, Funk & Soul does exactly what it says on the tin. World-class artists come together with the leading lights of the local jazz scene in a laid-back, family-friendly event that celebrates Birmingham's musical heritage. Like its sister folk festival, it's located in the gorgeous Moseley Park - a stunning woodland glade tucked away from busy streets and providing a perfect escape from city-centre hustle & bustle.

Line-up includes: Neneh Cherry and Nightmares On Wax - both pictured.



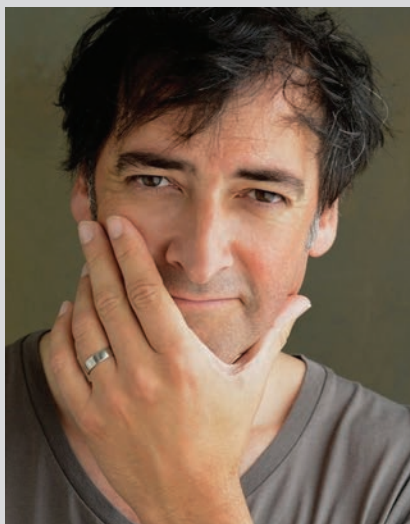
Lichfield Festival

Various venues in Lichfield,
Thurs 8 - Sun 18 July

Bringing together ballet, cabaret, symphony orchestras, steel pans, family fun, chamber music, live cooking, storytelling, drama and comedy, Lichfield Festival this year spans 11 days and, as usual, multiple venues. Commenting on the 2021 edition, Lichfield Festival Director Damian Thantrey said: "With distancing and

regulations still 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."

Line-up includes: Mica Paris, Alistair McGowan, Justin Moorhouse and BBC National Orchestra of Wales



Black Country Musicom Festival

Himley Hall & Park, Dudley, Sun 12 September

Making a welcome return, this popular event features live music from top tribute acts and local bands, a line-up of well regarded comedians, a funfair, real ale & street food, and a sandpit and garden games for young children to enjoy.

The festival is this year being used as an opportunity to say thank you to NHS frontliners for their selfless endeavours during the pandemic.

Line-up includes: Adele by Chloe, UB40 Labour of Love, The Killers Collective (pictured), BRUNO - a tribute to Bruno Mars, and Bootleg Abba

Solihull Summer Fest 2021

Tudor Grange Park, Solihull,
Sat 24 & Sun 25 July

Taking place for the fifth time, Solihull Summer Fest is fast becoming one of the most popular music get-togethers on the Midlands events calendar. The festival features multiple hours of live music across two days, 20 of the region's most respected street-food vendors, and bars serving everything from real ale to prosecco.

Line-up includes: Kool & The Gang, Shalamar, Snap!, Billy Ocean, Tony Hadley and Marti Pellow (both pictured).



Your City Festival

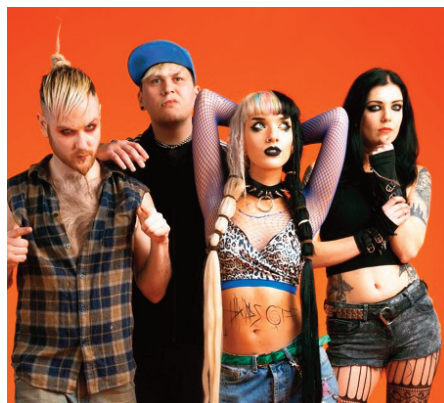
Various venues in Stoke-on-Trent,
Sat 24 & Sun 25 July

Organisers of this annual event are eager to grow its reputation so that it becomes a festival of national significance.

Taking place at some of Stoke-on-Trent's most prestigious music venues, the two-day get-together is a celebration of great local music, offering Potteries artists the chance to rub shoulders with nationally touring performers.

The festival will also host a music-industry conference, covering topics including DIY music, management and PR.

Line-up includes: October Drift, Hands Off Gretel (pictured), Black Coast, Anu and Psyence



ALSO Festival

Park Farm, Warwickshire,
Fri 2 - Sun 4 July



The UK's leading ideas festival is set in the beautiful Warwickshire countryside and this month returns for its eighth year.

The line-up features 70 carefully curated events, including talks from world-renowned thinkers, topical debates, creative masterclasses, relaxation, exercise, DJs and comedy - all taking place in ALSO's famous lakeside setting.

This year's theme - 'You animal!' - gives a nod to the past year while at the same time looking forward to celebrating better times.

Line-up includes Shappi Khorsandi, Sister Cookie (pictured), London International Gospel Choir, White Tale Falls, Flamingos

Fuse Festival

Beacon Park, Lichfield,
Fri 13 - Sun 15 August

Lichfield Arts' annual free-to-attend music & arts community festival, Fuse is this year taking place a month later than usual.

Commenting on the event, 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." To donate, visit gofund.me/92fda4f1

Line-up includes: The Ronaldos, Magnalium, The Social Ignition, Kissmet (pictured), Thomas Atlas, The Reggulites and Fred Zeppelin



ENJOY THE GREAT OUT

The Midlands is home to an abundance of enjoyable and exciting places to visit, catering for people of all ages and from all walks of life. Whatever you're looking for to keep the kids entertained this summer holiday, you're sure to find somewhere and something that fits the bill.

BIRMINGHAM

BECKETT'S FARM The venue hosts a number of family events, including cookery classes, and has a farm shop and restaurant on site. Wythall, Birmingham B47 6AJ. Farm Shop open Mon - Sat 7.30am - 5pm, Sun 10am - 4pm.

BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS The gardens span 15 acres, with four glasshouses presenting a variety of climates, from tropical rainforest to arid desert. Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 3TR. Open Mon - Fri 10am - 6pm, Sat - Sun 10am - 7pm. Pre-booking essential.

CADBURY WORLD Discover the origin of everyone's favourite sweet treat, from the cocoa beans in the Aztec jungle to the making of Cadbury confectionery. Bournville, Birmingham, B30 1JT. Open daily until 1 Sept and then every weekend from 4 Sept, 9am - 4.30pm. Pre-booking essential.

CANNON HILL PARK Opened in 1873, Cannon Hill comprises 80 acres of formal parkland and 120 acres of conservation and woodland plantation. Moseley, Birmingham, B13 8RD. Open (see website for times of various attractions).

LEGOLAND DISCOVERY CENTRE Discover the ultimate indoor Lego playground, with three rides, 10 Lego build & play zones, a 4D cinema and much more... King Edwards Rd, Birmingham, B1 2AA. Open daily, 9.30am - 6pm from 26 July.

LICKEY HILLS COUNTRY PARK Covering 524 acres, the park is a place for family fun, whether that be walking the dog, cycling, horse riding or maybe just enjoying the views and a cup of tea. Rednal, Birmingham, B45 8ER.

NATIONAL SEA LIFE CENTRE The centre features over 2,000 creatures and 60-plus displays, including a million-litre underwater tropical tank, Nemo's Kingdom, turtle breeding and much more. Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2HL. Open daily, 9.30am - 6pm from 26 July. Pre-booking essential.

RESORTS WORLD Boasting the largest casino in the UK, a shopping mall, restaurants and cinemas. Birmingham, B40 1PU. Open, see website for details of various venues.

TREETOP ADVENTURE GOLF Situated in Bullring Shopping Centre, this rainforest-themed mini-golf activity offers 18 holes of fun. Open Mon - Wed 11am - 10pm, Thurs - Fri 11am - 11pm, Sat 10am - 11pm and Sun 10am - 10pm.



Legoland Discovery Centre, Birmingham

SHROPSHIRE

ATTINGHAM PARK An elegant 18th century mansion house with Regency interiors. Set within an expansive deer park, with riverside walks, a woodland sculpture trail and family events to enjoy. Shrewsbury, SY4 4TP. Open: Park 8am - 6.30pm, playground 8am - 6.30pm, Shop 10am - 5pm, walled garden 9am - 5pm. Pre-booking essential.

CARDING MILL VALLEY Covering almost 5,000 acres, with stunning views of the Shropshire and Welsh hills. An important place for wildlife, geology and archaeology. Church Stretton, SY6 6JG. Open.

CHOLMONDELEY CASTLE The Gothic castle - a product of the early 19th century - stands on a high rise above a lake. The castle is surrounded by lawns, a variety of mature trees and gardens. Whitchurch, SY14 8AH. Castle closed, gardens open Wed, Thurs & Sun 10am - 5pm. Pre-booking essential.

IRONBRIDGE GORGE MUSEUMS The place where the Industrial Revolution was born is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with 10 award-winning museums to visit. Ironbridge, TF8 7DQ. Open, see website for details of various venues. Pre-booking essential.

PARK HALL FARM Explore the great outdoors via the Maize Maze, The Barrel Train, Pig Racing, the Woodland Walk, plus two adventure playgrounds, Park Hall Countryside Experience, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY11 4AS. Open from 10am daily.

RAF COSFORD The museum houses one of the largest aviation collections in the UK. Over 70 historic aircraft are displayed in three wartime hangars on an active airfield. Shifnal, TF11 8UP. Open from 10am daily. Pre-booking essential.

SEVERN VALLEY COUNTRY PARK An oasis of calm and beauty on the banks of the River Severn, this 51-hectare award-winning park is a place for quiet enjoyment of the countryside. Bridgnorth, WV15 6NG. Open daily.

SHREWSBURY MUSEUM & ART GALLERY Housed within the town's Grade II Victorian music hall and one of the country's rare 13th century mansions, the venue features a broad range of artefacts alongside a rolling programme of contemporary art. Shrewsbury, SY1 1LH. Open Mon-Sun 10am - 4pm Pre-booking is essential.

THE BRITISH IRONWORK CENTRE The centre boasts a varied collection of beautifully decorative metal



RAF Museum Cosford, Shropshire

items, some of which are faithful reproductions of ironwork no longer seen today. There's also a collection of animal sculptures to admire. Oswestry, SY11 4JH. Open Wed - Sun 10am - 4pm.

STAFFORDSHIRE

ALTON TOWERS Enjoy a mix of fantastic rides and attractions, offering unlimited fun for kids of all ages, families and thrill-seekers. Alton, ST10 4DB. Open daily 10am - 6pm. Pre-booking essential.

BIDDULPH GRANGE COUNTRY PARK Originally part of the larger Biddulph Grange Estate, this is a 73-acre wooded hillside site with a large lake, ponds and meadows. Stoke-on-Trent, ST8 7TZ. Open daily 8am - 9pm.

CENTRAL FOREST PARK Located in the heart of Stoke, Central Forest Park is a green space providing facilities for walking, cycling, dog walking, informal sports and skateboarding. Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 6AZ. Open daily.

CHURNET VALLEY RAILWAY Take a journey back to the classic days of railway travel on a rural line that passes through beautiful countryside known as Staffordshire's 'Little Switzerland'. Froghall, ST10 2HA. Open - see website for train times. Pre-booking essential.

DRAYTON MANOR THEME PARK A definite stop-off venue for thrill-seekers, featuring all manner of white-knuckle rides. And with a zoo on site too, it's a venue that's got plenty for kids and adults of all ages to enjoy. Tamworth, B78 3TW. Open 10.30am-5pm daily from 22 July. Pre-booking essential.

HANLEY PARK Hanley Park and the adjacent Caudon Grounds are open to the public. Features include three play areas: toddler, sensory and adventure (including aerial slide). Shelton, ST1 4DX. Open daily.

PEAK WILDLIFE PARK Come face to face with exotic and endangered animals from across three continents. Leek, ST13 7QR. Open 10am - 6pm daily. Pre-booking essential.

TAMWORTH CASTLE From its origins back in Anglo Saxon times through to the Victorian era, explore how the castle developed over the centuries and learn about the families who called it their home. Tamworth, B79 7NA. Open: Tues - Sat 9.30am-4.30pm, Sun 10am-4pm. Pre-booking essential.

THE WEDGWOOD MUSEUM The home of one of the most interesting ceramic collections in the world.



Drayton Manor Theme Park, Staffordshire

DOORS THIS SUMMER!

The galleries tell the story of Josiah Wedgwood, his family, and the company he founded over two centuries ago. Stoke-on-Trent, ST12 9ER. Open Wed - Sun, 10am - 5pm.

WARWICKSHIRE

BADDESLEY CLINTON A secluded estate set in the heart of the Forest of Arden. Featuring guided talks, walks through the gardens and activities for children such as pond dipping and garden trails. Warwick, B93 0DQ. Open daily, 9am - 5pm. Pre-booking essential.

BRITISH MOTOR MUSEUM The museum features the world's greatest collection of classic, vintage and veteran British cars. Gaydon, CV35 0BJ. Open daily from 16 July, 10am - 5pm. Pre-booking essential.

CHARLECOTE PARK This grand 16th century country house comes complete with deer park and is a National Trust property. Warwick, CV35 9ER. Open daily 9am - 5pm. Pre-booking essential.

COMPTON VERNEY The Georgian house is set in more than 120 acres of Grade II listed classical parkland landscaped by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, the most eminent landscape architect of the 18th century. Warwick, CV35 9HZ. Open Tues - Sun, 10am - 5pm. Pre-booking essential.

COTSWOLD WILDLIFE PARK Set in 160 acres of parkland and gardens, Cotswold Wildlife Park has one of the UK's largest zoological collections. Burford, OX18 4JP. Open daily, 10am - 6pm. Pre-booking essential.

COVENTRY MUSIC MUSEUM The museum offers activities to interest and delight youngsters, and a studio in which visitors can try their hand at composing and music-making. CV2 4ED. Open: Thurs - Sat, 10am - 4pm, Sun 10am - 3pm. Please phone ahead on 07971 171441.

COVENTRY TRANSPORT MUSEUM The museum houses the largest publicly owned collection of British vehicles in the world. CV1 1JD. Open daily 10am - 5pm.

HATTON ADVENTURE WORLD An attraction for families with children up to the age of 12. Hatton, CV35 8XA. Open daily until 3 Sept, 10am - 5.30pm. Pre-booking highly recommended.

HERBERT ART GALLERY & MUSEUM A family-friendly museum, with activities that run throughout the school holidays. Coventry, CV1 5QP. Open: Mon - Sat, 10am - 4pm, Sun 12pm - 4pm.

KENILWORTH CASTLE A vast complex of ruined fortifications and palatial apartments spanning over five centuries. CV8 1NG. Open daily, 10am - 5pm. Pre-booking essential.

SHAKESPEARE BIRTHPLACE TRUST The Trust runs six unique properties where you can discover the

fascinating stories behind the world's greatest storyteller. Open Wed - Sat 10am - 4pm, Hall's Croft & Mary Arden's Farm are currently closed to the public.

STONELEIGH ABBEY Visitors to the Abbey can learn about the house's history through a guided tour of the west wing. CV8 2LF. Open Sun - Thurs 10am - 5pm.

STRATFORD BUTTERFLY FARM A unique opportunity to watch hundreds of the world's most spectacular butterflies flying around. Stratford-upon-Avon, CV37 7LS. Open daily, 10am - 6pm. Pre-booking highly recommended.

WARWICK CASTLE Experience over 1,000 years of history. Aside from visiting the castle itself and looking at the battlements, towers, turrets and interiors, there are also jousting events, the Horrible History show and Time Tower to keep you entertained. CV34 4QU. Open daily, 10am - 4pm. Pre-booking essential.

WOLVERHAMPTON & BLACK COUNTRY

BLACK COUNTRY LIVING MUSEUM A tribute to the traditional skills and enterprise of the people who once lived in the heart of industrial Britain. Dudley, DY1 4SQ. Open daily, 10am - 5pm. Pre-booking essential.

DUDLEY CANAL TUNNEL TRUST Enjoy guided boat trips through the tunnels, along with videos, lifelike reconstructions and stunning music & light shows. Dudley, DY1 4SB. Open daily, 10.30am - 4pm.

DUDLEY CASTLE AND ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS Home to more than 1,300 animals, with up to 200 species. At the heart of the site sits the ruins of an 11th century castle. Dudley, DY1 4QF. Open daily from 10am, last admission 3pm. Pre-booking essential.

HIMLEY HALL & PARK An 18th century building set in 180 acres of Capability Brown-landscaped parkland. Dudley, DY3 4DF. Park open daily from 7am-7pm.

WIGHTWICK MANOR & GARDENS A manor house filled with an important collection of Pre-Raphaelite and arts & crafts pictures and furnishings. Wolverhampton, WV6 8EE. Garden & tearoom open 10am - 5pm.

WORCESTERSHIRE

AVONCROFT MUSEUM A fascinating museum of historic buildings spanning seven centuries on a beautiful open-air site in the north of Worcestershire. Bromsgrove, B60 4JR. Shop & grounds open Wed, Sat & Sun 10am - 5pm.

BERRINGTON HALL Created by architect Henry Holland, the hall is one of a small number of his

buildings to survive intact. As well as being able to explore the family rooms and servant quarters, guests can take part in activities or relax by the lake. Nr Leominster, HR6 0DW. Garden & park open 10am - 5pm, Stables café 10am - 4pm.

BROCKHAMPTON ESTATE Set in 1,700 acres of estate, the romantic Manor House dates back to the late 14th century and is accessible via a small gatehouse and over a moat. Nr Bromyard, WR6 5TB. Estate & grounds open 10am - 5pm, Granary food kiosk 10.30am - 4pm. Pre-booking essential.

CROFT CASTLE The castle is located deep in the heart of the Herefordshire countryside, surrounded by 1,500 acres of historic woodland, farm and parkland. Home to the Croft family for nearly 1,000 years, this castle has many intriguing stories to uncover. Yarpole, Nr Leominster, HR6 9PW. Garden & park open 10am - 5pm, tearoom 10am - 5pm. Pre-booking essential.

CROOME PARK Explore what remains of a secret wartime air base and discover how thousands of people lived and worked there during the 1940s. Worcester, WR8 9DW. Park open 10am - 5.30pm. Pre-booking essential.

EASTNOR CASTLE & DEER PARK The castle is set within the dramatic beauty of the Malvern Hills and surrounded by a beautiful deer park, arboretum and lake. Ledbury, HR8 1RL. Open Sun - Thurs 10.30am-5.30pm.

HARTLEBURY CASTLE A Grade I listed building which was built in the mid-13th century as a fortified manor house. Kidderminster, DY11 7XZ. Open Tues - Fri 10am - 5pm, Sat - Sun 11am-5pm.

SEVERN VALLEY RAILWAY A full-size standard-gauge railway line which runs regular steam-hauled passenger trains, for tourists and enthusiasts alike, between Kidderminster and Bridgnorth, a distance of 16 miles. Bewdley, DY12 1BG. Open - see website for train times.

THE MALVERN HILLS A wide variety of walks, from short and gently graded slopes to more strenuous options. WR14 3EY. Open.

WITLEY COURT One hundred years ago, Witley Court was one of England's great country houses, hosting many extravagant parties. Today, it's a spectacular ruin, the result of a disastrous fire in 1937. Great Witley, WR6 6JT. Open Wed - Sun 10am-5pm. Pre-booking essential.

Our What's On directory features just a selection of the best places to visit across the region at this time of year.

Be sure to check the latest information on each venue's website before setting out - especially as a lot of destinations are requiring visitors to pre-book!



Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust



Black Country Living Museum, Dudley



Avoncroft Museum, Worcestershire

Aston Hall

One of Birmingham's most iconic buildings
reopens to the public this month





It's hard to believe but in the shadows of the concrete jungle of Spaghetti Junction and the largest football stadium in the West Midlands - Villa Park - sits one of Birmingham's most iconic buildings.

Just a few short miles from Birmingham city centre and a stone's throw from the A38 Expressway is the magnificent Aston Hall - a Grade 1 listed 17th century mansion. And its location is just one of the things that makes it so special, according to Kimberley Biddle, museum team manager at the venue: "Its location definitely makes Aston Hall so unexpected and unique. Situated next to a seven-lane motorway, a Premier League football stadium, rows of terrace houses and an industrial estate is this very theatrical and fairytale-like mansion that has survived 400 years of history."

We Brits are fascinated with stately homes and country mansions. Countless novels and hugely successful TV dramas - from Jane Austen to Downton Abbey - centre on historic houses and the lives of the people who live there. According to research, in 2019 there were 26.9 million visits made to a National Trust property and 26.8 million people visited one of the UK's Historic Houses.

In 1864 Aston Hall was the first historic building in Britain to be preserved by a local authority specifically as a public visitor attraction - pre-dating the creation of the National Trust by some 30 years.

"Whether it's an element of romance, a fixation with history or a general fascination with the lives of others, our interest in stately homes, castles and stories of the past is undeniable," says Kimberley.

After being closed for over a year, Aston Hall is this month set to welcome visitors once again. The venue reopens on 7 July, complete with brand-new displays that explore the fascinating lives of the Hall's residents and its colourful historical past. Like every other UK visitor attraction, the prolonged pandemic-enforced closure has had a significant impact on Aston Hall, but it has also brought some time to reflect on the visitor experience.



"The past year has given us the opportunity to consider how we retell, reimagine and re-display the four centuries of Aston Hall's history," explains Kimberley. "The new displays capture the excitement and eventful history of the Hall, and the fascinating lives of people associated with it. Visitors love the architectural and historical delights of Aston Hall - such as the breathtaking Long Gallery and the battle scars of the Civil Wars - but they also revel in the real-life stories of the families that lived there. We've made more of the ancestral history of the Holte family, who built Aston Hall in the 1600s, and peppered that history with enthralling stories of family rifts, royal visits, pitched battles and even the tragic tale of a tightrope walker."

Visitors can explore over 30 rooms at Aston Hall, including the amazing Long Gallery - said to be one of Britain's finest and surely one of Birmingham's most incredible spaces - and the elaborate Great Stairs.

But equally fascinating are the servants' rooms, from the eerie Dick's Garret at the very top of the house, to the purposeful Butler's Pantry on the ground floor.

There's also an amazing collection of paintings spanning four centuries to see, including works by the likes of Thomas Gainsborough and George Romney. Peter Lely's famous official 'warts and all' portrait of Oliver Cromwell also features - as Kimberley explains: "Cromwell purportedly said to another artist, Samuel Cooper, who was painting his portrait, 'Remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts and everything as you see me, otherwise I will never pay a farthing for it'. Lely is thought to have based his portrait on Cooper's, and it does indeed show Cromwell 'warts and all' - and so the saying was born."

"Aston Hall is home to Lely's prime version, or original, of the Cromwell portrait. When it was painted, it was declared an official portrait of him in his role of Lord Protector."

Another historic gem will also be on display for the first time in over a decade when the Hall reopens - the hangings from the 17th century bed in the King Charles Room.



"This is one of the rooms used by King Charles I when he spent the night at Aston in October 1642, shortly before the battle of Edgehill," says Kimberley. "The bed hangings were in desperate need of restoration and were taken off display over a decade ago. We don't know the full provenance of them, but they're believed to be hundreds of years old. So to finally have them back on display, reinstated for many more years to come, is really quite an exciting coming-home moment for us all."

The exquisite embroideries have been painstakingly restored by a team of conservators and volunteers at Birmingham Museums over a period of 10 years. Designed using a type of embroidery called 'crewel work' - a popular 17th century style - the embroideries feature a stunning design of flowers, birds and Chinese-style pavilions.

So what else can visitors to Aston Hall expect as part of the July reopening?

"We've also changed the Hall's food & drink offer," Kimberley explains. "With Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery currently closed due to the essential electrical upgrade of the Council House complex, we'll be welcoming the sous chef from the gallery's award-winning Edwardian Tearooms to head up a new menu in the Stable Yard Café. We'll be serving hearty hot lunches for the first time, as well as a signature Astonishing Afternoon Tea inspired by the Hall's Lady Holte's Gardens."

As a born-and-bred Brummie, Kimberley's passion for Aston Hall is palpable: "Nowhere else in Birmingham can you explore such a magnificent and iconic building. The Hall really comes alive when visitors are there to enjoy its many treasures, be it the breathtaking rooms, incredible collections or the real-life stories of the past. It's a must-see destination this summer, and we can't wait to reopen."

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Aston Hall opens on 7 July. To book a visit, go to birminghammuseums.org.uk/aston



24 hours in Stratford

Escape to Stratford-upon-Avon... *As You Like It* this summer

When it comes to quintessentially British getaways, a trip to bustling Stratford-upon-Avon is sure to rank highly on any 'staycation' list.

Located in the heart of the Warwickshire countryside, sitting proudly alongside near neighbours Leamington Spa, Kenilworth and the Cotswolds, this once sleepy market town has been home to a thriving 'Shakespeare' tourism industry since as early as 1769. It was in that year that theatre impresario David Garrick hosted the first ever 'Shakespeare Jubilee' on the banks of the Avon, complete with firework displays, masked balls and (that other equally famous British tradition) torrential thunder showers...

Stratford-upon-Avon is, of course, home to the world-renowned Royal Shakespeare Company. Shakespeare's Birthplace, Anne Hathaway's Cottage and Shakespeare's Schoolroom are amongst other sites of pilgrimage. And whilst there's no denying Shakespeare's 'starring' role in shaping the town as it is today, there's a great deal more to contemporary Stratford than first meets the eye; from Michelin-starred dining opportunities and riverside walks and waterways, to boutique B&Bs, independent shops & cafes, and family-friendly attractions to suit all budgets.



But how best to navigate this 'infinite variety'? Read on for our insider's guide to making the most of your minibreak in Stratford-upon-Avon this summer.

I like this place and could willingly waste my time in it...

After surviving a difficult 12 months, Stratford-upon-Avon's boutique hotels are back - and business is booming. In the last two years alone, new additions to the town's already impressive CV include the 93-bedroomed Grade II listed Hotel Indigo in Chapel Street - home to the five-star-rated Woodsman Restaurant - and the 46-bedroomed Hotel Du Vin in Rother Street, boasting unique rooms with carefully restored period features dating back to 1798. For the perfect waterside location, The Arden Hotel, overlooking the historic Royal Shakespeare Theatre and nearby River Avon, is the perfect bolthole from which to soak up Stratford's historic architecture and tranquil riverside surroundings. The 16th century White Swan on Fuller Street, meanwhile, is the ideal base for explorers, bringing together original Tudor period features, characterful rooms complete with timber-beams, idiosyncratic décor and modern flourishes to suit all tastes.

For a stylish escape just a stone's throw from the nearby high street, the AA five-star-rated Arden House comes complete with 10-individually designed boutique rooms, dog-friendly accommodation and the intimate Garden Room, serving award-winning breakfast and daily afternoon tea.

For a taste of Warwickshire hospitality on a budget, one can't beat a traditional bed & breakfast. Check out longstanding local favourites Elmsley Guest House, Ashgrove House, Salamander Guest House, Woodstock Guest House and Twelfth Night Guest House for a taste of olde English charm. Overnight stays are from £100 during peak season.

For those eager to embrace the great outdoors, Stratford Parks Holiday Park offers an extensive range of self-catering

accommodation, from riverside glamping pods and riverfront cottages, to luxury lodges and modern, self-catered caravans - all set within an idyllic waterfront location complete with riverside restaurant, children's play area and fishing service as standard.

Further afield, The Baraset Barn Hotel in nearby Alveston is every foodie's fantasy, bringing together 200-year-old grounds, an extensive menu of locally sourced dishes and 16 individually designed bedrooms furnished in modern English style.

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Alcester, the four-star luxury, 16th century Billesley Manor Hotel (pictured below) - in whose historic grounds Shakespeare was understood to have written *As You Like It* - is the perfect weekend retreat for staycationers. Set in 11 acres of parkland and boasting 71 bedrooms, it also features 120-year-old topiary gardens and extensive leisure and wellness facilities, including swimming pool, gym, treatment rooms and yoga hut.



Like to the lark at break of day arising...

After a great night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, you're up and ready to explore. To ease yourself into the day, take this insider's tip and beat the midsummer crowds with a morning stroll alongside the River Avon, taking in sites such as the historic Holy Trinity Church - home to the graves of Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway - the Royal

RSC

ROYAL
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY



ROOFTOP

RESTAURANT & BAR

rsc.org.uk

24 hours in Stratford

Shakespeare Theatre (including a stop-off for coffee at their takeaway Riverside Café), Avoncroft Gardens and the Memorial Theatre Gardens.

For the ultimate waterside experience, head east over Clopton Bridge towards the Bancroft Gardens to experience one of Avon Boating's Covid-safe river cruises, offering the chance to enjoy the unique surroundings of Stratford and Alveston's historic waterways and green spaces. Or, for a more intimate boating experience, embrace your inner romantic with a trip by rowing boat, punt or electric launcher, allowing you to revel in Warwickshire's picture-perfect landscapes at your leisure.



Muscles-flexed, it's time to venture into the historic High Street, with its pretty cobbles, timber-framed buildings, traditional teahouses and quirky line in independent shops and cafes.

For the serious shoppers amongst you, head to Bell Court for a taste of contemporary Stratford living. The courtyard is home to boutique retailers Sea Salt Cornwall, Balou, Lush and Pop Up Clothing Co, plus beauty brands including Black Sheep Barber Shop, The Brow Studio and Bad Apple Hair.

For souvenir shopping in style, the nearby Shakespeare Distillery pop-up shop at No 1 High Street boasts an impressive range of locally made artisan spirits, from Jester Rum to Stratford Gin. And for the perfect excuse to return, why not treat yourself to one of their gift vouchers, priced from £17.50 to £125.



There are vouchers available for the distillery tour, gin school, gin-tasting cruise and cocktail masterclass.

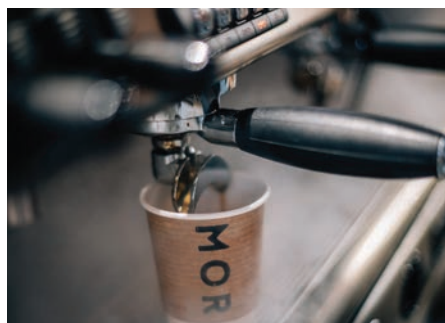
For lovers of high-quality craft ale, Ya Bard on Rother Street comes with a well-stocked fridge of local IPAs, ciders, ports and pale ales, with free delivery within 10 miles of Stratford town centre.

The family-run Vin Neuf independent wine merchants, meanwhile, boasts a portfolio of over 450 lovingly selected wines from across the globe.

Elsewhere, just a short walk from Henley Street, boutique lifestyle brand Vinegar Hill is the ideal place for bagging that one-of-a-kind gift, from high-quality homeware to the best in beauty and wellness.

Dog lovers can browse Cosy Chic Pet Boutique's bespoke range of luxury dog beds, collars, chew toys and natural treats. There's even a pre-bookable self-service doggy day spa on site, priced from £7.50 for 15 minutes.

For the perfect mid-morning snack, make like a local and head to Mor Bakery to sample one of their delicious hand-crafted viennoiserie pastries. Or, for something more substantial, grab yourself an all-day breakfast/brunch from Boston Tea Party. Twice voted best cafe in Stratford by the Stratford-upon-Avon Awards, its generous menu features meat-based, vegetarian and vegan plates, ranging from the full-English 'Boss' breakfast to American-style pancakes, burgers and super-salads.



If coffee is your bean of choice, don't leave before taking time to check out Stratford's impressive range of independent coffee shops. This includes, to name but a few, local favourites Bardia's (a boutique coffee shop and handmade gift shop selling handtied bouquets, pot plants and other home décor), Box Brownie - run by self-confessed 'coffee geeks' Ben & Hayley and home to a mouthwatering menu of handcrafted coffee and cakes - Cotswold Craft Bakery Huffkins, and the newly opened Yorks Café on the main High Street.

Pleasure and action make the hours seem short...

With your stomach fully lined and your thirst quenched, it's time to take the plunge and sample some of Stratford-upon-Avon's signature visitor attractions. But where to start?...

Well, for those longing to walk in the footsteps of the bard, a visit to Shakespeare's Birthplace - young William's 16th-century childhood home - is the obvious starting place. Having reopened its doors to the public in May, this most instagrammable of half-timbered historic landmarks now operates according to a timed ticket system, so be sure to book in advance to guarantee your place on the day.



Located on Henley Street at the beating heart of the town centre, the Birthplace allows visitors to become fully immersed in Shakespeare's life and world from the moment they step across the threshold. Journeying through the room in which Shakespeare was thought to have been born, they can enjoy the ornate Tudor gardens, in which he spent much of his young life, and check out the glove-making workshop in which his father, John, learnt his trade. To complete the Shakespearean pilgrimage, I strongly recommend investing in a Shakespeare Story Ticket, priced at £26 per adult and £15.50 per child. The ticket allows you to access the newly reopened Shakespeare's New Place and nearby Anne Hathaway's Cottage in Shottery, the ancestral home of the woman who became Shakespeare's wife.

If all of that isn't enough to satisfy the Shakespeare enthusiast in your life, you're just a short walk away from Shakespeare's Schoolroom and Guildhall in Church Street; home to the very room in which William sat as a pupil in the 1570s, and where his father served as bailiff.

And what self-respecting tourist worth their salt could overlook the chance to visit the nearby Tudor World, or to take a turn through Stratford's strange and surprising history in

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the company of its most famous son, Master Shakespeare himself, on Shakespeare's Walking Tour of Stratford, running for 90 minutes every day throughout the summer holidays.

There's Magic Alley too (pictured below), a unique adventure into Shakespeare's lost years, taking visitors on a journey through his own private study into magical streets, witches' lairs and mystical forests.



If brushing up on your Shakespeare doesn't float your boat, however, be not afraid... this town is full of surprises. Not least among them is the MAD Museum in Henley Street, by far and away one of the most exciting and overlooked attractions to grace Stratford's 16th-century cobbled streets. As much fun for adults as it is for kids, the museum of Mechanical Art & Design is a pint-sized wonder of imagination, featuring more than 50 weird and wonderful pieces of automative art that would give the likes of Cornelius Potts, The Nutty Professor and Wallace &

Gromit a serious run for their money! An absolute must-see for the young and young-at-heart alike. If this be madness, then there's method in it!

Elsewhere on Henley Street, the fun continues for families courtesy of a whistle-stop tour of some of Stratford's best-loved high-street souvenir shops. These include the Harry Potter-themed House of Spells (a veritable magnet for wizards and muggles for miles around), the delightfully quirky Neon Sheep, and the mildly perplexing Nutcracker Christmas Shop - a purveyor of festive cheer every day of the year! And whilst I can't guarantee that you'll escape bad Shakespearean puns (Much A Shoe About Nothing, anyone?) or kitsch souvenirs (what is life without a novelty Lady Macbeth soap?!), it's worth taking the risk for the inevitable smiles it will bring to the faces of the little ones in your life!

Of course, all this sightseeing is hungry work and the perfect excuse, if one were needed, to sample one of Stratford's bountiful afternoon-tea packages. Whether stepping back in time at the 1940s-inspired Fourteas Tea Room in Sheep Street - home to the 'Ivor Novello Afternoon Tea' - indulging oneself in one of Hobson's Patisserie's legendary 'cream teas' and choice of over 20 handcrafted cakes, or soaking up the sunshine with a sparkling afternoon tea served alfresco from The Arden Hotel's stunning Waterside terrace, there's no

shortage of choice on offer. And there's the 'downright quirky', too. I speak, of course, of Shakespaw Cat Café, providing vintage afternoon tea served in the company of a supporting cast of rescue cats, including Hamlet, Bottom and Horatio, to name just three!

With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come...

As time creeps in its petty pace and the afternoon grows short, no summertime visit to Stratford would be complete without an evening trip to the Royal Shakespeare Company's newly constructed outdoor Garden Theatre - a fully bespoke 500-seater space situated on the banks of the River Avon and host to the Philip Breen-directed *The Comedy Of Errors* - the RSC's first full Shakespeare production since the pandemic hit in March 2020. Opening on 13 July and running until 26 September, Shakespeare's playful and quick-witted comedy of mistaken identity and everyday miracles is the perfect introduction to the bard. You may also be interested to know that it happens to be Shakespeare's shortest play, ensuring there's plenty of time to enjoy a post-show tipples in one of the neighbouring pubs. Theatrical favourite *The Dirty Duck*, the *Encore Pub & Restaurant* and the stylishly refurbished *Townhouse Hotel* are all located just a short walk away.

If it's pre- or post-theatre dining you're

24 hours in Stratford

looking for, Stratford's culinary credentials are second-to-none, with a la carte packages to suit a variety of tastes and budgets. Options include the 3AA Michelin-starred Salt - home to a lavish eight-course evening taster menu of fine-dining classics priced at £85 per head - and the all-singing, all-dancing El Greco Greek Restaurant - famed for its generous Hellenic mezzes, warm welcome and legendary party nights. If it's a sense of occasion you're looking for, The Woodsman on Chapel Street delivers on both quality and theatrical flair, sourcing the very best local meat and game, alongside vegetables from local farmers and herbs from its very own herb garden, prepared over wood, charcoal and flame using traditional cooking methods just a stone's throw from onlooking diners.

For a more intimate dining experience, Lambs Restaurant in Sheep Street and the nearby Loxley's Restaurant & Wine Bar frequently rank top of the charts on Trip Advisor for attentive service, delicious food and relaxed, contemporary surroundings.

For dinner with a view, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more idyllic location than La Marina Tapas Bar, complete with south-facing sun terrace overlooking the nearby marina, an extensive drinks selection and a made-to-order tapas menu with daily specials as standard and a weekly Paella Thursday promotion.

Then there's the neighbouring Cox's Yard Pub, Loft & Pantry, a venue that brings a welcome splash of boho chic to Stratford's timber-clad riverside, serving up a daily menu of sharing platters, classic burgers, wings and no-frills pub-grub favourites guaranteed not to break the bank.

Play on...

After a serious day's exploring, what better way to wind down than with a visit to Stratford's newly launched Music Café, to enjoy one of their daily live-music events. With live sessions ranging from jazz music to contemporary folk, and from classical to spoken word, this intimate, cabaret-style set-up, located just a short walk from the town

centre, is exactly what Stratford has been crying out for. The venue is open daily from 9am to 11pm.

And so, to sleep - to sleep, perchance to dream, of future visits...

After all, what stay in Stratford is complete without an encore?

More on the Explorer Pass

This added-value sightseer card provides massive savings on entrance fees to top visitor attractions and beauty spots in and around Warwickshire. Additional discounts at selected shops, hotels and restaurants also form part of the package. Adult and child passes are available (adult from £39, child from £25) - and with one, two and three-day options from which to choose, there's no better way to explore beautiful Stratford-upon-Avon and nearby Warwickshire attractions this summer. The Explorer Pass is valid for 12 months from activation, meaning you have plenty of time to experience and enjoy this lovely part of the Midlands.

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