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inside:

READY TO ROCK?

hit musical School Of Rock comes to the Grand Theatre



QUIREBOYS

London rockers bring Amazing Disgrace album to The Robin



BACK IN MOTION

Motionhouse dance company on tour with new show Nobody



PRESENTS

24-26TH SEPTEMBER 2021

Chillington Hall, Brewood, Wolverhampton

FRIDAY 24TH SEP

BAD MANNERS | DR & THE MEDICS

UNCLE FUNK'S DISCO INFERNO

SLIPPERS THE SPLIT

JILTED GENERATION

THE AC30s SKA BAND | THE SPECIALZ

SATURDAY 25TH SEPTEMBER

DJ SASH I TECHNOTRONIC

KELLY LLORENNA (FROM N-TRANCE)

TPAU

HAZELL DEAN

SONIOUE

THE OUTHERE BROTHERS **ALISON LIMERICK** KYM SIMS

SLIPPERS THE SPLIT JENNIE BELLESTAR

THE NEVILLE STAPLE BAND

THE ORIGINAL DIVAS OF LIVIN JOY

JANICE ROBINSON & TAMEKO STAR

THE OUT OF SPACE LIVE BAND

SHENA WINCHESTER (JX)

URBAN COOKIE COLLECTIVE

SUNDAY 26TH SEPTEMBER

THE REAL THING

THE CHRISTIANS

THE DUALERS

EURASURED

EBAN BROWN

SLIPPERS THE SPLIT

FLEETWOOD MAD

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2 STAGES 3 DAYS 3 DECADES OF MUSIC

What's On

September 2021

ONTENTS

INSIDE:



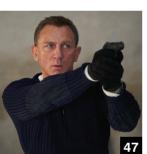
















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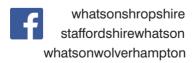
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Go go go Jo! Joseph is back in the Midlands

The new London Palladium version of Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat has been added to Birmingham Hippodrome's autumn season of shows. The hit Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice musical will be joined in the theatre's line-up of entertainment by Jimmy Carr's Terribly Funny Book Tour and children's festive favourite, Dear Santa.

The new productions join the previously announced The Cher Show, The Play That Goes Wrong, What The Ladybird Heard and the National Theatre's Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time.

For more information and to book tickets, visit birminghamhippodrome.com

Safari park submits plans for new lodges

West Midland Safari Park has submitted proposed plans to Wyre Forest District Council for the second phase of its Safari Lodges accommodation.

The opulent two-storey accommodation will be authentically integrated into newly updated giraffe and white rhino habitats, giving guests 'an immersive and unforgettable overnight wildlife encounter like no other'.



Soundtrack released for film version of hit musical

The original soundtrack of Prime Video's new film version of hit West End musical Everybody's Talking About Jamie will be released a week before the movie itself becomes available to view.

The soundtrack is released by Island Records on 10 September. Mostly written by The Feeling's Dan Gillespie Sells, it features stand-out songs from the stage show, as well as an exclusive new song performed by Frankie Goes To Hollywood legend Holly Johnson. Chaka Khan, Richard E Grant, Sophie Ellis-Bextor and Becky Hill are among others making a contribution... For more info, visit everybodystalkingaboutjamie.co.uk

Black Country Musicom returns to Himley Hall

The Black Country Musicom Festival is this month making a welcome return to the grounds of Himley Hall.



Taking place on Sunday 12 September, the festival will feature live music and comedy, a funfair, stalls and numerous children's activities.

Commenting on the event, Councillor Anne Millward, the Mayor of Dudley, said: "The Black Country Musicom Festival has a special meaning this year, giving us the chance to say thank you to all those people who worked so tirelessly risking their lives on the frontline to protect us all during the pandemic." For more information about the festival, visit himleyhallandpark.co.uk

Panto an Open Sesame to Telford festive fun

The Place at Oakengates in Telford is staging a pantomime version of Aladdin as its family show for Christmas 2021.

Coming complete with 'music, laughter, dazzling dance routines, stunning scenery,

beautiful costumes and amazing special effects', the production runs at the venue from 8 December to 2 January.

Comedian Carl Dutfield stars as Wishee Washee, with local favourite Chloe Barlow appearing as The Spirit of The Ring.

For more information about the show, visit theplacetelford.com

Music Trust launches new autumn season

Shropshire Music Trust's (SMT) autumn/winter season is kickstarted early next month by the Carducci Quartet (performing at The Lion Hotel, Shrewsbury, on Friday 8 October).

The concert, which includes Schubert's Death And The Maiden as well as works by Beethoven and Shostakovich, is the first of three by string quartets which the Trust is presenting under the banner Vienna To Moscow.

To find out more about SMT's new season, visit its website: shropshiremusictrust.co.uk



Weekend escapes at Lichfield Garrick

Lichfield Garrick Theatre is now offering even more by way of entertainment, courtesy of a brand-new Escape Room.

Operating on Fridays and Saturdays, and suitable for between two and six people aged 13-plus, the attraction challenges participants to crack codes, solve puzzles and work together in order to unlock a mystery and make their escape. For more information, visit lichfieldgarrick.com



David Dickinson is the Real Deal at RAF Cosford

David Dickinson's popular daytime television series, Real Deal, is visiting the RAF Museum Cosford on Saturday 4 September.

Doors will be open between 8am and 5pm. For more information about the event and to book a ticket, go online at rafmuseum.org.uk





Disney On Ice makes a return with Find Your Hero show

The ever-popular Disney On Ice returns to Birmingham next month with its show, Find Your Hero.

Featuring more than 50 Disney characters, the

production includes both modern tales and timeless classics. It shows at the city's Resorts World Arena from 28 to 31 October. For more information, visit disneyonice.co.uk

Buzz Band Beach Boys



The music of Brian
Wilson & The Beach Boys
is this month being
celebrated via a
collaboration between
the Buzz Band and the
English Philharmonic
Orchestra.
Good Vibrations stops off
at Wolverhampton Grand
Theatre on 7 September.
To purchase tickets, visit
grandtheatre.co.uk

Wolverhampton bidding to become UK City of Culture in 2025

Wolverhampton is bidding to become UK City of Culture 2025. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, which delivers the initiative, has tasked entrants with proving that they can put culture at the heart of their plans to recover from the impact of the pandemic.



Ex Cathedra set to launch new autumn season

Birmingham early music ensemble Ex Cathedra kickstarts its brand-new season next month with a concert that features rarely heard music from Beethoven's Funeral procession (Symphony Hall, 17 October).

"Appropriately we begin with an act of remembrance, with Mozart's profoundly moving Requiem Mass, unfinished at his death and completed by a pupil," says Ex Cathedra founder & conductor Jeffrey Skidmore. "It is preceded by a unique reconstruction of Beethoven's Funeral Procession. In 1827, over 20,000 Viennese music lovers adoringly followed their hero to his graveside, led by four trombones and a male chorus." Ex Cathedra is joined for the occasion by the Concert Trombone Quartette.



Jabs: topical new show goes on Shropshire tour

A new play offering 'a peek behind the scenes' of 2021's Covid vaccination roll-out is visiting a number of Shropshire venues over the next few weeks.

Scripted and directed by Chris Eldon Lee, Jabs is played 'largely for affectionate laughs... with a few gentle moments of poignancy, a smattering of new songs and a touch of audience participation'... To find out where the production is showing, visit Love Lee Premiere Productions' Facebook page.



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Potteries Museum's Spitfire Gallery to open this month

Stoke-on-Trent's iconic Spitfire and its new museum gallery will be unveiled at the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery on Wednesday 15 September - the day which marks the RAF's victory in the Battle of Britain.

A VIP launch event will be held in the venue's new glass-fronted extension, with

guests including Armed Forces dignitaries, veterans, air cadets, local historians, faith leaders and Operation Spitfire members. Three days later, on Saturday the 18th, the £5.4million gallery will open to the general public for the first time. For more information, visit stokemuseums.org.uk

Fitting tributes at the Assembly Rooms

Tamworth Assembly Rooms is set to pay tribute to pop-culture icons including Stevie Wonder and Elton John this autumn.

The venue is hosting a season of tribute shows, beginning with Keeping The Faith:
The Billy Joel Collection on Friday 3
September. For more information about the season, visit tamworthassemblyrooms.co.uk

Get ready to Party In The Park at Chillington Hall

Chillington Hall's annual Party In The Park is this year being held from 24 to 26 September. The ever-popular event takes place in the grounds of the Wolverhampton venue and celebrates music from across numerous decades and genres. To check on this year's line-up of talent, visit partyintheparkfest.com

Edward Lear poem inspires Little Angel Theatre's latest show

A popular poem by Edward Lear has provided the inspiration for a brand-new show from Little Angel Theatre which is visiting Stafford Gatehouse this month. The Dong With A Luminous Nose is aimed at children aged seven-plus and shows at the Gatehouse on Saturday 23 October. For more information, visit: littleangeltheatre.com



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For tickets visit www.himleyhallandpark.co.uk/bcmc



JEWSON



Dame Julie Walters to narrate Severn Valley Railway's festive offering

Dame Julie Walters is narrating Severn Valley Railway's brand-new Enchanted Express Christmas services.

The voice of the BAFTA-winning actress will be heard as passengers arrive at Bridgnorth station, where they will receive complimentary sweet treats before setting off on a heritage steam-train adventure. As part of the festive experience, passengers will be encouraged to dress in their pyjamas, to add to the special magic of the occasion. Once everyone has settled into their private compartment, the fun continues, with Julie's evocative voice narrating an 'enchanting Christmas tale', based on the classic poem, 'Twas The Night Before Christmas.

As the steam-hauled train makes its way to Highley station through a winter wonderland, there will be appearances by characters from the festive poem, including the Sugarplum Fairy.

A chance to meet Santa Claus also features. He will be visiting every compartment for photo opportunities and to present a gift to each child.

Tickets for Severn Valley Railway's Enchanted Express are now on sale at syr.co.uk



Folk At The Farm opens Lichfield Arts' L2F event

Lichfield Arts' L2F Festival 2021 will host its opening event in the leafy surrounds of the city's Woodhouse Farm on 5 September. Folk On The Farm will feature live music, Morris dancers and the shortlisted songs from the L2F songwriting competition. A barbecue or picnic is also included in the ticket price.

The main L₂F Festival takes place on 22, 23 & 24 October. For further details and to book tickets, visitlichfieldarts.org.uk



Line-up revealed for Sandwell Valley Park festival

'The world's craziest party' rolls into Sandwell Valley Country Park for its biggestever Midlands event on 25 & 26 September. The two-day festival of 'house music, surreal theatre, incredible production and colourful clubbing' boasts a line-up that includes Joris Voorn, Detlef B2B Latmun, Eli Brown, Groove Armada, Franky Rizardo, Alisha, and Hott Like Detroit. For more information, visit elrow-midlands.co.uk

Award-winning dance show at Theatre Severn

Cuba's award-winning music & dance show, Pasión de Buena Vista, will stop off at two Midlands venues when it tours the UK next spring.

The hit production, which features celebrated dance troupe El Grupo de Bailar and 12-piece ensemble The Buena Vista Band, will visit Birmingham Town Hall on Saturday 12 February. It then returns to the region four days later (Wednesday the 16th) at Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn.



Godber's Sunny Side Up in Newcastle-under-Lyme

Staffordshire's New Vic Theatre is next month hosting a touring production of John Godber's latest play, Sunny Side Up.
Billed as 'a hilarious and moving account of a struggling Yorkshire-coast B&B and the people who run it', the play shows at the

Newcastleunder-Lyme venue from Tuesday 26 to Saturday 30 October. For more



information and to book tickets, visit newvictheatre.org.uk

Spooktacular fun planned at Ironbridge Museums

Magic, potions and creativity are on the agenda for visitors to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust's numerous attractions next month, with an array of 'spooktacular' Halloween events being included in the entry prices. To find out what's happening where and when, visit ironbridge.org.uk





Razzle Dazzle!

Faye Brookes talks about her dream job - starring as Roxie Hart in a new tour of hit musical Chicago, which comes to the Midlands next month...

Complete with formation dancing, vaudeville influence and a healthy dose of fishnets, Tony and Olivier Award-winning Broadway and West End hit Chicago delves into the underbelly of the Windy City during the Jazz Age.

Based on real-life events in the Roaring '20s, the show centres on the character of Roxie Hart, a nightclub singer who shoots her lover. Together with her cell-block rival, doublemurderess Velma Kelly, Roxie fights to stay off Death Row with the help of smooth-talking lawyer Billy Flynn...

Kander & Ebb's musical builds on many of the themes of their earlier hit, Cabaret, 'the corrupting hand of celebrity' and 'audience complicity in amoralism' being the two most prominent ones.

"You see murder, corruption, adultery and all sorts of scandalous things," explains Faye Brookes, who plays Roxie. "But at the end of the day, it's that razzle dazzle that truly grips the audience. It's been so worth the wait to get this show on the road. I'm so happy to be a part of it! The role is really iconic too, so I'm absolutely thrilled.

"Roxie is so ambitious. She can be manipulative to get her own way, but it's because she dreams big and has a big heart. She loves her husband, Amos, but always retreats back to being like a child when she's around him. She doesn't stop until she gets her own way. In that sense she's very stubborn. There are many, many layers to Roxie, and she can say some very mean things. It's a very fine line between the things Roxie says and the journey we want the audience to go on with her. Part of it is having everyone on "Team Roxie', regardless of her flaws. But I'm still discovering her - and I love her! She's feisty!"

Chicago originally opened on Broadway in 1996, since which time it's boasted plenty of

star names in its cast, including Patrick Swayze and Liza Minnelli. Faye is now catapulted into this hall of fame, joining the cast after starring in Legally Blonde, Shrek The Musical and ITV's Coronation Street.

"As a child, I definitely looked up to Ruthie Henshall, who took on this role. But now that I'm creating this character myself, I don't want to compare myself to other people's versions. It's all about putting your own heart and soul into the character. These are real characters based on a true story that we need to do justice to. As much as I greatly admire all these other women for paving the way - and now I'm incredibly excited to stand amongst these legends! - I'm finding my own Roxie! This is the first time I've been given this kind of creative freedom with a character, and I'm really relishing it.

"Every little detail of this show counts, right down to anyone who plays the music or grabs my hand at some point in the choreography. Just like everyone else brings a little piece of themselves to the stage and the performance, I have to do so as well. But it's also something that you do together, and with the audience too. The rest of the cast bring out something in me, and this group of people is incredibly special."

Darren Day, Sinitta, Djalenga Scott, Joel Montague and Davina De Campo are also appearing in the UK touring version.

And alongside such a star cast is a stellar score. With an opening number like All That Jazz, it's hardly surprising that the show boasts a Grammy Award-winning album.

But what's Faye's favourite moment in Chicago?

"Roxie (The Name On Everyone's Lips) is a huge moment in the show for my character. It's the time when Roxie finds out that she's becoming famous. I'm definitely enjoying this bit the most in rehearsals! But it's also the most challenging because it's the most popular and the most well-known number from her.

"This is absolutely a dream role. I never thought it would be possible for me to play Roxie Hart. It's the most perfect timing for me in my career. I'm enjoying every single moment of it. Every day I'm discovering something new about the show and about Roxie. Moment by moment, minute by minute, I'm just falling more and more in love with her. And I hope the audience does too."

Although her focus right now is firmly on Chicago, Faye is also very much looking forward to the future: "I'm very open with my career. I think after the last two years we've all put our guard down and are willing and ready for anything. I definitely know that my bread & butter is musical theatre, though. It's what I've been trained to do, and there's nothing like it. I'm playing Roxie for at least the next year, but I would love to pursue this role for even longer because I've dreamed about this. I would love to further Roxie. I'm dreaming of the West End and Broadway for her! Theatre is definitely up there for me, but it doesn't mean I'm closing the door on TV at all. My options are wide open, and I'm taking each role as it comes."

So does Faye have some final words for anyone who hasn't yet snagged their ticket to this month's hottest musical?

"Don't think twice! We're going to blow your socks off! The talent in this cast is like nothing I've ever worked with before. From every angle of this show, you're going to be completely blown away."

Chicago shows at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre from Mon 25 to Saturday 30 October; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 24 - Sat 29 January; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 14 - Sat 19 March

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Wagamama to open at Telford's Southwater

Popular British restaurant chain Wagamama - which serves Asian food based on Japanese cuisine - is opening a new eatery at Telford's Southwater. The following jobs have been listed on the chain's website: head chef - paying up to £39,000 - front-of-house manager, senior sous chef, sous chef, and assistant general manager.

New Big Band Brunch event comes to Wolverhampton

Wolverhampton event space The Hangar is this month hosting the city's first ever Big Band Brunch.

Taking place on Sunday 19 September, the event features a variety of street food, a choice of craft ales, beers and classic cocktails, and performances by local musicians.

Kicking off proceedings is Liam Price and a seven-piece band, who will be performing a mixture of soul, reggae, '80s and '90s classics throughout the day.

The Big Band Brunch runs from 1pm to 10pm. Early-bird tickets cost £5. For more information and to buy tickets, visit: hangarvenues.co.uk

Dishoom launches Home Feast meal kit

Popular Indian restaurant Dishoom has launched a brand-new meal kit containing a selection of its best-loved dishes.

Home Feast, which has a balance of veg and non-veg dishes, comes complete with all the ingredients and know-how required to prepare 'a bountiful spread' of grills, curries, breads, sides and pudding in little more than half an hour

Kits are priced at £60 and are available for nominated day delivery to most addresses nationwide.





The Beefy Boys arrive in Shropshire

Burger, beer & cocktail specialists The Beefy Boys have opened a new restaurant on Shrewsbury's High Street.

Founded in Hereford in 2011, The Beefy Boys are four backyard amateur cooks who share a passion for local produce and dirty American-

style burgers and BBQ.

One of the most popular options on their menu is the Chilli Cheese Boy, comprising American and Swiss cheese, bacon, beef chilli, nacho sauce, sour cream, mustard, chives and pickled jalapeńos.

Shrewsbury Cocktail Week to take place this month

Shrewsbury BID is hosting a week of cocktail-inspired events from Monday 13 to Sunday 19 September.

Cocktail classes, tasting menus and parties - as well as special offers for guests purchasing a Cocktail Week Pack - all feature.

The pack, which costs £8 (£5 for NHS/NUS), contains a wrist band, a programme booklet with a list of participating bars, plus links back to the website for events and recipe cards. According to the BID, there will be 'guest DJs spinning vintage bossa nova and deep house, party games, a tiki photo booth and a top-secret live performance as the clock strikes midnight'... For more information, visit: shrewsburysopen.com.



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Afternoon Tea



Call 01743 355055 or book online www.thepeachtree.co.uk

Albert's Schloss making its way to the Midlands this winter

Albert's Schloss bier palace and cook haus is to open at Paradise, Birmingham, in November.

The venue - which is known for its Bavarian-Alpine food (think fondue and pork knuckle) and its Munich lagers, Czech Pilsner and carefully curated cocktails - will operate over two floors with three bars, the largest of which will be over 100 feet long.

A huge outside terrace area will come complete with a restored Citroen Van bier bar. Schloss will also be home to over 100 freelance artists serving up 'fun and flamboyant performances' every night of the week. Commenting on the opening,

Roy Ellis, CEO of Mission Mars - the award-winning group that operates not only Albert's Schloss but also Rudy's Neapolitan Pizza and Zumhof Biergarten in Digbeth - said: "We're creating a retreat from the modern world, where we invite guests to discover new things, celebrate one another and enjoy the pleasures and wonder of our decadent Schloss. Influenced by our travels across Bavaria, Bohemia and Alpine European retreats, expect roaring fires, raucous musical performances, tankards of Europe's finest biers and robust Bavarian food in our wonderful Paradise surroundings."





REVIEW: Lupo Lounge, Wolverhampton

A stylish bar situated in the heart of Wolverhampton city centre, Lupo Lounge caters for all needs, from breakfast, brunch, tapas and dinner, right through to evening drinks.

Although Lupo is part of a chain of eateries, the quirky decor gives it a really independent feel. The ground floor has a darker evening atmosphere, whilst upstairs is light and airy. With stools, armchairs, settees and regular chairs and tables, you are spoilt for choice and comfort.

The drinks menu features a good range of wines, beers, premium soft drinks and cocktails. We went for a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc (£24.95), which was well chilled and smooth. It was so nice we had another glass for the road!

To start, we had tapas: salt & pepper squid and the falafel and supergrain bowl. Although they arrived at separate times, both were really tasty, presented nicely and perfect-size portions for a starter. All tapas dishes are £4.25.

For mains, I opted for the Mexican superfood bowl with halloumi (£11.90), which was really delicious. Meat lovers can swap the halloumi for chorizo. The dish included spicy rice,

sweet potato, black beans and salsa. Very delicious, light but filling.

My friend had the pulled brisket chilli (£10.75) served with spicy rice. Although it was actually quite mild, it was nonetheless very tasty.

Our desserts - chocolate brownie and sticky toffee pudding - were £4.95 each. Both were served with ice cream and finished off the meal perfectly.

I have since been back with friends and our children. The kids' menu features a really good range - and there are complimentary snack pots, too, as soon as you order, to keep the "I'm hungry" moans at bay!

The last Wednesday in the month is quiz night - fantastic for a social after work or with a group of friends. *Eva Easthope*

Food:
Service:
Ambience:
Overall value
OVERALL

Lupo Lounge 12 - 13 Dudley Street Wolverhampton WV1 3EY Tel: 01902 429073



DIAL M FOR MURDER

The touring production of Frederick Knott's famous thriller is now back on the road after lockdown...

As he restarts the lockdown-halted tour of the classic Frederick Knott thriller, Dial M For Murder, show director Anthony Banks is excited that live theatre is up and running again: "You can't beat it; that shared experience is so much better if it's live because it's much more visceral, whether it's through suspense and tension or the collective release that comes from the production's comedic moments."

Whilst saddened that the tour, which started in January 2020, had to be cut short, Anthony kept himself busy making a short film - The Gap, written by Jim Cartwright and starring Sue Johnston and Matthew Kelly - and directing a revival of the drama, Herding Cats, for the reopening of the Soho Theatre last May. He's pleased to be back on the road with Dial M For Murder: "In a way, it's like doing a

revival. It gives us the chance to make it even better.

"The show is the opposite of a whodunnit because we know who's going to do it from the beginning," says the director, who also had audiences on the edge of their seats with his critically acclaimed touring production of The Girl On The Train in 2018.

"This is not a play where you can hear the characters thinking. They have the thought and they do it, and that's really quite modern. Given the success of Tarantino's films and Killing Eve on television, I think there's a real appetite for this kind of storytelling."

The instigator of the crime here is Tony Wendice, a former tennis pro. When he discovers that his socialite wife, Margot, is having an affair, he blackmails an old university pal into committing her murder for

No stranger to the genre (his other credits include Gaslight and Strangers On A Train), Anthony notes that Frederick Knott's masterpiece combines traditional thriller tropes - such as a story that hooks people so that all they can focus on is 'I wonder what happens next' - with an exploration of social class: "They really are rare, these plays, because what you usually get is political history, socio-economic observation or your standard whodunnit. This play takes elements from all of those and combines them in a unique way."

Cambridge-educated Knott was a wannabe screenwriter who penned the stage play as a stepping stone into the movies - except that nobody would produce it. Instead Dial M For

Murder was originally put on in 1952 by the BBC as a live broadcast. It was such a hit with viewers that West End impresarios were suddenly knocking on Knott's agent's door, eager to stage it.

The play ran in London for a year, went to Broadway, and was then translated and performed around the world. Then, in 1954, it was filmed by Alfred Hitchcock. Ray Milland and Grace Kelly starred as Wendice and Margot, with Knott himself supplying the script.

Hitchcock shot it in 3-D, but the process was technically glitchy and cinemagoers had grown tired of the format. So after a few half-empty screenings, it was released in 2-D and became a big box-office success.

More than six decades later, and with the three dimensions of the stage at his disposal, Anthony sees it as a timeless story with a juicy premise: "It's a bit like Macbeth in that this guy has a sniff of something that might be possible and two hours later he's become a complete sociopath. It's about tumbling into the darkest place you could possibly imagine."

Another draw for the director is the way in which Knott's play presents a vivid picture of social class in London through its main characters: the wealthy heroine, her charming husband who has married into her money, a struggling writer who has become her lover, a working-class Northern detective, and the hired killer, who is a member of 'the old boy network' of former male-only school chums.

The 1950s-penned text doesn't state a specific time frame, so Anthony has chosen to root his production in 1963.

"It feels contemporary because furniture shops now are full of Sputnik lamps with balls shooting out of them, L-shaped sofas and '6osstyle patterns on curtains and upholstery. Plus, suits and dresses have a very '6os cut."

The play also deals with very contemporary themes: the North-South divide, imbalances between men and women, and disparities between haves and have-nots, with one character remarking 'People with capital don't realise how lucky they are'.

Leading man Tom Chambers, who came to fame as Sam Strachan on Holby City and was crowned Strictly Come Dancing champion in 2008, likes exploring Wendice's complexities: "We're not going down the obvious 'cad' root. Our take on Tony is as a friendly, warm person who's caring and honest, but behind the scenes he's working a whole load of stuff out."

During lockdown Tom was in an online production of Apollo 13: The Dark Side Of The Moon, a show about the US's thwarted mission to the moon in 1970. He appeared alongside his Dial M co-stars, Michael Salami and Christopher Harper.

"I was so grateful to have a project to occupy my mind that wasn't about homeschooling or anxiety and uncertainty."

And he's thrilled to be going back on the road: "You can feel the energy in the air, and it now feels more exciting and poignant than ever.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder, and it's been such a long absence."

Taking over from Sally Bretton (who did the tour last year and is now busy filming Not Going Out) is Diana Vickers: "I'm a massive fan of the genre, so saying yes was a nobrainer for me. It's a bit daunting, though. I'm excited but terrified at the same time!"

The X-Factor semi-finalist turned actress and writer has done some comedy stand-up recently, as well as writing a TV series. The last time she toured with a play was in 2019, when she appeared in an acclaimed version of John Osborne's The Entertainer.

Diana sees her character of Margot as "smart and a bit of a risk-taker": "She feels very trapped in her situation with Tony, constantly running around after him. Then she meets novelist Max Halliday and he's new and fresh and makes her feel alive. I think she quite likes the danger of having an affair under her husband's nose."

Margot is very much a woman of her time as far as Diana is concerned: "She doesn't really have a voice. The way the inspector speaks to her is almost like, 'Shush, woman, the boys will deal with this'."

Diana is happy to note that times are changing: "There's definitely been progress, especially in this industry. There are a lot of female-generated or female-dominated projects now. Women are speaking out, whereas in Margot's time, they couldn't."

The object of Margot's affection, Max Halliday, is played by Michael Salami, an America-born, London-raised actor whose CV includes Just A Couple and Hollyoaks.

"Max is deeply in love with Margot and wants to be with her," explains Michael, "but in societal terms it just wouldn't work - this young, penniless black guy who is in love with a gorgeous white aristocrat."

The character's ethnicity isn't stated in the script. "At first, when I was approached to play him, I thought, 'But he's white'. But there's nowhere in the text that refers to his race, and I think it's very brave and clever of Anthony to do it this way. It raises interesting questions."

Since the tour was put on hold, Michael has mostly been doing voiceover work and spending time with his six-year-old son. He enjoyed the Apollo 13 experience but is keen to get back to live theatre. "I miss the crowds. I miss hearing a pin drop, I miss the laughter and the applause. Stage work is something you can't beat. You have to ride every mistake and every beat."

Fellow cast member Christopher Harper agrees. Best known for playing Nathan Curtis in Coronation Street, and with a long line of theatre credits to his name, Christopher is on double duty here. In act one he's Captain Lesgate - aka Charles Swann - the old acquaintance whom Tony tracks down and manipulates into becoming a murderer. "He's a wonderful, slimy, dark character," grins Christopher, who, in act two, plays Inspector Hubbard. "Hubbard's not your normal comesin-and-solves-it kind of guy. There's something odd or rotten going on there as well."

Christopher feels there's now a renewed appetite for live productions: "I'm regularly reading stories to my little boy - and being carried away by a tale is something that's more and more appetising, whether it's on television or being read to you at bedtime.

"But being told a story live - in an auditorium, with a group of people and the suspension of disbelief that floats in the air - is something else again. I think audiences are feeling that anew, and it's something I'm proud to be a part of."

Dial M For Murder shows at Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, from Mon 6 to Sat 11 September, and at Malvern Festival Theatre from Mon 29 November to Sat 4 December



What's On

A new season of shows at the newly refurbished Tamworth Assembly Rooms Theatre – lovingly preserved and modernised for future generations to enjoy.



T Rextasy
Saturday 28 August



The Billy Joel Collection Fri 3 September



Mr Stink
Saturday 4 September



An Evening with The Fizz Friday 10 Sept



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Beer Festival
16-18 September



Jimmy Cricket
Thursday 23 September



The Music of Elton John Fri 24 September



The Music of Stevie Wonder sat 25 September



Horrible Histories
Sunday 26 September



Lesley Garrett
Wednesday 29 September



Only Fools & Boycie
Thursday 30 September

Box Office: 01827 709618

www.tamworthassemblyrooms.co.uk









Shrewsbury Food Festival

The Quarry, Shrewsbury, Sat 4 & Sun 5 September

As well as featuring around 200 food, drink and craft exhibitors - providing a great opportunity to support local businesses, this annual event also boasts cookery demonstrations, chef schools, a gin school, cake decorating classes, kids' entertainment, an animal area, live music and plenty more.

This year's line-up of chefs includes Great British Menu winner Stuart Collins (pictured), Wild Shropshire's James Sherwin and the Festival's Head Chef, Chris Burt. Free kids activities include entry to the Panic Circus big top, a 400 ft. inflatable obstacle course, football, tennis and hockey skills, and axe throwing. Live entertainment comes courtesy of Dirty Rockin' Scoundrels (pictured), Lost The Plot and Vertigo, local theatre group Get Your Wigle On, and Dapper Flappers, who'll be performing the Charleston. Advance tickets cost £16.50 for adults and £8.50 for children.



Tamworth Food Gusto

Tamworth Castle, Staffordshire, Sat 11 & Sun 12 September

Tamworth's popular Food Gusto Festival returns with a wide variety of artisan food & drink.

On the menu this year are Mexican dishes, a Caribbean BBQ, organic sausages and beefburgers, a hot hog roast, Asian noodles, Thai dishes, Sri Lankan street food, artisan wood-fired pizza, real ale, cocktails, organic wines and barista coffees.

Live music, fairground rides and craft activities also feature.

Gates open at 10.30am until 5pm both days. Entry to the festival arena is £2 per adult and free for children under the age of 12.





Ludlow Food Festival

Ludlow Castle, Shropshire, Fri 10 - Sun 12 September

This year's festival boasts more than 180 local food & drink producers and suppliers selling 'real food', ale, cider, perry, wine and plenty more.

The festival showcases creative producers from Ludlow and across the Welsh Marches alongside a handful of invited traders who have something 'that little bit different' to bring to the event.

Free talks, demonstrations and tastings across Ludlow's main stages are an ever-popular element of the festival. The line-up is still to be announced at the time of going to print.

Adult tickets cost £12. Children's ticket prices are age-dependent.

Visit: ludlowfoodfestival.co.uk

Ginger & Spice Festival

Market Drayton, Shropshire, Sat 25 September

This free annual celebration, taking place during British Food Fortnight, explores Market Drayton's culinary heritage and social history via an eclectic mix of fringe events

As well as a Spicy Street Market and a family Heritage Town Trail, visitors can this year experience the Roving Traders' Floating Market.

The festival's only ticketed event is the Fodder & Tipple Trail. Ticket-holders are invited to meander through the town's streets and take in the delightful scenery whilst enjoying local tasting courses and refreshers at several stop-off points along a five-mile route.

For more information and to buy tickets for the Fodder & Tipple Trail, visit: gingerandspicefest.co.uk





From The Jam

The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury, Thurs 9 September

From The Jam, which features The Jam's very own Bruce Foxton and frontman Russell Hastings, stop off at The Buttermarket this month as part of their

That's Entertainment - Up Close & Acoustic tour

Expect interpretations of classics from The Jam's back-catalogue, with hits including Start, Town Called Malice, That's Entertainment, In The City, Eton Rifles, Beat Surrender and Going Underground all likely to feature.

Stone Jets

Albert's Shed Southwater, Telford, Sat 18 September

Creating toe-tapping afro-pop-rock wrapped in soul and traditional elements, Cape Town's Stone Jets is made up of Manfred Klose on guitars, Eduan Joubert on drums and Given Nkanyane on vocals and bass. Formed in 2013, the band has released two EPs - River and What I Say - and performed alongside the likes of Hugh Masekela and Majozi.



The Drifters

Walsall Arena, Fri 24 September

With more than 50 hits under their belt, global album sales somewhere north of 114

million, and a greatly deserved place in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, The Drifters are one of the longest-serving bands in history. They're back on tour this autumn with a brand-new show, performing classic numbers from the last six decades, including Saturday Night At The Movies, You're More Than A Number, Come On Over To My Place, Under The Boardwalk and Kissin' In The Back Row.

Quill

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Thurs 9 September; Palace Theatre, Redditch, Sat 18 September

Brummie music legend Bev Bevan takes his place in seven-piece Quill as the Birmingham band head out on an autumn tour.

Led by Joy Strachan-Brain, Quill have developed a unique musical style that reflects numerous influences, including Celtic folk and rock.

Expect quirky interpretations of Blackberry Way, Telephone Line, Flowers In The Rain, Heaven And Hell and Don't Bring Me Down. Original new songs Grey Goose Call and Elephant In The Room also feature, as do longstanding favourites Say It Ain't So, The Jig and Nine Mile Camp.

Quireboys

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Wed 22 September; The Robin, Bilston, Thurs 23 September

After supporting Guns N' Roses and the Rolling Stones during the 1990s, this quintessential British rock'n'roll band are now enjoying a revival and selling out venues around the world.

Formed in London in 1984 - originally as The Choirboys, then The Queerboys, before settling on the less controversial name of The Quireboys - Spike, Guy, Keith and Paul are showing no sign of slowing down any time soon. Indeed, their 12th album, Amazing Disgrace, sounds every bit as fresh and dynamic as any of their releases from the past 35 years.



Nick Cave & Warren Ellis

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Tues 7 September

Described by Nick Cave as "a brutal but very beautiful record nested in a communal catastrophe", new album Carnage was created in collaboration with Warren Ellis and recorded over a period of several weeks during lockdown. Warren is a long-term member of Cave's band, The Bad Seeds, and although the pair have composed and recorded many soundtracks together, this is the first time they've released an entire album of new songs as a duo.



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Symphony Hall and Town Hall re-open for audiences



Grayson Perry: A Show for **Normal People**

Thu 2 September

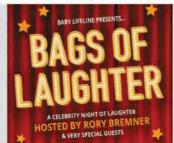
Symphony Hall



Simon Amstell: Spirit Hole Fri 29 October 8pm Town Hall

Bags of Laughter Hosted by Rory Bremner

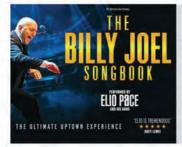
Thu 23 September 8pm **Town Hall**



Marti Pellow: The Greatest Hits Tour

Sun 28 November 7:30pm Symphony Hall





The Billy Joel Songbook

Fri 24 September 7:30pm Town Hall



Adventures of the Yorkshire Shepherdess -Amanda Owen

Tue 30 November 7:30pm Town Hall

The Music of Lord of The Rings, Game of Thrones And Beyond

Sun 10 October

Symphony Hall



The Bootleg Beatles

Mon 13 December 7:30pm

Symphony Hall





Joker in Concert -Film with Live Orchestra

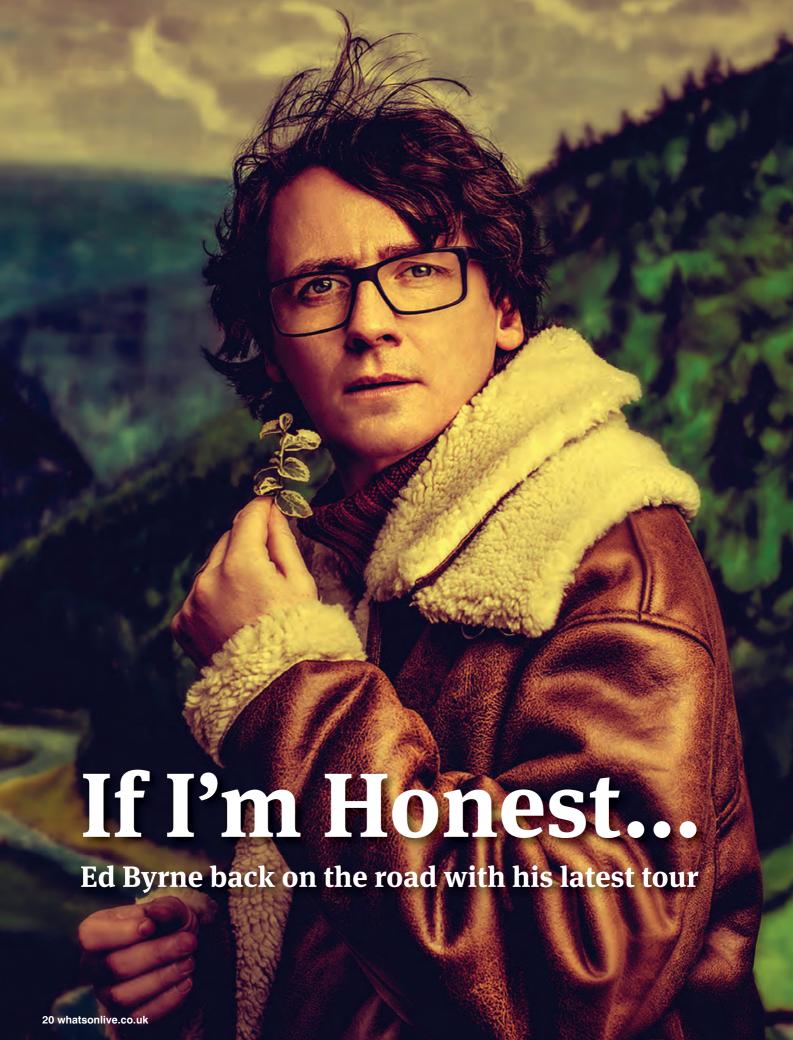
Tue 19 October 7:30pm Symphony Hall



Live on Stage

Sun 26 Dec 2021 -Sun 9 Jan 2022 Town Hall

Book Online: bmusic.co.uk



A household name teetering on the brink of national-treasure status, award-winning comedian Ed Byrne enjoys worldwide acclaim for his stand-up. With 25 years under his belt, Ed has parlayed his on-stage success into a variety of notable television appearances. A regular on Mock The Week and The Graham Norton Show, Ed has recently co-presented Dara & Ed's Big Adventure and its follow-up, Dara & Ed's Road To Mandalay, and managed not to disgrace himself on Top Gear or whilst tackling one of The World's Most Dangerous Roads. As a semi-professional hill-walker himself and a fully paid-up humanist, he also brought a refreshing warmth and honesty to BBC Two's recent hit, The Pilgrimage.

But the Irishman is still best known and best appreciated for his stand-up performances. A quarter of a century at the comedic coal-face has equipped Ed with a highly evolved story-telling ability and a silky mastery of his craft. Yet his wit, charm and self-deprecatory observational humour is often underpinned by a consistently hilarious vitriol and sense of injustice at a world that seems to be spinning ever more rapidly out of control.

Having recently hit a new peak with shows such as the sublime Spoiler Alert and reflective Outside, Looking In, which explored the minefield that is modern parenting and a generational sense of entitlement, Ed's new show, If I'm Honest, digs ever deeper into a father's sense of responsibility, what it means to be a man in 2021, and whether he possesses any qualities whatsoever worth passing on to his two sons. Occasionally accused of whimsy, If I'm Honest is a show with a seriously steely core.

Gender politics, for example, is something Ed readily engages with - deploying his customary comedic zeal. "I'll admit that there are things where men get a raw deal," he says. "We have higher suicide rates, and we tend not to do well in divorces, but representation in action movies is not something we have an issue with. It was Mad Max: Fury Road that kicked it all off, even though nobody complained about Ripley in Alien or Sarah Connor in Terminator 2. Of course, social media means this stuff gets broadcast far and wide in an instant, which emboldens people.

"The problem with men's rights activists is that it's not about speaking up for men's

rights, it's about hating women. If you're a men's rights activist, you're not going to care about the fact that there's an all-female Ghostbusters remake. That's nothing to do with men's rights or female entitlement. That's everything to do with being, well, a whiny baby."

As ever, Ed manages to provoke without being overly polemical, a balancing act that only someone of his huge experience can really pull off.

"I did stuff about Trump and the Pizzagate right wing conspiracy, and a couple of the reviewers said, 'Oh, I would have liked to have watched a whole show of this'. And I think, 'well you might have, but the average person who comes to see me would not like to see that'. I like to make a point or get something off my chest, or perhaps I'm talking about something that's been on my mind, but the majority of stuff is just to get laughs.

"People who come to see me are not political activists necessarily, they're regular folk. If you can make a point to them, in between talking about your struggles with aging, or discussing your hernia operation or whatever it is, you can toss in something that does give people pause as regards to how men should share the household chores.

"When a joke makes a good point, I think people enjoy it. It's the difference between having a steak and eating a chocolate bar."

Ed, who broke through in the mid-1990s when the New Lad became a genuine cultural phenomenon, doesn't want to submit to any unnecessary revisionism, but admits that if the times have changed, he has changed with them. He reflects a little ruefully on one of his most famous jokes: "There's an attitude towards Alanis Morrisette in the opening of that routine that I'm no longer comfortable with, where I call her a moaning cow and a whiny bint. Slagging off the lyrics of the song is fine, but there's a tone in the preamble that I wouldn't write today."

The new show also takes his natural tendency towards self-deprecation to unexpected extremes: "I do genuinely annoy myself. But the thing of your children being a reflection of you, gives you an opportunity to build something out of the best of yourself, only for you to then see flashes of the worst of yourself

in them. It's a wake-up call about your own behaviour."

When I challenge him over the degree of self-loathing he displays, he disagrees. "Self-aggrandising humour is a lot harder to pull off than self-deprecating humour. A lot of people get really annoyed when Ricky Gervais is self-congratulatory. I always find it very funny when he accepts awards and does so in the most big-headed way possible. I think it's a trickier type of humour to pull off, talking yourself up in that way.

"So no, I don't think I'm being massively hard on myself. The fact is, when you're the bloke who is standing on the stage with the microphone, commanding an audience's attention, you're in a very elevated position anyway."

That said, If I'm Honest brilliantly elucidates the frustration that arrives in middle age - and lives up to its title. "I'm bored looking for things. I'm bored of trying to find stuff, because I can never find it, and it's entirely my fault. Nobody's hiding my stuff from me. Although my wife did actually move my passport on one occasion."

Since the pandemic hit and live comedy as we know it temporarily ceased to be, Ed has done a few socially distanced gigs, as well as some on Zoom. He can't wait to get back on the road properly. It will have been 18 months since he last performed a tour date.

"I'll have to see what still works and what doesn't. I've missed doing stand-up the most during this lockdown. No-one told me 'you're not going to be touring for 18 months' or I would have planned it better."

Ed Byrne's If I'm Honest tour stops off at Redditch Palace Theatre, Wed 8
September; Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Sat 11 September; Crewe Lyceum, Fri 24
September; Huntingdon Hall, Worcester, Wed 10 November; Birmingham Town Hall Wed 24 November; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sun 30 January; Leamington Spa Pavilion, Thurs 10 February; Dudley Town Hall, Sat 12 February; Walsall Arena, Wed 16 February; The Core, Solihull, Wed 23 February and The Place, Telford, Wed 15 June



Sindhu Vee

The Core, Solihull, Fri 17 September; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sat 9 October; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Sun 17 October; Birmingham Town Hall, Tues 2 November; William Aston Hall, Wrexham, Thurs 9 December

Former bonds tradeswoman Sindhu Vee makes a welcome return to the Midlands this autumn with a brand-new show. Although her previous career in the City no doubt offers plenty of material for an evening of stand-up comedy, on this occasion Sindhu's decided to let the subject of finance gain some extra interest in the comedy bank. Instead, she's turning the spotlight on the subjects of hair, friends, and 'living the vast difference between virus and viral'.

Sindhu stumbled across a career in comedy by chance. Having quit her job as a banker in order to look after her children, she then found out that one of the least funny people she knew was doing stand-up.

"If she could do it, then so could I," says Sindhu. "And my career as a comedian has gone very well. Comedy is like a fire in my belly, and I feel incredibly lucky to have found it. It's hard work, for sure, but it's also my calling."

Seann Walsh

The Old Rep, Birmingham, Sat 18 September; Rose Theatre, Tewkesbury, Thurs 28 October

Even though Seann Walsh is a hugely popular comedian, he still has to write his own blurb - which, as he points out, is something that he finds 'absolutely insane': "What am I meant to say? 'I'm fantastic, come and look at me talk'? I don't know. It's me. I do stand-up. "I guess I can start with the fact I renamed the tour. Sticking with Same

Again? felt a bit triggering after the year we've had. So it's now called Back From The Bed. Some of the material will be the same as I'd always planned, but some of it will be new, because it will be difficult to avoid mentioning the last year, in which millions of decent people tragically lost their lives to TikTok. "The previous leg of this tour got a lot of standing ovations, which was pleasing. Either that, or they were leaving early. Come along if you like me. I'd be confident enough to say come along if you're on the fence. Cheers - Sean."

Jenny Eclair

Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Fri 10 September; The Old Rep, Birmingham, Sun 10 October; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sun 7 November

Compared to some of her peers, Jenny Eclair's ascent up the comedy pole to celebrity status was relatively slow. "I think I've made more public mistakes than most people, and suffered for them," she observes. "Like being crap on stage. I was 22 when I started, and there are still producers working now who saw me then and wrote me off. It took years to change their minds."

As Jenny matured, she developed an appreciation of her womanhood that's since proved to be of real benefit to her comedy routine: "I think women get dirtier as they get older. The more your body lets you down, the more you have to find it funny. I just think bumholes and fannies are hilarious. The first joke my father told me was a fart joke, and I still find it funny."

Kerry Godliman

Evesham Town Hall, Sat 18 September; Glee Club, Birmingham, Wed 29 September

Comedian and actress Kerry Godliman's new touring show, Bosh, covers all manner of subjects, from needy cats and disappointing camper vans to ever-raging feelings of 'mum guilt' and her ongoing bewilderment at the phasing-out of thimbles...

You may remember Kerry from such TV shows as Miranda, Our Girl and Ricky Gervais' Extras, Derek and After Life. She's also had her own show on Radio Four. But it's live stand-up that's closest to her heart. "It's such a creative opportunity to say all the stuff I want to say about things like politics and parenting," she explains. "And that's amazing. There aren't many jobs where you can just say exactly what you like."



Bags Of Laughter

Birmingham Town Hall, Thurs 23 September Ed Byrne, Reginald D Hunter (pictured) and Bobby Davro are among the star names making a contribution to this special fundraiser.

The event is a 40th-anniversary celebration of Baby Lifeline, a unique charity that supports the care of pregnant women and their unborn and newborn babies. Hosted by Rory Bremner, the show also features, among others, Freya McGhee, Alan Francis, John Thomson, Gabby Killick, Geoff Whiting and Charlie Hopkinson.



Gary Meikle

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Thurs 23 September; The Old Rep, Birmingham, Tues 26 October; Rialto, Coventry, Sat 15 January

Evolution, social media, single mums, bee sex, small-man syndrome and how to deal with burglars are among the topics under consideration in Glasgow-born Gary Meikle's currently touring stand-up show. Gary's fast-paced delivery and playfully dark style of humour has seen him score a massive hit with audiences - most significantly online, where numerous viral video rants about subjects including eyebrows, hair extensions and 'dick pics' have accumulated over 150 million views and counting.

Gary gets much of the inspiration for his comedy from his own life, particularly from his experience of being a lone parent and now a grandparent. He lives with his daughter and granddaughter. "I've been stuck in lockdown with two generations of formidable Meikle women," he says. "Believe me, they're just as glad to see me hitting the road for this tour as I am!"



Rob Newman

Huntingdon Hall, Worcester, Thurs 2 September; Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, Thurs 30 September

Rob Newman came to prominence in the late 1980s - in The Mary Whitehouse Experience and via his comedy double-act with David Baddiel, a partnership which was allegedly fraught with significant tension.

Since going solo, Rob's work has been characterised by a strong political element which has seen him likened to Mark Thomas.

With a downbeat style of delivery, he's not to

everybody's taste as a stand-up comedian generating belly laughs doesn't seem to rate all that highly on his list of priorities - but he's always an interesting and thoughtprovoking experience.

This latest show 'weaves together Nietzsche's sunglasses, James Bond in Toxteth, electric spiders and singing Neanderthals'.

Simon Brodkin

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Sat 18 September; The Old Rep, Birmingham, Sun 19 September; Rialto, Coventry, Tues 2 November

Former medical doctor Simon Brodkin is perhaps best known as the creator of comedy character Lee Nelson, a bling-wearing Stellaswigging South London geezer.

Simon has also hit the headlines for his

Simon has also hit the headlines for his unwavering commitment to the business of being a top-quality prankster: he famously handed Prime Minister Theresa May her P45 at the Conservative Party Conference.

This latest tour sees him taking on perhaps his trickiest task yet - going on stage as himself. Previously billed as '100% Simon Brodkin' but now called Troublemaker, the show reveals what it's like to be chased by Donald Trump's bodyguards, how to make the police laugh while they're arresting you, and what to do when you're outed as a Jew by the Ku Klux Klan.



whatsonlive.co.uk 23

What's New Pussycat?

Brand-new Tom Jones musical brings the Swinging '60s to The REP



What's On recently caught up with Dame Arlene Phillips, the choreographer behind brand-new '60s-set comedy musical What's New Pussycat?, which receives its world premiere at Birmingham Repertory Theatre next month...

Take the hit songs of one of the most famous singers ever to come out of Wales, combine them with one of the earliest English novels, and the result is a brand-new musical called What's New Pussycat?, which receives its world premiere at Birmingham Repertory Theatre next month.

Songs made famous by Sir Tom Jones form the basis for an adaptation of Henry Fielding's influential novel from 1749, The History Of Tom Jones: The Foundling.

Swinging London of the 1960s provides a backdrop to the show's unfolding storyline. It's 1965, and although Tom Jones has rocked up in London with a broken heart, he's full of ambition and boasts a booming voice. He soon encounters an exciting world of dancing, mods, miniskirts and great music. And while the audience revels in the romantic adventure that plays out on stage, one burning question remains unanswered: will the eponymous hero and ladies' man ever be reunited with his true love, who seems way too preoccupied with designing for Carnaby Street to contemplate taking a walk down the aisle?

While numbers such as It's Not Unusual, Delilah and, of course, What's New Pussycat? whisk the audience right back to Swinging London in the 1960s, the show's choreography promises to be something to behold, with none other than Dame Arlene Phillips having taken the reins.

Dame Arlene has been involved in the project for quite some time: "It goes back to the beginning of last year, when my agent called me and said that the producers were interested in me choreographing the show. I absolutely love the music of Tom Jones, the incredible, amazing songs, the richness of the musical arrangements and, of course, 1960s' style, so I said I'd love to be a part of it."

Arlene's only encounter with the man they call The Voice actually took place back in the '6os: "When I was in my 2os, there was an American choreographer called Claude Thompson, who was in England searching for dancers for Tom's new TV show, This Is Tom Jones. He was looking for a dancer to feature in a solo spot. Juliet Prowse was the star dancer and there was a dance battle. She had to win by out-dancing me on a table - I eventually jump off - and I got picked for that part. It was so exciting!

"There was Tom, singing away, and my gosh, being so close to such a megastar was absolutely incredible. And that's my only experience of Tom - but what an experience to have!"

While the sprawling source material for What's New Pussycat? is unlikely to be found on many bookshelves outside a university English Literature faculty, Arlene has been familiar with Henry Fielding's story for most of her life: "I started reading it when I was younger, so I was aware of the novel. There's no way that, in a musical lasting two hours, you could even begin to really tell a story that's a very complex series from a long, long book. What's New Pussycat? is set in the '60s but definitely based on that story, without question. The way that it's been written, and the way that our brilliant director, Luke Sheppard, has used and developed what the audience are going to see, is very clever."

While people of a certain vintage will no doubt recall Arlene's 1970s dance troupe, Hot Gossip, Arlene herself only really came to widespread public attention in 2004, when she featured on the original judging panel of Strictly Come Dancing.

"We knew from the start that Strictly was really attracting people to dance, without

question. At the time, there were dance-shoe manufacturers going out of business because they couldn't sell enough shoes. Strictly really changed that. It changed things for a lot of people - for schools that teach, for costume makers. The series always brings more and more people to dance."

As theatrical productions reopen postlockdown, Arlene has noticed how invested audiences seem to be in the shows they're now watching: "Audiences have missed the feeling that theatre gives them; watching something and taking something away to talk about. Theatre is life-enhancing, and when you lose that, you lose a little bit of yourself and a little bit of life. Covid has been incredibly damaging. I opened a show two weeks ago - Grease The Musical - which had been postponed four times. The roar, the response from the audience, was massive. There was a real outpouring of every kind of feeling - laughing, crying, cheering, clapping and that's before the show's even started!"

So what can audiences expect when they settle down to watch What's New Pussycat??

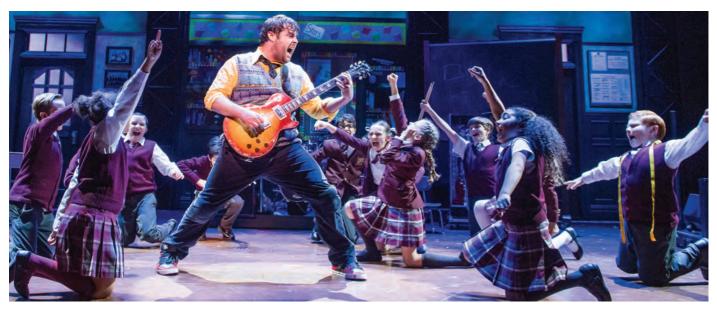
"So many songs that are heavy with big brass arrangements. You hear the music and it's triumphant and rhythmical. There's so much there to use as a choreographer! Also, a phenomenal visual design - a real feast for the eyes - and they're going to love the story, too; there's a lot of comedy in there. When people walk out of the theatre at the end of the show, they're going to have a real spring in their step!"

What's New Pussycat? shows at The REP, Birmingham, from Friday 8 October to Sunday 14 November









School Of Rock

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 21 - Sun 25 September; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Tues 19 - Sat 23 October; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 31 January - Sat 5 February

There's a school of thought that School Of Rock would've been even better without Jack Black.

And the great thing about Andrew Lloyd Webber's stage version of the hit 2003 movie is that you actually get to find out if that's true!

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

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

SIX The Musical

Birmingham Hippodrome, Tues 14 - Sat 18 September; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 1 - Sat 5 February

From Tudor queens to battling boss-women, SIX sees the wives of Henry VIII take to the stage to tell their own versions of their lives. The one-act production, which premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2017, was enjoying a runaway success until Covid put the brakes on, but a show that sits somewhere between a Girls Aloud gig and a traditional musical should have no trouble whatsoever refinding its momentum.

A loud and colourful celebration of girl power, the production sees the cast being ably supported by all-female band The Ladies In Waiting.



Everybody's Talking About Jamie

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 14 -Sat 18 September; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 5 - Sat 9 October

Everybody's Talking About Jamie may have come from humble beginnings - it was inspired by a television documentary and premiered in Sheffield - but after only a matter of months it had transferred to the West End.

Since then, the musical - which follows a young man's quest for acceptance on his journey to becoming a drag queen - has enjoyed blockbusting success, with numerous Olivier nominations, an extensive UK tour and a feature film, released this very month, testifying to its incredible popularity. "Jamie is a production that tries to tell people to stay true to who they are," explains Layton Williams, who plays the title character. "It tells people to be proud of themselves, and that if they're different or feel like they don't fit in, then there's a place for them in the world anyway. It's all about having hope."

Heathers The Musical

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 21 - Sat 25 September

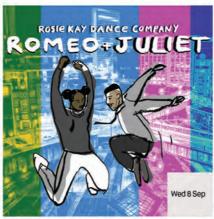
Although far from being an unqualified success with the critics, Heathers The Musical did great business in the West End, and is equally likely to pack them in during its first ever UK tour.

Based on the cult 1989 movie starring Winona Ryder and Christian Slater, the show follows the character of Veronica Sawyer, a high school student who's tired of being part of a feared and popular clique with three girls named Heather. Eager to opt out, she finds herself drawn to new student Jason 'JD' Dean, a rebellious young man with murder in mind...



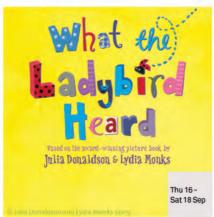
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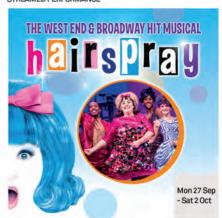


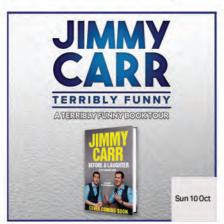










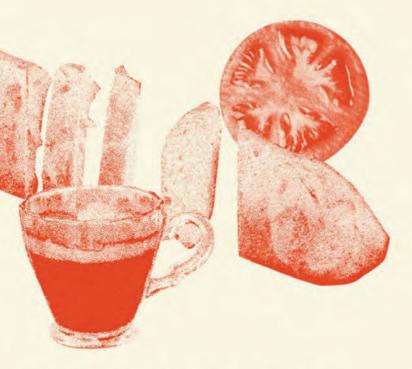








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The Rocky Horror Show

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 27 September - Sat 2 October; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 13 - Sat 18 June

Hook up your fishnets, tighten your corsets and prepare to 'do The Time Warp again' - The Rocky Horror Show is returning to the Midlands!

Richard O Brien's cult production tells the tale of the straight-laced Brad and the deliciously corruptible Janet, who arrive at the castle of the alien transvestite Frank N Furter and witness the birth of the monster, Rocky.

Along the way, they take the audience through a selection of love-'em-or-loathe-'em musical numbers, including Sweet Transvestite, Damn It Janet and The Time Warp. Great fun's a guarantee - particularly if you get into the spirit of things and attend the show dressed in your very best stockings and suspenders (as many patrons do)!.

The Navy Lark

The Old Rep, Birmingham, Sat 25 September If you're old enough to remember enjoying long-running radio comedy series The Navy Lark, then be sure to drop anchor at the Old Rep for this slice of nostalgia from the mid-20th century. Presented in the style of a radio performance, the production comprises three classic episodes from the hit show, which ran from 1959 to 1977.

The Little Shop Of Horrors

The Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham, Wed 1 - Sun 26 September

One of the longest-running off-Broadway shows of all time, The Little Shop Of Horrors is an affectionate spoof of 1950s' sci-fi movies. Despite various productions quite regularly turning up at theatres across the country, it remains perhaps best known from its 1980s film version, which featured a hilarious turn from Steve Martin as the splendidly sadistic dentist.

East Is East

The REP, Birmingham, Fri 3 - Sat 25 September Although best known from its 1999 film version, East Is East was originally produced for the stage, world-premiering at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1996. Written by Ayub Khan Din, the critically acclaimed play presents a semiautobiographical account of British Asian life in early-1970s' Salford.

Pakistani chip-shop owner George may be determined to give his children a strict Muslim upbringing, but the kids themselves have other ideas. Born and brought up in Britain, they increasingly see themselves as British. Their rejection of Pakistani customs leads to plenty of household tensions and no small number of genuinely funny moments.



Seven Ages

Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton, Thurs 2 September

Going to school, falling in love, finding a job, having a child and growing old disgracefully are among the subjects covered in Kevin Tomlinson's well-reviewed comedy, a show which focuses on the idea that life's journey is separated into seven different stages. The production is supported by Black Country Touring, an initiative which uses theatre as a way to shine a light on the region's stories, personalities and diverse communities.

NOT Lady Chatterley's Lover

Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sat 18 & Sun 19 September; The Core Theatre, Solihull, Tues 28 September; The Swan Theatre, Worcester, Thurs 14 October; Albany Theatre, Coventry, Fri 15 October; Brierley Civic Hall, Sun 14 November; Civic, Stourport, Sun 21 November

When the unexpurgated version of DH Lawrence's most famous novel finally saw the light of day, some 30-plus years after the book had first been published, its explicit descriptions of sex - and use of words which were at the time unprintable - made it the subject of a watershed obscenity trial. In stark contrast, nobody will be getting their knickers in any kind of a twist about this Mel Brooks-style parody of the Midlands-born author's most notorious work.

Presented by well-regarded theatre company Happy Idiots and hailed for its Carry Onesque reworking of the novel, the show comes scomplete with 'high drama, high comedy and highly raised eyebrows'.





Shane Richie reprises his West End role of Hugo/Loco Chanelle in the touring version of smash-hit musical Everybody's Talking About Jamie...

You first played Hugo/Loco Chanelle in 2019 and have recently returned to the role for the reopening of the show in the West End, prior to this UK & Ireland tour. How did playing the part come about?

I'd just come out of EastEnders, and I was kind of happy just to have a break because I knew I was going to be busy from April/May onwards. But then Nica Burns, the show's producer, got in touch with my manager. I'd heard a couple of tracks from the show, and I really liked them, but when you're in EastEnders, you're in a bit of a bubble, so I hadn't had the time to go and see it. So I went to see it with my manager, Phil Dale, and was like, 'Oh my God, I just love this show!' They said, 'We'd like you to play a Sheffield drag queen', and because it was so different to the next character I was lined up to play on stage - Archie Rice in The Entertainer - I thought, 'I need to do this'. I was in panto at the time, so I didn't get as much rehearsal time as I thought I would. It was seven weeks, then 'Bam!', me and Layton Williams, who plays Jamie, both started at the

How has the past 18 months been for you with theatres closed?

When the Jamie tour got cancelled, I thought it would only be for a few weeks, but then we got to realise just how serious it was. There was no light at the end of the tunnel, although I always knew I was going into the castle for I'm A Celebrity, so I had that to look forward to. Before I went into I'm A Celebrity, I was asked to go back into the West End production in January, so when I was in the castle I was thinking, 'I need to lose a bit of weight so that I can fit back into the dress', knowing full well there was going to be no panto. Then, two days before I was due to go into rehearsal, the show had to be pulled. There were all these false starts, and it was so disheartening. I was alright at first, but when there was no light at the end of the tunnel for theatres, I started panicking.

What are you most looking forward to about going back out on the road again?

We started off in Sheffield and played to 24,000 people in three weeks. Then we got to do Northampton and Edinburgh before we reached Birmingham and were forced to cancel the tour. I thought, 'That's alright', because I thought it was only temporary and I was pretty tired. Then I went home and was wiped out for four days, not realising I'd got

Covid myself. As for starting up the tour again, I can't wait to see everyone in the cast and crew. There's a different buzz when you're on the road compared to being in the West End. It feels like we're bringing the circus to people, and they're so excited when we arrive.

How did you prepare to play Hugo's drag queen alter-ego, Loco Chanelle?

My dad used to run clubs in London, so from the age of 10 I was used to seeing men in drag. Then, on one of my very first tours, when I was 17 or 18, there were three drag queens and two strippers in the show. I knew drag queens, I grew up with them, and I knew Danny La Rue. It's funny now - if you'd have said to me 30-odd years ago that drag would be mainstream, I'd have said, 'Don't be stupid' - but drag *is* mainstream now and quite rightly so.

Did it take long for you to master the high heels?

I had a nightmare. With my left calf muscle, even when I just talk about putting on the heels, I can feel it twingeing. It's one thing standing in five-inch heels, it's another thing to walk in them and another thing entirely to dance in them. Layton and the other drag queens in the show helped me. I'd do the school run, then come home, put the heels on and walk around the kitchen. My wife was like 'Seriously, if the Tesco delivery man comes, you're not answering the door in high heels!'. I walked everywhere in them.

When the show reopened, though, I struggled

when the snow reopened, though, I struggled at first because my calves didn't have muscle memory. When I put the heels back on, I thought I'd only need a day to get used to them again. The producer said, 'Shane, you might want to practise', but I was like, 'Shut up', but then I put them on at home one day and I was a wreck. I couldn't walk in them. People say it's like riding a bike, but once you've not worn heels for a long time, it's so hard. The first couple of shows, I had a few little stumbles, but now I'm twirling again and I know what I'm doing.

What kind of feedback about your performance did you get from fans?

Those who've followed my career for years loved it, but there's a whole generation who would only have seen me as Alfie Moon. There'd be these young girls whose mums wanted to come see the show because they're going, 'What, Alfie's playing a drag queen? I'll

come see that with you, darling'. At the stage door, boys and girls and teenagers were there with their parents! If I can bring another generation to come see Jamie - the 40-plus-year-olds who wouldn't normally come see a show like this - and then they love it, then I'm happy. From the outside looking in, they might be like, 'Oh, it's about a gay boy who wants to wear a dress', but it's not about that at all. Right at the beginning, he's going, 'I'm gay, get over it'. It's not about someone being gay, it's about someone who dares to be different.

How important do you think that message is nowadays?

It's so relevant. We're in a country where there are so many social, political and cultural changes going on, and people are being divided. We're getting angry with each other; there's the Far Left and the Far Right, and then there's this show that goes, 'Be who you want to be, let others be who they want to be and celebrate diversity'.

What's your favourite musical number in Iamie?

For me, it's Over The Top at the end of act one. Lyrically it's all there and it sets everything up for act two, where Loco passes the baton to Jamie and goes, 'Right, your turn now'.

What couldn't you be on the road without?

I bring my guitar, a lot of books and my backroller for the physical warm-up. I try to make my dressing room like a home-from-home, so I've got my iPad, my guitar, my music and my pictures of my family.

The tour calls at The Alexandra in Birmingham. Does the venue have any particular significance for you?

I did Scrooge there, among many other things, and every time I go to Birmingham I see so many changes. Culture is seeping out of the walls. They've got fantastic museums and fantastic shopping, and I'm really looking forward to going back.

Everybody's Talking About Jamie shows at The Alexandra, Birmingham, from Tues 14 to Sat 18 September. The show then visits Wolverhampton Grand Theatre from Tues 5 to Sat 9 October.







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Being Mr Wickham

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 30 September - Sat 2 October

Jane Austen's roguish George Wickham here gets the opportunity to redeem himself. Set some 30 years after Austen's Pride And Prejudice ended, this one-man show stars Adrian Lukis, who memorably played Wickham in BBC TV's unforgettable adaptation of the novel.

The production finds Wickham on the brink of hitting 60, still married to Lydia but with his looks on the wane and harbouring a great disdain for the "sanctimonious age of Victoria" in which he now finds himself living...

A must for any Austen fan, this well-reviewed hour of theatre has been co-written by its star.

The 39 Steps

Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, Thurs 9 - Sat 18 September

Anybody who remembers the various film versions of John Buchan's classic spy thriller would be hard-pressed to call any of them 'humorous'. So it's a bit weird, to say the least, to imagine an adaptation of the story that majors in belly laughs. Nonetheless, that's exactly what Blue Orange Theatre is here serving up as part of its 10th anniversary celebrations.

So why not catch up with handsome hero Richard Hannay as he battles to remain impressively stiff-upper-lipped in the face of dastardly murders and life-threatening encounters with double-crossing secret agents. Four fearless actors take on all the roles in a show that promises plenty of fun.

Crimes In Egypt

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Tues 7 September; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Thurs 16 September

The award-winning New Old Friends theatre company's previous on-stage successes include the much-loved Falcon's Malteser and the Agatha Christie, Noel Coward & PG Wodehouse-inspired Crimes On The Coast. So if you caught either of those critically acclaimed productions, you'll no doubt be looking forward with eager anticipation to Crimes In Egypt.

This latest comedy adventure features Belgian 'detective extraordinaire' Artemis Arinae, who finds himself investigating a gruesome murder or several while taking a holiday cruise on the river Nile. Along the way, a versatile cast of four brings to life all manner of quirky and curious characters, from lascivious lawyers and crocked captains to fastidious physicians and feuding femme fatales.

Expect a fast-paced and funny evening of absorbing theatre and dastardly crime.



Quentin Crisp: A Naked Hope

Swan Theatre, Worcester, Thurs 30 September This one-man show debuted to rave reviews at the Edinburgh Festival and depicts the legendary Quentin Crisp in two distinct phases of his extraordinary life: firstly in the late 1960s, in his filthy Chelsea flat, where he surveys a lifetime of degradation and rejection; and then in New York in the 1990s, where, finally embraced by society, he regales the audience with his hard-earned philosophy on how to make the most of one's time on earth. "Life will be more difficult if you try to become yourself," he advises. "But avoiding this difficulty renders life meaningless. So discover who you are. And be it. Like mad!" The production is written and performed by Mark Farrelly.

Petticoat Council

Malvern Theatres, Fri 24 September

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

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...



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19/9 **Eddie Reader Live**

22/9 Malcolm Stent in the Afternoon 23/9 The Stars of Irish Country Show

25/9 Step Inside the 60s

26/9 An Audience with Lesley Garrett

27/9 Talon - The Best of Eagles

28/9 **NOT Lady Chatterley's Lover**

Graham Gouldman 29/9

1/10 The Upbeat Beatles

2/10 Sukh Oila: 'Life Sukhs' Tour

5/10 Geoff Norcott: I Blame the Parents

7/10 **Buddy Holly & The Cricketers**

9/10 The Music of Stevie Wonder

13/10 Steeleye Span

14-15/10 The Roy Orbison Story

16/10 Blake Live in Concert

This is not a full list - see website for full programme















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The Play That Goes Wrong

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Mon 13 - Sat 18 September; Birmingham Hippodrome, Tues 26 - Sat 30 October; Malvern Theatres, Tues 9 -Sat 13 November

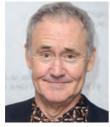
Mischief Theatre Company's The Play That Goes Wrong visits the region on the back of a fantastic reputation and hugely successful runs in the West End.

For those new to the show, it focuses on the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society's attempt to put on a 1920s-set murder-mystery. The only trouble is, the bumbling thesps are more than a little accident-prone. So much so, in fact, that they're not even sure they'll manage to reach the curtain call...

All Above Board

The Albany Theatre, Coventry, Tues 7 & Wed 8 September; Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Thurs 9 September

All Above Board has been written 'in the best traditions of British farce' by Nigel Planer - best known for playing hippie Neil in the hit 1980s alternative comedy series, The Young Ones. The play focuses



on an unlikely bunch of modern-day dogooders, whose attempts to make the world a better place see them not only losing the plot but also compromising their morals and even being divested of their clothing!

Ticket holders for any of the three Albany
Theatre performances are welcome to attend a pre-show Q&A with Nigel on the 7th.

The Stolen Year

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, Thurs 23 - Tues 28 September

MAC's associate company, Little Earthquake, here presents a theatrical installation which aims to share the lockdown experiences and perspectives of older Birmingham residents. From making banana bread, through watching Tiger King, to Clapping For Carers, the show examines the ways in which people's spiritual and political perspectives have been reshaped by the events, challenges and traumas of the Covid era.

The show forms part of MAC's autumn 2021 Celebrating Age season.

The Girl Next Door

New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Tues 7 - Sat 18 September

Modern-day narcissism lives next door to wartime sacrifice in this 85th fulllength play by the prolific and everbrilliant Alan Ayckbourn.



Veteran actor Rob is suffering a case of the 2020 lockdown blues when he spies a 1940s housewife putting out the washing on the other side of the garden hedge.

What follows is a bringing together of national crises past and present, as Rob finds that his understanding of himself - along with his perception of the world in which he lives - becomes seriously challenged...

The Canterbury Tales

Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton, Wed 15 September

One of English literature's most famous works, Geoffrey Chaucer's legendary epic - written at the end of the 14th century - presents a series of cautionary tales. The stories are supposedly recounted by a group of pilgrims as they travel together to the shrine of Saint Thomas Beckett at Canterbury Cathedral.

The work is best known to modern audiences for its spectacularly bawdy charms, featuring, as it does, more than its fair share of references to willies, bottoms and bodily functions.

This particular presentation has been deemed suitable for adults and older children aged 12-plus - although audiences are being warned to expect Middle Ages 'naughtiness and nonsense', tights and codpieces, and even some medieval swearing!

Judy & Liza

Lichfield Garrick, Fri 24 September; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Tues 27 October

In 1964 Liza Minnelli performed on stage with her mother, Judy Garland, for the one and only time. Minnelli was on the threshold of great things, including winning a Tony Award a few months later and, a handful of years afterwards, the 'best actress' Academy Award for her performance in Cabaret. Garland, in stark contrast, was on an addiction-strewn pathway towards self-destruction that would ultimately lead to her untimely death before the decade was out...

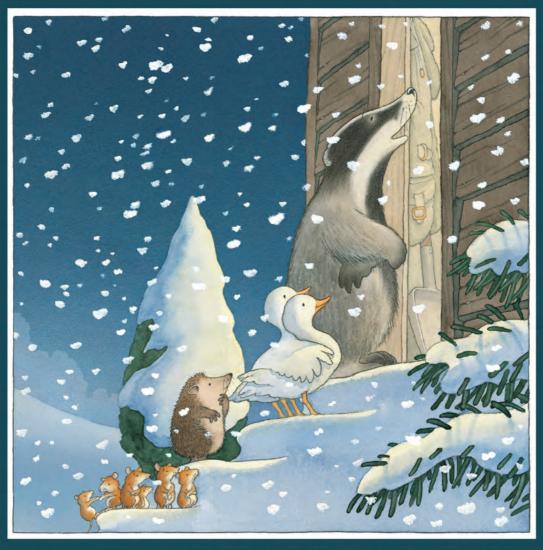
Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, Judy & Liza showcases one of Hollywood's most famous and turbulent mother-daughter relationships, along the way boasting a playlist of memorable numbers including Cabaret, Maybe This Time, The Trolley Song and The Man That Got Away.





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What The Ladybird Heard

Birmingham Hippodrome, Thurs 16 - Sat 18 September
This stage version of the award-winning picture book by Julia
Donaldson and Lydia Monks continues to delight its target audience of

children aged two and older.

When Hefty Hugh and Lanky Len set out to steal the farmer's prize cow, they soon find that the best-laid plans of mice and crafty robbers can sometimes be undone by the tiniest and quietest of creatures - namely, one very small ladybird...

Justin Live: The Big Tour

The Alexandra, Sun 12 September; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Sun 13 March; Malvern Theatre, Sun 24 - Mon 25 October

'Well-known songs, lots of dancing, hilarious comedy and plenty of slapstick fun' is the order of the day when CBeebies favourite Justin Fletcher MBE hits town



with his very own show.

Justin's previous children's entertainment endeavours have included hit programmes Justin's House, Gigglebiz and Gigglequiz, as well as voiceover work as Harold from Thomas The Tank Engine, and numerous Christmas seasons spent in pantoland. One of his most successful undertakings is Something Special, a children's television show specifically aimed at youngsters with delayed learning and communication difficulties.

In The Night Garden

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Fri 17 & Sat 18 September

If your little ones are big fans of the top-rated CBeebies television series, they're certain to enjoy this live version as well.

And it's not only the kids who're in love with the production - audience surveys and parents' reviews reveal that, for nine out of 10 adults, it's a 4.8-out-of-five theatrical experience!

Featuring full-size costumes and 'magical' puppets, the show is now in its 11th year, with this latest adventure going under the title of Igglepiggle's Busy Day.



Fireman Sam Live: Saves The Circus

The Prince of Wales Centre, Cannock, Sat 25 September



Now an impressive 34 years into his firefighting career, Fireman Sam is still putting out blazes in Pontypandy and lighting up children's eyes the length and breadth of the UK.

In this latest adventure, perpetual troublemaker Norman Price decides to become the star of the circus. But with a tiger on the loose and faulty lights threatening everybody's safety, it's soon time for Fireman Sam to reach for his trusty hose and come to the rescue.



Motionhouse dance company is back, promising to push the boundaries of performance further than ever before. What's On caught up with founder & artistic director Kevin Finnan MBE to find out what audiences can expect from brand-new show Nobody...

Leamington-based company Motionhouse exists to break new ground in the world of dance, its spectacular productions combining circus-dance with digital imagery in ambitious settings.

For co-founder Kevin Finnan MBE, inspiring as diverse an audience as possible is of the utmost importance: "What we at Motionhouse are focused on is producing work that's interesting and thought-provoking but also entertaining and engaging. The proof of that is in our outdoor tours. Everybody comes along including people who wouldn't usually go to the theatre. And if you can create a show that makes them stand in the street, then you're on the right track because, for us, it's always about reaching the widest possible audience."

Motionhouse was co-founded by Kevin and Executive Director Louise Richards. The pair built up the company by earning money from teaching, and are committed to supporting those pursuing a career in dance and the arts.

Although it started small, Motionhouse now produces world-class shows which have toured globally, along the way building strong working relationships with numerous Midlands venues.

"We started a relationship with Birmingham Hippodrome back in 2008, and over the years the theatre has included our outdoor work as part of their programme. In 2012 they were our production partner for The Voyage, which was a huge spectacle in the centre of Birmingham where we built a full-scale ship for the London 2012 Festival, celebrating the Olympic and Paralympic games.

"It was a really exciting thing to do and saw us moving into that level of large-scale outdoor production. The Hippodrome was a fantastic support to us, and that developed into us performing some of our smaller outdoor shows outside the theatre, finally building up to the associate artist programme in 2018 and performing on the main stage."

Motionhouse also has a longstanding relationship with Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, collaborating on numerous projects, and with Warwick Arts Centre, considered by the company to be its home venue: "We always want to make connections, and we're very proud to be associated with these fine venues."

Although Motionhouse has been flying high for some time, Kevin is quick to point out that, just like everybody else, the company was left grounded by the pandemic: "Frankly, it was a really difficult time. I had young dancers who'd just joined us, and it was like you're seeing their career go by. I've also got dancers from Spain, who were living in Leamington and were locked in their accommodation, in a foreign country, knowing very few people. Motionhouse is a company that tours all year round, and we were on a hectic schedule. Then Covid came along and took it all away."

The pandemic may have brought to a halt the company's busy schedule, but the past 18month period has been vital in terms of Kevin's brand-new production, Nobody: "I started out to make this show thinking about identity and who we are in the world. When the pandemic hit, I was really focused on this notion that we'd all been talking only to the people around us and to ourselves, because lockdown was quite a lonely time. I re-thought what I wanted to make a show about, and became really interested in the voice in our heads. Everybody talks to themselves, and everybody has a voice in their head, but it was during lockdown that it became clear to me that this is something we all go through.

"So when we were finally able to go back to work, I threw most of my original ideas away and started again. The show is really about the relationship with ourselves, and what the voice in our head means. I've created two sets of characters in Nobody. There are the everyday characters - ourselves in the normal world - and then there are the crows, who are the voices in our head."

Motionhouse's most ambitious show to date, Nobody will be like nothing the company has ever produced before: "This show is a real use of spectacle, combining dynamic and thrilling dancing with digital film. And we're engaging with the digital in a different way in performance now, so it's going to be a really exciting show."

Interestingly, it's also the first-ever Motionhouse show to have an interval: "I always generate momentum in our shows, so initially I wasn't keen on the prospect of an interval. But I've suddenly realised that having one allows us to do things we've never done before, like changing the environment.

"The break we had over lockdown has given us the chance to rethink and develop something new. We're coming back on a different level with this show in terms of what we can achieve with the dancing, the circus vocabulary, and the integration with digital.

"What's thrilling to all of us at Motionhouse is that we really seem to be moving forwards. Every show that we're bringing out has more people wanting it and more people going to it, and virtually every person that booked us prior to lockdown has kept their booking and pushed it back. So when Nobody comes out, it's got three full tours to do and loads of European dates because everyone has stayed with us."

Emerging on the other side of the pandemic, Kevin is keen to ensure that Motionhouse continues to thrive: "Over the last 10 years, the company has been going through a revolution of growing and developing. In the period just before the pandemic, we'd got to a level where there was one Saturday when we did four different shows in four different cities in four different countries, because we'd built the company up to that point.

"We want to get Motionhouse back to the level where we're running multiple companies and developing global touring, so that we can bring the absolute best to the whole of the UK and beyond."

Right now, however, Kevin's primary focus is the current production: "It's really strange when you've spent a lot of time with a show in your head, and then it's finally there before you, out on the stage. That's the thing about working on a performance - until you see it, it doesn't really exist. I'm proud of Nobody, and I'm really looking forward to seeing people's reactions to it and getting that buzz from the audience. At the moment, it feels like we're pregnant with it and we're waiting for that moment when it pops out!"

Motionhouse presents Nobody at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham, Friday 22 - Monday 25 October; Malvern Theatres, Tuesday 2 November; Birmingham Hippodrome, Friday 4 February and Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Wednesday 27 - Sat 30 April **AWARD** WINNING **FESTIVAL RETURNS**



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Message In A Bottle Birmingham Hippodrome, Fri 24 September

Acclaimed choreographer Kate Prince's creations are always worth an evening of any dance enthusiast's time - but even more so when they're accompanied by a soundtrack of brilliant music. Given the piece's title, it's no surprise that the featured music on this particular occasion is Sting's, with 1979 track Message In A Bottle featuring alongside numerous other memorable tunes, including Roxanne and Every Breath You Take.

The show hasn't met with universal praise, being criticised in some quarters for being a by-numbers exercise, but

there's certainly plenty to recommend the production. Not least among its many highlights is the performance of the exuberant cast, who bring high energy and real commitment to everything they do.

All in all, Message In A Bottle is a worthy addition to Kate Prince's CV, which already features urban fairytale Into The Hoods and hit musical Everybody's Talking About Jamie.

The show is being presented at the Hippodrome in association with 2021's Birmingham International Dance Festival.



English Youth Theatre: The Nutcracker

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Fri 3 - Sat 4 September

Presenting full-length versions of classical ballets such as Giselle, Coppelia, The Sleeping Beauty and Swan Lake, English Youth Ballet (EYB) utilises professional principal dancers in its productions' leading roles.

The company performs in regional theatres across the UK, providing young dancers outside London with the opportunity to develop their talents within a professional setting.

This latest presentation sees EYB taking on Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker, complete with its numerous much-loved classics, including the stirring Waltz Of The Flowers and the magical Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy.



The Ballroom Boys Act Two

The Albany Theatre, Coventry, Sun 26 September

The Ballroom Boys are very much 'back by popular demand', their previous tour, in 2019, having garnered some seriously complimentary reviews.

Strictly stars Ian Waite and Vincent Simone are here presenting a brand-new show, complete with dance routines aplenty - from the Viennese waltz and the foxtrot, to the rhumba and the Argentine tango.

The boys are joined by their 'stunning dance partners and a world-class singer'.



Get Dancing!



Birmingham International Dance Festival is back with a thrilling live programme of performances and events...

Birmingham International Dance Festival (BIDF) is back - and it's live too, both outdoors and in venues.

The city's signature festival, produced by Hippodrome-based DanceXchange, showcases some of the best contemporary outdoor performances and new commissions.

A theatrical world premiere also features, as do innovative collaborations with visual and performance artists.

This autumn edition follows on from a hugely successful online festival in June. Taking place at various locations across the city from 21 September until 3 October, the event boasts an imaginative and entertaining live programme,

shining a light on the region's amazing dance offer while at the same time engaging communities and celebrating diversity and inclusivity.

Also featured in the festival is a programme of dance workshops in schools and free public dance classes showcasing hip-hop, circus and flamenco. There's an augmented reality (AR) experience too, where people can connect via tablet devices to explore and interact with a series of imaginary digital dances.

Locations in which the BIDF programme will be taking place include Centenary Square, Digbeth, North Birmingham, Cannon Hill Park and the on-site Midlands Arts Centre. Commenting on the festival, Lucie Mirkova, Head of Artistic Programmes at DanceXchange and Curator at BIDF, said: "We can't wait to be back outdoors presenting thrilling dance performances, and to finally return to venues after so long. The programme is really exciting, showcasing the amazing creativity of both UK and international artists. We are delighted to be taking the festival to communities across the city, so that you can experience amazing dance on your doorstep. Make sure you've got the dates in your diary and look out for more announcements in the coming weeks."

Check out our festival highlights below...



Frock

Stop Gap Theatre presents an uplifting dance riot set to a new art rock soundtrack - the result is a punkish celebration of individuality and difference.



Beyond Borders

Witness the power of nature as the landscape changes around you in this live dance sequel to Beyond Borders, a film co-created with over 130 young dancers in the West Midlands.



Out Of The Deep Blue

Autin Dance Theatre uses dance, movement and masterful puppetry to tell a story about the climate emergency.



Born To Protest

Working with young people from North West Birmingham, Just Us Dance Theatre challenges presumptions about black male and female figures to reveal vulnerability, fragility and the battle to prove oneself.



The Bull And The Moon

DeNada Dance Theatre's heart-warming, family-friendly tale blends contemporary dance, flamenco and theatre.



IRMÃ-sister

Damaedance explores the beauty and challenges of women's relationships - their strength, power and vulnerability - in an exhilarating and cutting-edge performance.



With three cinema screens, a gallery upgrade, a new public performance space, three new hospitality venues and a redesigned building, Coventry's Warwick Arts Centre is reborn.

"We're upgrading from one cinema screen to three," says Director Doreen Foster (pictured below). "What's great about this expansion is that we will now show new releases as well as our popular independent and foreign films. We will develop a much deeper programme too, such as talks and 'in conversation with' sessions with directors. The important thing about having an independent cinema is to diversify the sector; not just the audience and films showing, but those who are involved generally. We hope to develop ways for new people to find their way into the film world, whether as makers or in any other capacity.

"Next up to mention is the Mead Gallery, which has moved from its previously hiddenaway spot on the first floor to right off the ground floor foyer. We've recreated the same footprint but have also added the Fourth Gallery - a space in front of the main gallery and foyer. We'll use this for performances, public programming and workshops. Programming in these immediate public spaces will make the whole centre feel more alive."

Giving the building an open and welcoming feel is just as important as the upgrades themselves.

"We'll have three new places to eat and drink. The restaurant at the new main entrance, which now overlooks the central university plaza, is one that I hope people will see as truly special for Coventry. We're hoping people will travel into the city just to eat with us. There are just so many changes that improve Warwick Arts Centre's overall offering to the city. A new section of the building has also created this really lovely open foyer space. The idea was to really flood the space with light and give people more space to relax on busy evenings - and just to provide the general feeling of the venue being open and welcoming. If you can see what's happening inside, then you're more inclined to walk through the doors to have a look - so that's how the building has been designed. We're hoping that as we gradually increase our programming upon reopening, more people will come to see the arts centre as a

destination for so many different needs."

As well as drawing people in, Warwick Arts Centre will be going right into the heart of local communities.

"What you really need to do to develop audiences is go to them. So we will also have some specific programmes for getting people involved in co-commissioned and curated projects. We have this big Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games project called Playing Out, which is based in Canley, an area that sits next to the arts centre. It's designed to develop activities with communities there by collaborating with artists and then delivering it in their locality. Then some of those activities will be brought into the arts centre. They will all be new people who've never visited us before, even though they live next door. Getting the people of Coventry into the arts centre is really what this whole redesign has been about.

"Both ourselves and the City of Culture team have deliberately designed projects that create a sense of community and place. Absolutely, the appetite is there, but we're the ones who have to do the work to make sure that carries on. A building is just an empty vessel. Just like how a house isn't a home until you fill it with memories, an arts centre is just the same. My main agenda over the coming years is to locate us more strongly in Coventry. While a lot of our audiences come from places like Warwick and Kenilworth, it's really important that the people of Coventry understand that this is their arts centre. We're using City of Culture as the opportunity to raise our profile within the city through the projects that are funded, but we're also just grabbing that scope for promotion and visibility around the region and beyond."

Being fully embedded in the University of Warwick has an equal part to play in Warwick Arts Centre's outreach.

"We must have more than 200 come into the arts centre within a year for our creative learning programme. We also work with schools to produce their own summer festivals, including choosing their artists. We also host and provide space for a lot of the music and drama societies at the University of Warwick, so that they have a regular programme of performances in our main venues. We have the Music Centre within the

building too, which is used by over 2,000 students each year for free tuition. We are starting to collaborate with Coventry University on a number of City of Culture projects as well - so we're also making those new connections."

The venue will be looking to maintain its profile both nationally and internationally.

"People travel to other cities for culture, and I very much see people travelling to Coventry for that; both for the City of Culture and beyond. As an arts centre, we already see visitors coming from well outside the region even from as far away as Glasgow. As a venue, we already have a reputation for presenting international work. We're part of that international circuit where we're visible beyond the region, and I very much see that continuing. The hope is that people will discover there's even more to Coventry than they thought. The reason we're City of Culture is that it was recognised how much untapped potential there is in Coventry. There's plenty of opportunity out there, and we just have to nurture it. We want artists and audiences to know that this city is home to the arts - and that Warwick Arts Centre is a vital piece of that jigsaw.

For information about future programming, visit: warwickartscentre.co.uk



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Doreen's Top Eight

Warwick Arts Centre Director Doreen Foster selects some of her personal highlights from the venue's forthcoming autumn season of shows and festivals...



Coral Avenue 1-4 October

Air Giants present their joyful, interactive, inflatable robots, inspired by undersea life.



Write To Rave 2 October

Algoraves invite people to dance to music made using algorithms, often through live coding. Since first being coined in 2011 in London, the Algorave movement has gone global. Join poet, academic and social activist Debris Stevenson for a night of immersive electronic beats.



From The Source Festival 29–31 October

The festival features contemporary artists who draw their inspiration from jazz but reinterpret it for today. Contributors include:

Sarathy Korwar (29 October), who draws on Indian classical as well as jazz traditions; Birmingham rapper Kofi Stone (30 October), whose debut LP, Nobody Cares Till Everybody Does, featured collaborations with Loyle Carner, Maverick Sabre and Ady Suleiman; and MOBO-nominated saxophonist Camilla George and her Quartet (31 October).



Change Festival 5-7 November

A weekend of uplifting theatre, cabaret, discussions, music and craft, inviting us to rise up and create a better future. Highlights include The Coca Butter Club and Meet Me A Tree, HurleyBurley's opera for children under the age of two.



Cuckoo by Jaha Koo 10-13 November

A journey through 20 years of Korean history. Told by 'a bunch of talkative rice cookers', Cuckoo combines personal experience with political events and reflections on happiness.



The Midnight Bell 10–13 November

Another premiere, this time from New Adventures and Matthew Bourne, who delve into the pubs and bars of 1930s London for a tale inspired by the work of novelist Patrick Hamilton (Hangover Square, Twenty Thousand Streets Under The Sky).

Jack Dee: Off The Telly

3 December

The latest show from the veteran comic, who offers a ray of sunshine in these difficult times!



Beckett's Room

4-7 December

UK premiere by Dublin-based Dead Centre (whose Hamnet was a huge hit at Warwick Arts Centre in 2018). Beckett's Room tells the story of the Parisian apartment where playwright Samuel Beckett lived during World War Two. Told without performers, characters are heard through headphones as objects miraculously move and the story unfolds.



Birmingham COMED Festival 1-10 Oct Pestival 1-10 Oct 2021



RUSSELL BRAND · TAILENDERS
CHRIS RAMSEY · JASON BYRNE
CLINTON BAPTISTE · JIMEOIN
RACHEL FAIRBURN
BUSTER KEATON
DANE BAPTISTE · JENNY ECLAIR
MARK STEEL · MAX FOSH
DARREN HARRIOT
FIN TAYLOR · LOYISO GOLA
HOWERD'S END · COBO
SCOTTISH FALSETTO
SOCK PUPPET THEATRE
FREE HALF-DAYER

JOSH PUGH · TEA WITH THE DEVIL · GOOD KIDS CELYA AB & MARY FLANIGAN · DANNY CLIVES JAMES COOK'S BOARD GAME SMACKDOWN WAYNE BEESE · KITTY MESSALINA

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THE MOON & THE WARDROBE · DAMON CONLAN BIRMINGHAM FOOTNOTES · BOX OF FROGS ... and more

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No Time To Die

CERT 12a (183 mins)

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

After many a pandemic postponement, Daniel Craig finally gets to pick up his Licence To Kill for the fifth and final time. This latest adventure sees everybody's favourite British secret service agent pitting his now-fiftysomething wits against a mysterious villain armed with dangerous new technology.

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

Craig has been a massive hit as Ian Fleming's famous super-spy, and is surely making the right decision by handing in his Walther PPK at the age of 53. Roger Moore played the role until he was nearly 60, a decision that did neither him nor the Bond legend any favours.

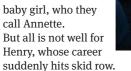
Released Fri 30 September



Annette CERT 15 (141 mins)

Starring Adam Driver, Marion Cotillard, Simon Helberg, Rila Fukushima, Natalie Mendoza, Ron Mael Directed by Leos Carax

World-famous soprano Anna and controversial comedian Henry fall in love and have a baby girl, who they call Annette.



While the couple are on a yacht during a storm, a tragic accident leads to Anna falling overboard and losing her life.

In the aftermath of her death, infant Annette begins to sing in her mother's voice - and a now financially compromised Henry suddenly sees the chance to make some much-needed moolah...

The opening movie at Cannes this year, Annette has garnered plenty of positive reviews, with the much-respected Rotten Tomatoes website describing it as 'a magnificently ludicrous rock opera'.

Released Fri 3 September

Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings CERT 12a

Starring Simu Liu, Awkwafina, Tony Chiu-Wai Leung, Michelle Yeoh, Tim Roth, Benedict Wong Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton

For those unfamiliar with Shang-Chi, he's one of Marvel's lesser-known superheroes. The character first appeared in comic books in the early 1970s, at the height



of the martial-arts craze that saw actor Bruce Lee catapulted to global superstardom. The film's storyline sees Shang-Chi encounter the mysterious Ten Rings organisation, the international terrorist group responsible for kidnapping Tony Stark in the first Iron Man movie...

Marvel is promising a film boasting 'stunning visuals, mind-blowing action and a relatable story'. They have a pretty good track record at delivering all three of the above, so hopes are high for this latest entry in the company's Cinematic Universe.

Released Fri 3 September

Here Today CERT 12 (93 mins)

Starring Billy Crystal, Tiffany Haddish, Dierdre Friel, Alex Brightman, Matthew Broussand, Max Gordon Moore Directed by Billy Crystal

Billy Crystal's first outing as a director in 20 years sees him wisecracking his way through a sometimes-poignant story about the benefits of living in the moment and savouring meaningful relationships. Crystal's Charlie Burnz, an aging comedy writer, is in the early stages of dementia when he meets aspiring singer Emma Payge (Haddish) and embarks on a platonic and life-affirming friendship...

There's plenty to enjoy here - not least the performance of the always-watchable Crystal - but ultimately the film fails to decide which particular chords it's mainly hoping to strike with its audience.

Released Fri 3 September





Copshop CERT 12a

Starring Frank Grillo, Gerard Butler, Toby Huss, Ryan O'Nan, Tait Fletcher, Alexis Louder Directed by Joe Carnahan



Fans of action movies will surely be salivating at the prospect of Joe Carnaham directing Frank Grillo and Gerard Butler in what promises to be a no-holds-barred explosion of violence and mayhem. Finding himself on the hit list of hired gun Bob Viddick, wily con artist Teddy Murretto hatches a plan to save his sorry ass - by getting himself arrested.

Problem is, Viddick is an assassin who's committed to leaving no hit unmurdered, meaning that he soon comes up with a plan of his own.

When a competing assassin arrives on the scene, the stage is suddenly set for some serious carnage...

Released Fri 10 September 48 whatsonlive.co.uk

Malignant CERT tbc (111 mins)

Starring Annabelle Wallis, Maddie Hasson, George Young, Michole Briana White, Jacqueline McKenzie, Jon Lee Brody Directed by James Wan

Madison Mitchell (Wallis) is having visions of brutal murders - killings which, she comes to realise, are actually taking place in real life... Categorised as a 'horror thriller' movie, Malignant has got plenty going for it, including the man in the director's chair: James Wan. Wan is a past master at films in this genre, having co-created the Saw and Insidious franchises and realised The Conjuring Universe. Expect spinetingling scenes and mindbending moments aplenty.

Released Fri 10 September



Herself CERT 15 (97 mins)

Starring Clare Dunne, Molly McCann, Ruby Rose O'Hara, Ian Loyd Anderson, Harriet Walter, Cathy Belton Directed by Phyllida Lloyd



This Dublin-set movie follows the story of a battered wife who, escaping the tyranny of her abusive husband, ends up building a house for herself and her two daughters... A standout film at last year's Sundance Festival, Herself is helmed by Phyllida Lloyd, who made her big-screen directorial debut with the altogether frothier Mamma Mia!. Since that pop-cornball film-career opener, Lloyd has ably demonstrated that she's equally at home with far more serious material. She looks set to garner plenty of accolades for this latest addition to her increasingly impressive CV.

Released Fri 10 September



Cinderella CERT PG (113 mins)

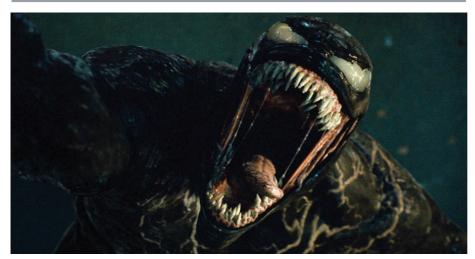
Starring Camila Cabello, Billy Porter, Idina Menzel, Nicholas Galitzine, Pierce Brosnan, Minnie Driver Directed by Kay Cannon

With its comical Ugly Sisters, matchmaking fairy godmother, drop-dead-gorgeous Prince Charming and fits-one-foot-only glass slipper, Cinderella can justifiably lay claim to being the most popular of all fairytales so this live-action version of the truly terrific tale should have no trouble whatsoever

finding its audience.

With Camila Cabello in the titular role and old hands Pierce Brosnan and Minnie Driver bringing a wealth of movie-making experience to proceedings, Prime Video may well be on to a real winner here - particularly with Billy Porter starring as a genderless fairy godmother. "Magic has no gender," says Porter. "This is a classic fairytale for a new generation, and I think that the new generation is really ready for it."

Released Fri 3 September (Prime Video)



Venom: Let There Be Carnage CERT tbc

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

Despite almost universally being described as a train wreck of a movie, Venom was the seventh highest-grossing film of 2018. Hence this sequel.

Tom Hardy's performance in the first film didn't exactly pull up any trees but was

nevertheless considered to be one of the movie's saving graces. The usually excellent Hardy will no doubt be aspiring to better things in this second outing as the Marvel Comics character.

He's joined by Woody Harrelson as Cletus Kasady, a psychotic serial killer who becomes the host of an alien symbiote known as - yep, you guessed it - Carnage.

NEW DATE: Fri 15 October

Gunpowder Milkshake

CERT 15 (114 mins)

Starring Karen Gillan, Lena Headey, Carla Gugino, Michelle Yeoh, Joanna Bobin, Freya Allan Directed by Navot Papushado

A female assassin goes rogue in order to save the life of eight-year-old Emily, whose father, unbeknown to the youngster, has been killed by the very assassin who's now trying to keep her safe... Navot Papushado goes for style over substance in this colourful over-the-top actioner that puts its female characters very much front and centre. If you avoid the mistake of expecting too much from the movie, there's every chance you might actually find something to enjoy about it.

Released Fri 17 September



The Many Saints Of Newark

CERT tbc

Starring Alessanadro Nivola, Leslie Odom Jr, Jon Bernthal, Vera Farmiga, Michael Gandolfini, Billy Magnussen Directed by Alan Taylor

The 1967 race riots in Newark, New Jersey, provide the backdrop to this eagerly anticipated movie, a cinematic preguel to hit gangster television series The Sopranos. Twenty-two-year-old Michael Gandolfini steps into the formidable shoes of his late father, James, to play a young version of future mob boss Tony Soprano. Michael hadn't seen even so much as a single episode of The Sopranos before he became involved in the Many Saints Of Newark project. To prepare for the challenge of playing the character his dad made famous, he ended up watching all six seasons of the show in as many weeks, as well as listening to hours of his father's monologues. The film's support cast includes Goodfellas' star Ray Liotta.

Released Fri 24 September



Tribute to a legend

Birmingham Opera Company founder Graham Vick sadly passed away earlier this year. BOC Music Director Alpesh Chauhan talks about how the company intends to make its future projects a fitting tribute to the man who started it all...

Birmingham Opera Company (BOC) is renowned for its unconventional and innovative performances, staging opera in unusual venues such as warehouses, aircraft hangars and shopping centres.

The Company was founded by international opera director Graham Vick. A strong believer in making opera accessible to everyone, Graham was committed to creating productions that reflected the diversity of Birmingham communities.

Graham sadly passed away in July, following complications arising from Covid-19. He was a pioneer in the opera world, leading BOC to numerous awards during his time as artistic director. Most recently, the Company won the Education & Outreach Award at the 2021 International Opera Awards, while their music director, Alpesh Chauhan, has been recognised as Newcomer of the Year.

Birmingham-born Alpesh was appointed to his current BOC post in July 2020, making him the first minority ethnic music director in Britain. Just like Graham, Alpesh is passionate about making opera for everyone: "I know that many communities are still quite closed. For example, when I took the cello home to my parents, they didn't know anything about it. In the Indian community, the feedback I got was not a matter of feeling that classical music was not for them, it was just that they didn't know anything of it.

"I really believe in going to children at a school-age level and having them be able to talk to each other about music. That's what did it for me - being able to listen to different types of music and talk about it, and also being able to play an instrument without it costing loads of money."

Alpesh realised his passion for music at just six years of age, and his own experiences solidified his commitment to making classical music accessible to all: "One of the most special projects I've done was BBC Ten Pieces, where the BBC selected 10 pieces of music across different genres within classical music and made them available across all schools. When I went to the premiere of the one I was involved in, there were teenagers and school children walking out saying that they hadn't realised that classical music could be so exciting. I was left wondering why. There's something about the connection of music with human beings that is good for all of us, and that project cemented that for me. I think BBC Ten Pieces is an example of the most important kind of work that we do as artists, and it's not by a very long extension that Birmingham Opera Company comes off that. BBC Ten Pieces was just going to children, but

the Company goes to the whole community and gets them involved."

Alpesh first worked with BOC in 2019, as the conductor for Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth Of Mtsensk. It was during this time that he met Graham Vick. "All the decisions Graham made came from the music and what the composer wrote. Everything was to service the art. It was about making the art connect with people. It was so inspiring to work with him, and to be on that journey together.

"It was always his passion to make the end result true to the composer, while at the same time making it visceral and relevant for the public. And that's something that most directors don't often get right - they just go one way or the other - but Graham somehow managed to always hit that balance perfectly. The audience would go away knowing the opera, while also having seen something incredibly politically relevant to them, and I think that's just mastery."

Graham forged himself an illustrious career as an international director, but he always maintained that even opera of the highest quality could and should speak to everyone.

"Graham democratised opera. He made sure everybody was on the same level, including himself. He was never hiding away in a royal box. He would be there before the concerts, ushering people in and saying hello, and also with a hand on their back as they left at the end."

Judging by BOC's reputation both in the opera world and with non-traditional opera audiences, its mission to bring opera to the masses has been a resounding success. But Alpesh's desire to reach new audiences was ignited long before he joined the Company, fostered by his own journey in the music world and the support he received.

"Although my parents didn't know anything about the cello, I was very lucky that they supported me and allowed me to go on this big journey with it. And the Birmingham system is one of the best for youth music in the UK, so I worked my way through that.

"Every time I work with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, there are people there who've done so much for me, from when I was a kid onwards. My cello teacher from my undergraduate course at the Royal Northern, Eduardo Vassallo, is principal cello for the CBSO. And there are other people in the orchestra who have been chambermusic coaches for me, or who've coached youth orchestras that I played in many years ago.

"Birmingham is responsible for me being able

to do what I do, and for the success I enjoy now. All of it is because I was given that opportunity in Birmingham."

Although Alpesh's talent has allowed him to perform all over the UK and Europe, staying connected to his Birmingham roots remains a priority: "For me, the audience in Birmingham is like family. They really support the orchestra, and, equally, we support the community. With Birmingham Opera Company, I have this connection to people from all backgrounds because we're able to touch so many people through our cultural output."

BOC's most recent production - Wagner's RhineGold - was eagerly awaited by the Company's devoted audience, having been two years in the planning. The production was intended to mark the 30th anniversary of Graham Vick staging the full Ring Cycle in Birmingham. Graham died while the Company was still in the rehearsal stages. The decision was made to go ahead with the show, as a tribute to him.

"It's a difficult time for the whole of the opera world - let alone Birmingham - and we had to put a lot of our personal feelings aside to finish RhineGold. But there was some positivity there, in that whenever we felt something wasn't working, we would all ask each other what Graham would do. So he was always on our shoulder. Not many people can have that kind of impact on those around them."

Though an incredibly difficult time for Birmingham Opera Company, Alpesh stresses the importance of continuing Graham's legacy: "Conversations about the future haven't even begun, because Graham touched so many people and was ingrained in so many of our lives. However, what must happen is that the message of Birmingham Opera Company and the message of Graham Vick continues. Music is for everyone, and that mantra cannot die with Graham; it must be his legacy. However we decide to do it, and however it takes shape in the future, that will continue."

The passion and dedication of its members leaves no room for doubt that Birmingham Opera Company will continue to thrive, and continue to bring world-class opera to communities all around Birmingham. But for now, BOC's focus is very much on remembering the life and work of its founder, Graham Vick - a real revolutionary in the world of opera.

For further information, visit: birminghamopera.org.uk



Grinling Gibbons: Centuries In The Making

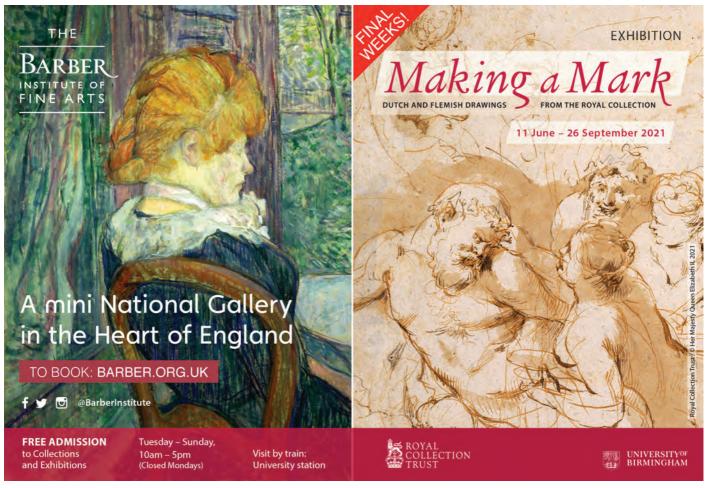
Compton Verney Art Gallery & Park, Warwickshire, Sat 25 September -Sun 30 January

Seventeenth century British woodcarver Grinling Gibbons is often referred to as 'the Michelangelo of Wood'.

Praise indeed for a man whose level of talent was profound, but who nowadays rarely receives the wider acclaim that his brilliance undoubtedly deserves.

Created in partnership with the Grinling Gibbons Society, Centuries In The Making explores the life, genius and legacy of Gibbons through sculpture and carving in wood and stone, drawings and sketches, portraits, still-life paintings and documents. Also showcased is the work of the 11 finalists in the Grinling Gibbons

Tercentenary Award. The pieces will be displayed throughout Compton Verney's Collections galleries.





The Butterfly Effect

Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham, Sun 25 September - Wed 17 November

An exhibition inviting viewers to think about how artists represent change in an often complex world, and how opportunities for social and cultural renewal can emerge from the Covid crisis, The Butterfly Effect features work by a wide selection of practitioners, including LS Lowry, Barbara Hepworth and Gabriel

Rossetti.

The exhibition, co-curated by seniors from MAC's Culture Club, reflects on what has been an era of rapid transformation, encouraging the viewer to reconsider the featured artworks through a newly acquired pandemic-created lens.

Fashioning Peace

County Museum at Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire, until December

This fascinating temporary exhibition explores how the changes brought about through the Great War were reflected in clothing and fashion from 1918 through to the Roaring '20s.

"Post-war fashion spoke of a new and liberated mood," explains Rachel Robinson, manager of the County Museum. "Fashioning Peace is about surviving and thriving after the Great War, an aspiration which is reflected in the functionality and fun of the costumes on display."





Fantasy Pop

Wolverhampton Art Gallery, until 5 December

Paintings, works on paper and sculptures all feature in this latest exhibition to be drawn from Wolverhampton Art Gallery's renowned Pop Art collection.

While some of the pieces examine and celebrate the obsessive nature of popular culture, celebrity and technological advancements in the 1960s, others are inspired by the space race of the mid-20th century, depicting elements of the impossible and unexplained, as well as ethereal and futuristic utopias powered by other-worldly technology.

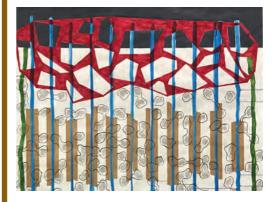
We Thought About It A Lot...

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, Wed 15 September - Sun 21 November

British artists Bill Woodrow and Richard Deacon have been collaborating for more than 30 years. For this exhibition of their 'shared drawings', they agreed that they wouldn't reveal the authorship of the individual contributions...

"We agreed not to say which bits had been made by which person," explains Bill. "People are very adamant that they know, but by and large, they're wrong. Richard is predominantly an artist who works in the abstract. My work is generally figurative in some form or other.

"What's been interesting is the way that the figurative and abstract, without saying who does what, have come together and produced this sort of third area."



Making A Mark

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 19th centuries by talented artists whose names are nowadays less familiar.











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The Photography Show & The Video Show

NEC, Birmingham, Sat 18 - Tues 21 September

As Europe's biggest photography and movingimage event, The Photography Show & The Video Show caters for everyone, from budding beginners to seasoned pros.

Canon, Olympus, Nikon, Sony and Fujifilm are just some of the big brands exhibiting at the show, which features plenty of talks and demos for visitors to get involved in. Among these is The Studio which offers an insight into how to produce engaging video content. Shutter Street features sessions on street photography and all things urban while Analogue Spotlight is packed with talks, tips, tricks and expert insights from film photographers.

Guest speakers announced so far include British photographer & director Rankin, fine art photographer Brooke Shaden, awardwinning blogger & food photographer Donna Crous, smartphone photography guru Mike Kus, and celebrity photographer Rory Lewis.

Adult Nights

Legoland Discovery Centre, Birmingham, Fri 24 September; Fri 22 October & Fri 26 November

Ever fancied visiting Legoland Discovery Centre but didn't have any little ones in your life to take along? Well not to worry, because now you can justifiably 'go it alone', courtesy of the venue's once-a-month adults-only event.

Featuring workshop classes held by master model builders, Legoland enthusiasts will be able to 'get constructing' in special creative play sessions, with plenty of prizes up for grabs throughout the night.



Malvern Autumn Show

Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire, Fri 24 - Sun 26 September



Celebrating the change in seasons, Malvern Autumn Show returns with its first-ever threeday-long event.

The show includes plenty of seasonal family fun, with world records being broken in the CANNA UK National Giant Vegetables Championship, animals of all shapes and sizes on the Family Green, and the chance to take a step back in time at the Vintage Village. An open-air RHS flower show offers greenfingered visitors the opportunity to check out displays and pick up some top tips and tricks, while the show's Autumn Potager Theatre hosts a line-up of guests and celebrities sharing seasonal gardening tips and trends for 2022.

Foodies can browse the brand-new Food & Drink Village - featuring the hugely popular Malvern Gin Show - and replenish their energy with an array of artisan treats.







Saxon Weekender

Tamworth Castle, Sat 18 & Sun 19 September
Travel back in time to experience Tamworth
during the Saxon period, courtesy of a jampacked weekend of activities - including pottery
making, wattle & daub construction, cooking and
purse making.

Demonstrations of Saxon burial rites and battle reenactments take place in the castle's grounds across the weekend.

Visitors can also check out the brand-new Battle & Tribute exhibition, providing an in-depth exploration of Tamworth's Saxon history and featuring a number of pieces from the famous Staffordshire Hoard.



International Model Air Show

Weston Park, Shropshire, Fri 3 - Sun 5 September Now in its 25th year, the International Model Air Show showcases a variety of model and full-sized aircraft displays, off-road and circuit model car racing, model boats and helicopters. As well as featuring a craft fair and a host of trader and food & drink stalls, the show also boasts live music in the evenings and a family-friendly funfair.

On the Saturday night, a firework and pyro spectacular will feature 'stunning' displays from Glider FX - with computer-controlled pyrotechnics and lights - and a firework finale.

Medieval Experience

Avoncroft Museum, Bromsgrove, Sat 25 & Sun 26 September

Step back in time to the middle ages as re-enactment group the Beaufort Companye take over Avoncroft. As well as learning about the history of the period, visitors can also enjoy numerous staged battles taking place across the weekend. Meanwhile, under the 14th century Guesten Hall roof, demonstrations of dancing and music provide a relaxing change of pace from the clash of sword and bang of cannon.



Oktoberfest

Alton Towers, Staffordshire, Sat 11 September - Sun 3 October

Alton Towers is this month set to 'go Bavarian' with its very own Oktoberfest. Attractions include themed entertainment for visitors of all ages, a line-up of food & drink outlets, and the chance to experience a selection of rollercoasters and family rides.



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Rediscover Dudley

www.discoverdudlev.org.uk



Staffordshire Well Being Market

50+ stands including holistic & alternative therapies, reflexology, spiritual counsellors, sound therapy, tarot, aromatherapy and much more...



Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 September Sat: 10am to 5pm Sun: 10am to 4pm

Member Pavilion, Staffordshire County Showground Weston Road, Stafford, ST18 0BD

Tickets: £5 day, £8 weekend, Under 16s free

www.lizianevents.org

DUDLEY BOROUGH HALLS



RUSSELL KANE

'The Fast and the Curious' comedy tour show **Saturday 11 September**



A BLACK COUNTRY NIGHT OUT

The legendary long-running local variety show Friday 17 September



IASON MANFORD

Like Me' work in progress comedy tour shows
Thursday 23 and Friday 24 September



THE D-DAY DARLINGS

Britain's Got Talent finalists' wartime musical Thursday 30 September



ALOHA FROM HAWAII

Starring leading Elvis tribute Gordon Hendricks Friday 1 October



DOM IOLY'S HOLIDAY SNAPS

'Travel and Comedy in the Danger Zone' show **Tuesday 5 October**



DOREEN'S REVOLUTION

New show from the Black Country comedy icon **Thursday 7 October**



THE BOHEMIANS

Internationally renowned Queen tribute band Saturday 9 Óctober



IIM DAVIDSON

'Unlocked' comedy tour show Friday 15 October



CATFISH KEITH

World-touring acoustic blues pioneer from USA Thursday 28 October



ALL STAR SUPERSLAM WRESTLING

Special half-term tag team championship event **Saturday 30 October**

01384 812812 boroughhalls.co.uk





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Dudley Borough Halls

Dudley Town Hall - Stourbridge Town Hall - Halesowen Cornbow Hall



Peaky Blinders Nights

Black Country Living Museum, Fri 10 & Sat 11, Fri 17 & Sat 18 and Fri 25 & Sat 26 September

Ahead of the sixth and final series of the hit television show, Peaky Blinders fans can don their flat caps and flapper dresses and walk in the footsteps of the show's iconic characters. The Black Country Living Museum's immersive experience brings to life the popular BBC series with the help of 1920s-themed cocktails, live music, street theatre and plenty more.

Many of the series' scenes have been filmed at the museum, with the Canal Arm acting as Charlie Strong's Yard - the location in which numerous deals and disagreements have taken place, as well as the famous tea party scene.

Other museum locations featured in the show include the canal bridge - a popular place for illicit meetings - and St James's School, which has been used as the backdrop to a grisly murder.



Spudfest

National Forest Adventure Farm, Staffordshire, Sat 4 - Sun 26 September

Every weekend throughout September, visitors to NFAF can get their hands dirty by digging up their own spuds from the farm's potato field - for free!

Hop on board the Spud Shuttle tractor and ride around the animal paddocks before being dropped off for some potatopicking fun.

Other areas of the farm, including the outdoor adventure play, the animal barn and soft play, will also be open.

Autumn Steam Gala

Severn Valley Railway, Thurs 16 - Sun 19 September

Train fanatics this month have the chance to ride behind the best of the Severn Valley Railway's home fleet (plus up to two very special VIP guest locomotives).

Starting your journey in Bewdley, Kidderminster or Bridgnorth, discover the wonders of the Severn Valley, with 96 miles of haulage available during the day, and another 128 overnight.

Refreshment rooms and pubs will be open throughout the event, which will also include a daytime stop-off at The Engine House.



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Brewhouse Arts Centre

Union Street, Burton-upon-Trent Staffordshire DE14 1AA

Box office: **01283 508100**

BOOK ONLINE AT www.brewhouse.co.uk





Brewhouse Arts



@Brewhousecentre



4 September, 8pm

Elvis –
The Songbook

Tickets: £10



29 September, 2pm Neil Sands Productions presents: Bringing Back the Good Times



7 October, 7.30pm **George Egg: Movable Feast**





11 October, 7.30pm

Simon Yates:
My Mountain Life

Tickets: £15 & £10



15 October, 7.30pm

Superstars of Wrestling at the Town Hall

Tickets: £10



6 November, 11am & 1.30pm Half Moon Theatre & Full House Big Red Bath

Tickets: £10



12 November, 8pm Mark Watson: This Can't Be It 14+ Tickets: £20



13 November, 7pm

Floyd in
the Flesh

Tickets: £18 & £16



1 December, 8pm

Martyn

Joseph

Tickets: £18

East Staffordshire



Lichfield Street, WV1 1DE | Box Office: 01902 429212 | www.grandtheatre.co.uk

Bear Grylls Adventure

National Exhibition Centre, Marston Green, Birmingham, B40 1NT

Website: beargryllsadventure.com

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

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

For the 'more courageous' (as if some of the above don't require courage!), The Fear Zone challenges you to 'sharpen your mind and find your inner strength' by taking on the challenge of navigating the area in complete darkness.

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

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



The Floodgate

104-108 Floodgate St, Birmingham, B5 5SR, Website: thefloodgate.co.uk

An 'experiential night out like no other', The Floodgate offers its visitors the chance to immerse themselves in a world of neon colour and graffiti art. And with the venue also serving up the latest on-trend cocktails, cold craft beer and tasty street food, what's not to like?

Making The Floodgate unique is its immersive and competitive offer, with three games from which to choose...

Bleachers Baseball Cage is a fast-paced experience where pitching machines deliver balls at up to 90kmph... Curl Club UV Curling allows players to test their sliding skills on one of three neon-lit lanes... Pit Pat Table-Top Golf - an 18-hole course - combines mini golf and billiards. Let the fun begin...

Escape Live

18 - 24 Constitution Hill, Birmingham, B29 3LY; Fargo Studios, 54 Grafton Street, Coventry; 31 Greenhill Street, Stratford-Upon-Avon CV37 6LE

Website: escapelive.co.uk

Sixty minutes is all you have to escape from a locked room before it's too late. With the clock ticking, there's no time to argue. Everyone must work together to find the clues and solve the puzzles so that you all make your way out in time... Escape Live has venues across the UK, with three here in the Midlands. As escape challenges increase in popularity, so does the range of themes to choose from. Peaky Blinders-themed escapes are available in Birmingham, Shakespeare's Script in Stratfordupon-Avon and Armageddon in Coventry.

Escape Live also offers live video experiences and an online game.



Flight Club

13 Temple Street, Birmingham, B2 5BN

Website: flightclubdarts.com

The Flight Club is seen as a key player in the experimental nightlife scene. The world's first 'social darts' venue uses patented dart-tracking technology to present a supercharged version of the sport. Each oche allows 12 people to play at once, with instant scoring reimagining matches into fast-paced social experiences. The venue also offers an extensive food & beverage selection, including craft beers, wines and cocktails.



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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND







Treetop Adventure Golf

Bullring Shopping Centre, Birmingham, B5 4BA Website: adventuregolf.com/birmingham

This brand-new mini golf experience opened its doors at Birmingham's Bullring Shopping Centre earlier this year.

Set within 'a mighty rainforest', Treetop Adventure Golf features two 18-hole indoor courses. Participants can choose to tackle the Tropical Trail's Mystic Wood or the ruins of the Ancient Explorer. There's also a bonus 19th hole that gives players the chance to win a free round should they achieve a hole-in-one.

The attraction recently announced brand-new inclusive 'quiet sessions', which will take place on the second Sunday of each month from 9am to 11am.

Climbing The Walls

Unit 3, Market Place, Battlefield Rd, Shrewsbury, SY1 4AN Website:climbingthewalls.club

Boasting 8,000 square ft of climbing space, this popular Shropshire venue is split into three zones, to cater for different ages and levels of experience.

Action Walls is perfectly suited both to beginners and more advanced climbers looking for a competitive challenge, while Bouldering is a fun way to learn without ropes. Featuring over 200 square metres and at a height of 4.5 metres with a one-metre overhang spread on two levels, it serves as both a workout and a problem-solving exercise.

The venue's Tall Walls, meanwhile, is a 12-metrehigh challenge for the most advanced of climbers. Climbing The Walls also hosts various clubs and is available to book for birthday parties.





Go Ape Tree Top Adventure

Midlands venues include Cannock, Coventry, Sherwood Forest & Wyre Forest Website: goape.co.uk

With 'branches' (geddit?) in some of the UK's most spectacular forests and parks, Go Ape Tree Top Adventure comprises two to three hours of flying down zip wires, leaping from Tarzan swings and navigating obstacles, crossings and rope bridges.

Tree Top Junior is suitable for 'mini Tarzans' aged six to 12 and offers an hour of tree-to-tree crossings with a zip line finale.

The Forest Segway, meanwhile, is an option for those preferring to keep their feet on the ground (well, almost!). The hour-long activity is a great way to explore the terrain of the forest.

Timberjacks

Unit 49, FlexSpace, Stafford Drive, Shrewsbury & Unit E, Green Street, Kidderminster, DY10 1RD Website: timberjacks.club

Timberjacks offers a unique way in which to have fun with friends and family... by participating in the time-honoured lumberjack sport of axe throwing!

The activity-based venue provides a safe and controlled environment in which to take aim. Games include Target Posters - with 10 to choose from - and Apple Smashing - Timberjack's 'longest-running ingame extra'.



Prison Tours

The Dana, Shrewsbury, SY1 2HR Website:shrewsburyprison.com

Although HM Prison Shrewsbury was originally built by Thomas Telford in 1793, the present building was constructed in 1877. In the wake of its closure in 2013, the prison became a hugely popular tourist attraction, providing visitors with the opportunity to learn about life behind bars for the thousands of criminals incarcerated there during its 220-year 'lifespan'. The tour includes the chance to walk the wings, check out the solitary confinement and condemned-man cells, and step



inside the execution room where

sentences were carried out. Seven

executions took place in the prison

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Let there be light!









Midlands artist and sculptor Peter Walker talks about the many strings to his bow, including being artistic director at Lichfield Cathedral and Luxmuralis, a collaborative team of artists from different backgrounds and disciplines...

From bronze sculpture to painting and spellbinding light & sound shows, Peter Walker's career as an artist has been nothing short of prestigious. Talking about everything from fine art to state-of-the-art projection, Peter fills us in on his artistic journey...

How would you describe your career path?

Since my late teenage years, I've always been involved in the arts in one way or another: first through music, then poetry, and eventually becoming a sculptor in my early 20s. After years of working with sculpture, especially bronze and statuary, my work eventually evolved into large-scale installation, fine artwork in terms of painting and works on canvas, and creating huge son et lumières with my colleague David Harper (as artistic director at Luxmuralis). There's always been an increasing evolution of different art forms. I can approach each and every subject in a totally unique way and use the most appropriate materials or style of work to do that. For example, my fine artwork is usually more personal and can relate more to myself and my emotions. The sculptural is perhaps a little more intellectual, in terms of being more gallery-orientated work. Then, my public work is more approachable and accessible. The big light shows that we do at Luxmuralis, for instance, often approach larger subject matter that has more universal appeal, such as 24hours on earth, space journeys or festive themes.

What makes Luxmuralis' shows different?

The type of projection work we produce at Luxmuralis is probably nothing like any other out there. Even though it's using light, it's still pretty sculptural and fine-art-orientated. One of the reasons we do so much work in cathedrals is because we're almost creating an entire new artform using light. We don't just project on walls to tell stories, we use the walls

and facades themselves as part of the story. We like viewers to actually be bathed in the light of the installation too, so that it feels like they're within the artwork and the story itself. It's an incredible and emotional experience to be standing in a 36m projection within a knave, where you can walk through the light and just look around these all-encompassing visuals. It's also always accompanied by beautiful music written by David, so it's almost an overwhelming experience to be carried through this light & sound journey. Even though there's quite a lot of it around now, I feel like we have quite an individual approach to using these mediums.

How do you think the landscape for, and response to, art has changed during your career?

I think there's an ever-increasing appetite from all kinds of people for engaging with the arts. I think one thing that we try to do at Luxmuralis is remove the invisible barriers that have restricted people's access to art. For example, a lot of the work I do is outside of the major European cities - and we're always overwhelmed by the response. The desire to experience the arts is certainly there. But also towns, cities and venues have realised that offering a multiplicity of arts to their communities does encourage open engagement. A bronze sculpture in a museum, for instance, is more expensive than seeing a light & sound installation, which may be free or have a low ticket price. An audience can be from any background, any age, and feel like they own, and are part of, this piece of art for the time they're there.

What's coming up next at Lichfield Cathedral?

It's approaching my six-year anniversary at Lichfield Cathedral, and the formal relationship ends at the close of this year. There will be a retrospective exhibition, to look back over the many projects from that period. People will be able to revisit a number of artworks or see videos of some of our iconic light shows, including Cathedral Illuminated our iconic Christmas show that's almost become part of the yearly festive traditions in the city. It's really a great chance to invite the people back who've been involved previously, whether as an audience member, participant or contributor. The exhibition is a big thankyou from me as an artist, both to the cathedral and the audience. It's also definitely an opportunity to reminisce about how we've managed to pull off programmes each year that are very unique as far as cathedrals in modern times go. My latest installation, The Laboratory, will be in the cathedral at the same time as the retrospective. At the centre, it mimics Einstein's desk, and surrounding it is the story of science built from objects, sound and projection. It's about having a space for oneself to think and consider in this cluttered and noisy world, whatever your field of exploration.

And what about later in the year?

We aim to bring back two of our most popular light shows to Lichfield Cathedral. So in November, we're planning the return of our Remembrance piece, Poppy Fields, which features sound recordings from Eddie Redmayne. Then we hope our What's On Readers' Award-winning Cathedral Illuminated will also be back for one more time this Christmas! That would be a beautiful end to this six-year period.

Peter Walker's exhibition, Retrospective, shows at Lichfield Cathedral from Thursday 2 September until Monday 1 November. For further information, visit: lichfield-cathedral.org

Heritage Open Days

Heritage Open Days, England's largest festival of history and culture, returns this month, with volunteers across the region organising a wide range of events for the general public to enjoy free of charge. Below is our selection of what to check out across Shropshire, Staffordshire and Wolverhampton & Black Country.

Shropshire

The Bishop's Castle Railway Weighbridge Project

Bishops Castle Railway Society Co. Ltd, The Old Weighbridge, Station Street, Bishops Castle, SY9 5AQ

View the Bishop's Castle Railway Collection in the restored Railway Weighbridge Building - the last railway building on the site of the station. Find out how the coming of the railway changed the life of a rural community.

Sat 18 September: 11am to 6pm



Oswestry Castle Season Seven Archaeological Dig

Oswestry Castle (Ruin), Bailey Head, Oswestry, SY11 1PZ

This is the seventh season of excavations on Oswestry's 12th century castle keep, examining the unexpected structure to the east of the keep, found in 2019. There will be an information officer on site to explain what's being excavated and how this relates to previous excavations. No booking required.

Fri 10 - Sun 19 September: 10am to 4pm

Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings - Manga Exhibition in the Dye House

Friends of Flaxmill Maltings, Spring Gardens, Shrewsbury, SY1 2SZ

Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings is currently undergoing a huge National Lottery-funded renovation, so much of the site isn't available to view this year. The visitor centre is open, though, as is the Dye House, which will host displays, interpretation information and a special showcase art exhibition from the New Wave project. Booking not required.

Sat 11 & Sun 12, Sat 18 & Sun 19 September: 10am to 4pm



Shrewsbury Drapers Hall Open Day and Talk

Shrewsbury Drapers Company, Drapers Hall, Shrewsbury, SY1 1DZ

This timber-frame building dates from the last quarter of the 16th century and has been the headquarters of the Shrewsbury Drapers Company for over 400 years. In addition to the hall, the furniture within was built for the company by local craftsmen. A talk on the history of the company will be given by Nigel J Hinton, a past master of the company and author of The Shrewsbury Drapers Company

1462-2017. Booking not required.

Saturday 11 September: 10am - 2pm, Talk at 11am - 12pm



Staffordshire

A Recipe For Success

World of Wedgwood, Wedgwood Drive, Barlaston, Stoke-on-Trent, ST12 9ER

Discover Edible England through Wedgwood's weird and wonderful ceramic tour at the V&A Wedgwood Collection, and enjoy a tasty sample inspired by recipe books in the venue's archives. For an extra treat, reserve your table at the World of Wedgwood tearoom and sample an exclusive Heritage Open Days Edible England menu. Pre-booking required.

Fri 10 & Fri 17 September: 3pm



Biking to Bottle Ovens

Dudson Museum, The Dudson Centre, Hope Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 5DD

Bottle ovens were once commonplace in the city of Stoke-on-Trent, but now only 50 remain. Local experts and experienced cyclists will be on hand to guide you along a 12-mile route and relate the history and heritage of these local icons. Part of a series of local bottle oven-themed events in Stoke-on-Trent. Pre-booking required.

Sun 12 September: 10am to 1pm



Hanley Park Open Day

Hanley Park Boathouse, Avenue Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DU

This Victorian-themed open day celebrates Hanley Park's renovation works, with visitors able to take part in various activities happening across the park.

Photo opportunities with themed characters, a static falconry display, sporting activities, a demonstration of balloon artistry and a magic show also feature. No booking required.

Sat 11 September: 11am to 4pm



The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Bethesda Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3DW

Celebrate Heritage Open Day's theme of Edible England and the opening of the new Spitfire Gallery. Travel back to the 1940s and see what life was like on the Home Front during the war. Discover how food was used as a medicine for household remedies, and enjoy the music of the age with Paul Barry's Swing Band. Join the 'Family at War' living history group as they bring along a Navy, Army, Air Force Institutes (NAAFI)

refreshment van. Children can have a go at craft activities and enjoy a variety of stalls designed and handmade to capture the essence of a 1940s funfair attraction. Prebooking preferred.

Fri 10 - Sun 19 September: 10am to 5pm



Wolverhampton & the Black Country

Dudley Zoo & Castle

Zoological Drive, Discovery Way, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 4AL

The 11th century castle in the heart of Dudley Zoo will open its doors for free from 3.30pm to 7.30 pm (last admission is 6pm). Refreshments will be available to purchase. Pre-booking is required.

Thurs 16 & Fri 17 September: 3.30pm to 7.30pm



I Remember Walsall Illuminations

Walsall Arboretum Bandstand, Broadway North, Walsall, West Midlands, WS1 2QH

A chance to reminisce about Walsall Illuminations and see a small exhibition to mark what would have been the event's 70th anniversary. The exhibition features photographs and videos from the 1950s to 2008, mostly supplied by former visitors from their family photo albums and archives. If you have any of your own old Illuminations photographs, take them along.

Sat 11 & Sun 12 September: 10am to 4pm

Stourbridge Glass Museum

Stourbridge Glass Museum, Stuart Works, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 4FB

Join Museum Director Oliver Buckley and Curator Steven Hearn for an exclusive opportunity to visit the new home of the internationally renowned Stourbridge Glass collections, before it opens to the public in April 2022. After the tour, there will be the chance to meet former glass-industry workers, get hands-on with historic glass artefacts and find out about volunteering opportunities. Pre-booking required.

Sat 18 September: 11am to 1pm



Moseley Old Hall

Moseley Old Hall Lane, Featherstone, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, WV10 7HY

Join in the celebrations of the summer's harvest, marking the traditional Michaelmas Festival. Immerse yourself in Tudor life, discover numerous crafts and skills - including apple pressing and beekeeping - and listen to stories told by costumed historic characters.

Sat 18 September: 11am to 1pm



Event listings are available at heritageopendays.org.uk. Search by location or use the map function to discover what's happening in your local area.

STRONGERTOGETHER

One of the UK's biggest LGBTQ+ festivals, Birmingham Pride returns this month...











Birmingham Pride took place for the first time in 1997. Since then, the event has blossomed into one of the most important LGBTQ+ festivals in the UK. As well as attracting in excess of 40,000 people to the festival site itself during the course of its two days, Pride also sees 75,000 people either participating in or watching the annual parade through the streets of the city.

This year, as a result of the Covid pandemic, Pride is being held over the final weekend of September, rather than its usual May bank holiday slot.

The theme for this year is Stronger Together, demonstrating Pride's commitment to standing in unity with all members of the LGBTQ+ community as it battles against transphobia, biphobia and homophobia.

For the first time ever, the festival will be split into two: the Street Party and Smithfield Live.

Previously the home of Birmingham's wholesale markets, the Smithfield site is spread across 12 acres, allowing Pride to safely and securely accommodate 20,000 attendees.

The site will play host to the event's biggestever main stage, as well as the cabaret stage, the dance arena and the additional attractions of the funfair, street food stalls and community stalls.

This year's main-stage line-up includes Cheryl, Bree Runway, Riton, Katy B, Sophie Ellis-Bextor and Ms Banks.

Over in the dance arena, Jodie Harsh, Melé, Barely Legal and House Mother are just some of the performers on the bill.

Meanwhile, popular drag acts Sandra, Black Peppa, Miss Penny and The Saturnos will take to the cabaret stage.

The area around Hurst Street, just down from the Birmingham Hippodrome, Bromsgrove Street and the surrounding roads, will be the home of Pride 2021's Street Party.

The Street Party includes LGBTQ+ bars & clubs, among which are Equator, The Fox, The Loft, Missing Bar, the Nightingale Club and Sidewalk Bar, as well as LGBTQ+ venues located beyond the perimeter of the Pride map. These include The Fountain, Glamorous

and Chic. Each bar and club will host individual Pride events across the weekend.

This year's Pride welcomes the return of the Community Village Green, providing a quieter, family-friendly and accessible area within the heart of the Pride Village.

On Friday 24 September, from 7pm, there will be a Free Community Pride event, including live entertainment, community-focused stalls, street food, a bar, acoustic music, LGBTQ+ performers & speakers, and a candlelit vigil. The event is free to everyone. People wishing to attend can reserve their ticket on the Birmingham Pride website. The Community Village Green area will host events throughout the festival weekend, programmed and scheduled by members of the Birmingham LGBTQ+ community.

Birmingham Pride 2021 takes place on Saturday 25 & Sunday 26 September. For tickets and further information, visit: birminghampride.com



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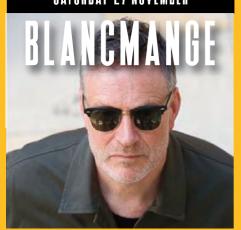
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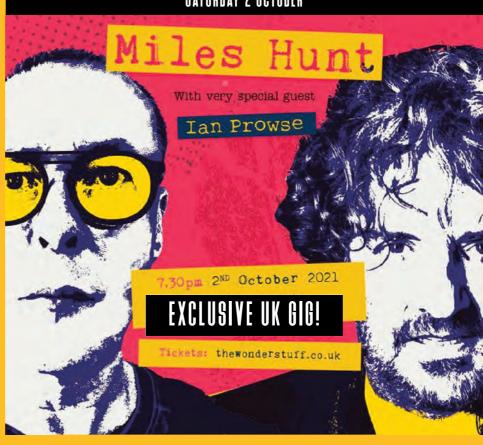




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FRIDAY 3 DECEMBER



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