

Coventry & Warwickshire

ISSUE 416 SEPTEMBER 2021

What's On

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inside:

KEEPING FAITH

RSC & Coventry City of Culture team up for 24-hour show



BACK IN MOTION

Motionhouse dance company on tour with new show Nobody



IT'S ALL ABOUT GIN

brush up on your botanicals at Shakespeare Distillery



BIRMINGHAM



Director Carlos Acosta

Carlos Acosta invites you to join us as we return to Birmingham Hippodrome - we can't wait to welcome you back

Sir Kenneth MacMillan's

Romeo and Juliet

6 – 9 October

Carlos Curates: R&J Reimagined

A double bill, including Edward Clug's Radio and Juliet, danced to the music of Radiohead

14 – 16 October

B BIRMINGHAM
HIPPODROME

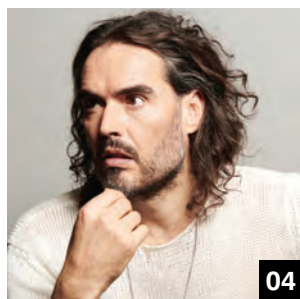
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ROYAL BALLET



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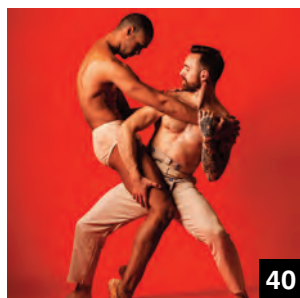
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22



29



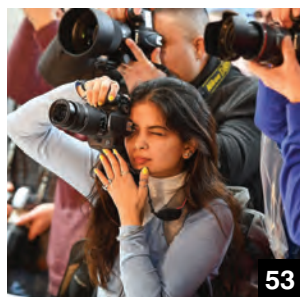
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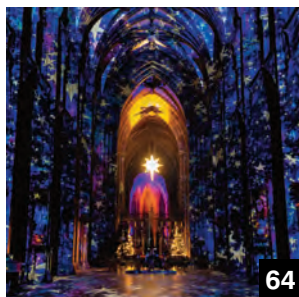
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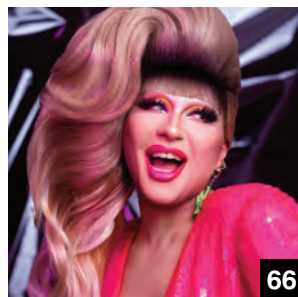
51



53



64



66

INSIDE:

First Word

4

Food

13

Gigs

18

Comedy

22

Theatre

26

Dance

39

Film

47

Visual Arts

50

Events

53

What's On

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Museum Of The Moon artwork visits Compton

Luke Jerram's spectacular touring artwork, Museum Of The Moon, makes a return to the Midlands next month.

Taking inspiration from the Chinese Moon Festival, Warwickshire venue Compton Verney Art Gallery & Museum will be hosting the artwork from Thursday 23 to Sunday 26 September.

Measuring seven metres in diameter, the moon features 120dpi detailed NASA imagery of the lunar surface.

The installation is a fusion of lunar imagery, moonlight and surround-sound composition created by BAFTA and Ivor Novello award-winning composer Dan Jones.

Safari park submits plans for new luxury 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

A Winter Glow comes to Malvern for Christmas

There's certainly no shortage of festive fun to enjoy in Malvern this Christmas. Presented at the Three Counties Showground under the umbrella title of Winter Glow, attractions include an ice rink, an illuminated light trail, a giant observation wheel and personalised 'Santa experiences'. The Winter Glow season runs from 12 November to 9 January. For more information, visit winterglow.co.uk

Birmingham Comedy Festival back in the room

After last year taking place online, Birmingham Comedy Festival is back in the room for 2021. Running from Friday 1 to Sunday 10

October, the popular event features over 40 shows.

Highlights include the return of Russell Brand (pictured) and appearances from Strictly semi-finalist Chris Ramsey and the Tailenders crew... For more information, visit: bhamcomfest.co.uk



Medieval coins on show at Coventry art gallery

A recently discovered collection of medieval coins that pre-date the signing of the Magna Carta are being showcased at Coventry's Herbert Art Gallery & Museum.

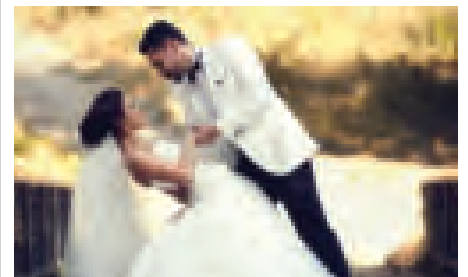
Twelve silver pennies, which have been dated between AD 1180 and 1210, were unearthed by metal detectorists operating as part of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

It has been estimated that the collection was buried or lost around the year 1210, five years before the Magna Carta was signed.

Your Wedding Live event to stop off at the Ricoh

The first major wedding event in the Midlands since before the pandemic will take place at Coventry's Ricoh Arena next month (23 & 24 October).

Your Wedding Live features celebrity guests, hands-on advice from industry experts, 'show-stopping' features & live shows, luxury & affordable shopping, inspirational masterclasses, demonstrations and catwalk presentations... For more information visit yourweddinglive.co.uk



Circus fun at Warwick venue

The Netherlands National Circus is visiting Warwick Racecourse from 15 to 19 September.

The company's new production features a mix of comedy, juggling, illusion, silks, balancing acts and gravity-defying aerial performances.

For more information, visit the Circus' Facebook page.



History festival makes a return

Warwick Words History Festival will this year take place from 1 to 10 October. The popular event features numerous speakers and a selection of local history talks and walks.

Guest speakers for 2021 include journalist, television presenter and food-brand creator Loyd Grossman, and Channel Four news reporter Fatima Manji (pictured). For more information, visit warwickwords.co.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

New info centre opens in Coventry

A striking new information centre has been opened outside Coventry Railway Station, to help visitors who arrive in the city during the UK City of Culture and Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games events. The futuristic pod on Station Square will provide help with information about events and places to visit, stay, eat and drink.

Paying homage to Coventry's post-war use of coloured glass, the pod's design is made of reflective materials that are covered in a dichroic coating, which shines in different colours as light passes over and through the panels.

A second visitor information pod is opening at Pool Meadow Bus Station. Both pods will be open seven days a week.

The Voice star partying in Solihull

Coventry-based Letitia George, whose superb vocals saw her get through to the knockout rounds of hit television talent show The Voice, will be the star attraction at Christmas Party Nights at Solihull Moors FC, taking place from Thursday 18 November to Thursday 23 December.

There will also be a special New Year's Eve Party, complete with a firework display.

Now a BBC local radio presenter working across several Midlands stations, 31-year-old Letitia will be performing two sets as part of a 'fun-packed' Christmas celebration.

For more information, visit 4threv.co.uk



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.



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



Turner Prize 2021 shows at the Herbert Art Gallery

The 2021 Turner Prize exhibition will open on 29 September at Herbert Art Gallery & Museum in Coventry, as part of the city's UK City of Culture celebrations. Marking the first time a Turner Prize jury has selected a shortlist consisting entirely of artist collectives, the exhibition will

showcase work by five nominees. All the nominees work closely and continuously with communities across the UK to inspire social change through art. Admission to the Turner Prize 2021 is free, and tickets are available to book now at coventry2021.co.uk

Cycling event looks to break fundraising record



A major Coventry & Warwickshire cycling event is on track to break its fundraising record.

The Starley Sportive raised more than £10,000 last year, despite the event taking place virtually as a result of Covid-19 restrictions.

Organisers are hoping for a huge turnout this year and are expecting to raise even more money, with more than 300 participants already signed up for the event. Riders will set off from the Deeley Group head office on Herald Avenue, Coventry, and have the choice of three distances: a 28.6 mile route, a 63.2 mile long-distance ride, or a mammoth 86.5 mile challenge.

Little Amal puppet to pass through Coventry

A 3.5-metre-tall puppet, which is travelling 8,000km in order to focus awareness on the refugee crisis, will be making its way through Coventry on 27 October. Little Amal will travel through eight countries and be welcomed by hundreds of cultural events in cities, towns and villages along the route. For more information about her journey, visit walkwithamal.org



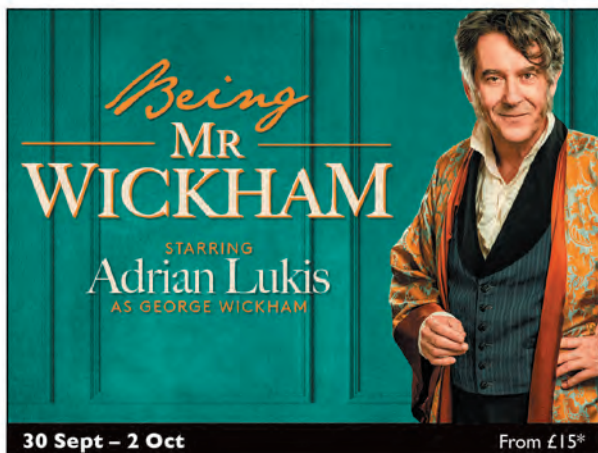
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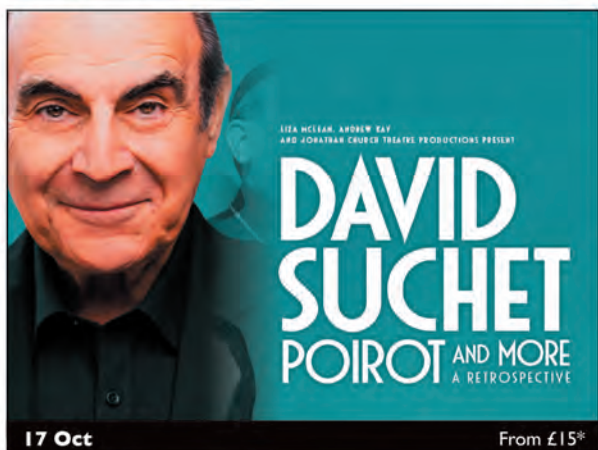
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News from around the region

New rock opera centres on the Coventry Blitz

An original rock opera - recounting through song a young family's experiences of the World War Two bombing of Coventry - is this month being performed by local musicians Phoenix Of The Ashes Band.

Written and composed by Coventry-born musician Simon Gibbons, City Of Burning Spires shows at The Arches in Coventry on Sunday 12 September. For more information, visit the Arches Venue Facebook page.

Exhibition highlights Warwickshire's heritage

A forgotten part of Coventry & Warwickshire's heritage is being given its time in the spotlight at a major City of Culture exhibition.

Modern Mercia: Art & Design In Post-War Coventry & Warwickshire 1945-1970, is showcasing the best of the region's post-war creativity as part of the University of Warwick's Resonate festival.

The multimedia visual arts exhibition is inspired by the post-war rebuilding of the city and features 60 exhibits, including sculpture, homeware, photographs and archive film. The show is available to view until 19 September.

Tickets on sale for Worcester's Big Parade farewell event

Worcestershire County Cricket Club is hosting a 'farewell event' to mark the end of Worcester's Big Parade, an eight-week art trail across the city featuring beautifully decorated elephant sculptures.

The farewell event runs from 30 September to 3 October and 7 to 10 October, after which the elephants will be auctioned to raise funds for St Richard's Hospice. For more information, visit worcestersbigparade.co.uk



Dame Julie Walters to narrate 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 'enchancing

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 svr.co.uk



New street art revealed in Coventry city centre

Two new commissions have been revealed as part of Coventry City of Culture's In Paint We Trust series.

In Paint We Trust, led by Street Art Strategy in partnership with Coventry City of Culture Trust and Coventry BID, commissions street and multi-disciplinary artists to create murals in unique spaces across the city. One of the murals, by Manchester-based duo Nomad Clan, is located at the city's New

Union Street car park and is Coventry & Warwickshire's largest mural.

The second mural, Electric Future (pictured), is by street artist Dan Kitchener and can be seen on Well Street.

The mural features the iconic London taxi, which is made in Coventry, set against a neon-filled Japanese streetscape, highlighting the car's iconic international appeal.



Keeping Faith

Part of City of Culture 2021, Faith is a 24-hour performance & community project taking place across Coventry... What's On recently caught up with local writer and Faith contributor Chris O'Connell to find out more...

Coventry City of Culture Trust has teamed up with the Royal Shakespeare Company to produce a 24-hour-long performance & community project based around the subject of faith.

Promenade performances, community cook-alongs of old family recipes, 'open house' events at faith centres, and a final symbolic ceremony by candlelight all feature in the intimate, free-of-charge co-production.

"We started off by thinking about interrogating what we meant by faith in all of its different forms," explains Chris O'Connell, the Coventry-born writer of two walking-theatre pieces in Faith's programme. "We began to think about religious faith. We are very much a multi-faith community across Coventry, and it's integral to leadership within different areas of the city. But we also wanted to think about what else faith could mean. I, for example, don't follow a particular religious faith. So we wanted to think about humanism in general, which has a lot of the core beliefs of respect, morals and kindness that many religions also resonate with. Then we also wanted to think about having faith in others; in the individual people around us and the wider city itself, especially in the times we've been through recently. I think faith very much relates to a secular society, too. If religious faith isn't for you, then it's important that you find faith in something else. Without it, it's very difficult to go forwards."

Chris' writing draws on both collective and personal experience: "My first piece, *The Messenger*, goes back to April 2020 - the real height of the first wave of the pandemic. A young girl's mum is taken ill, and her dad lives elsewhere for work. She's not ill with Covid, but she's still in a really serious condition. Faith definitely comes into play when we think about death approaching and what we expect when we pass from this world, so the mum gives the girl a letter; one which

she needs to pass onto her father. The young girl makes contact with her dad, who is struck by the news and also the fact he isn't really allowed to travel. Nevertheless he's going to come on the bus and meet her. So she sets out to meet him and sees a whole range of different characters. I guess the classic tenets of Greek drama - where, against all the odds, the messenger completes their task - comes into play here. It's an odyssey, but it's also a sharp awakening of young people to the adult world. I've really channelled my own experience here, of watching my children deal with the world seeming to collapse around them. I wanted to explore this idea of everything a child knows changing, almost in an instant, and being ripped apart, as I think it was also a pretty collective experience.

"The other piece, *The Return*, is more my own experience of rites of passage. As a young person, you can rarely wait to get away from the place you were born in, but many people also return. In the piece, there are two characters who haven't seen each other for 40-odd years and by chance meet on the steps of the cathedral - an iconic building - and begin to unpick everything. They were in a relationship when they were young and haven't seen each other since, so in a way it's a love story too. I wanted to delve into what 'belonging' means: a different part of faith that makes you stay somewhere, or draws you to a particular place at a certain time.

"The piece also ponders the nature of cities and how they evolve. There's an ongoing battle for the soul of Coventry. Some people want to knock down certain parts of it, and others don't want that. New parts get built to move us into the future, but equally do we then lose something of the past?"

Understanding the faith of others plays as much of a part in the programme as considering one's own: "We've really tried to engage all faith communities in the project.

We did a lot of initial research and meeting over Zoom, and also met with a lot of the different faith leaders from Coventry. We want to try and tap into all belief systems, and the roles these leaders play in our society. There's an area down by Harnall Lane roundabout that's like Coventry's 'sacred mile', where there's a lot of different places of worship. They all interconnect and talk to one another. But then, equally, this project is still very much for people who aren't directly part of that. Right at the end of the theatre aspect of Faith, on the Saturday evening as dusk falls, many of the different leaders of Coventry's religious communities will join together in Millennium Place for audiences to hear from them and light candles together in a show of unity. This really summarises what Coventry City of Culture has been about. It's about reaching out from the surface level of the city centre, right into the innards of the city, and asking questions. Who are we? What are our roles? How do we all come together?"

This search for the heart of Coventry and its people culminated in walking-theatre pieces: "The promenade aspect of the theatre section of the project definitely spun off from that 'sacred mile' I mentioned. But I was also particularly interested in trying to get out of the city centre as much as possible. That idea of faith in each other really resonates with City of Culture, so the act of doing these pieces out on the streets is highly symbolic of that. The idea of everyone rubbing shoulders together, of roaming and moving and sharing and collaborating across all different communities in the city, is really important."

Faith takes place in Coventry city centre from the evening of Friday 10 to the evening of Saturday 11 September. To find out more and book tickets, visit coventry2021.co.uk

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Food news from across the region...

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.

Taste of the Caribbean arrives in Coventry

Popular chain Turtle Bay has opened a premises in Coventry.

Located at Cathedral Lanes, Turtle Bay is renowned for providing Caribbean-style good times - offering a warm and sociable atmosphere while serving Caribbean-inspired dishes and signature cocktails throughout the day and into the evening.

The Turtle Bay menu includes jerk chicken, fiery goat curry, vegan dishes packed with punchy Caribbean flavour, delicious desserts and bottomless brunches.



Sausages and cider aplenty in Worcester

The touring Sausage & Cider Festival stops off at Worcester Rugby Football Club on Friday 10 September.

Visitors can expect an array of drinks, including ciders on tap, traditional bag in box cider, craft beer, prosecco and wine. There will also be a range of sausages (of course!) and a variety of street food to enjoy.

A live-music stage will host both local acts and 'some of the UK's best tribute performers'.



Leamington Food & Drink Festival returns this month

Leamington Food & Drink Festival returns to the town's Pump Room Gardens on Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 September, from 10am to 6pm. The free-to-attend festival will feature around 110 exhibitors offering a wide variety of food & drink to enjoy.

Other attractions include music from local bands and the return of the Live Kitchen, featuring cooking demonstrations by top chefs. Commenting on the event, Alison Shaw, BID Leamington project manager, said: "We know the Food & Drink Festival is a much-loved event in the town's calendar, so following a

difficult year for everyone, we are excited to see it return. I'm particularly looking forward to welcoming back our regular exhibitors, some of whom we've worked with for more than 10 years. We also have some wonderful new exhibitors to introduce.

"Although we may be a little smaller than usual this year, we're sure that the local flavours of all kinds will delight and entertain visitors. As will the return of popular attractions such as the Live Kitchen, Kids' Cookery School and Home Cook of the Year."



Company launches new gin inspired by Lady Godiva

Leamington Spa's Warwickshire Gin Company has launched Peeping Tom, its fifth dry gin, inspired by Coventry's famous tale of Lady Godiva. The new offering, an Old Tom-style gin derived from an 18th century

recipe, is gently spiced with star anise, nutmeg, cinnamon and liquorice. It will join the independent craft distillery's portfolio of artisan handcrafted premium gins.



REVIEW: That Gin And Cocktail Bar

The brand-new Warwick venue packs a real punch when it comes to creativity, flavour and good old-fashioned charm

As businesses across Britain's high streets once again re-open their doors - bruised but unbeaten by the recent pandemic - it's heartening to see budding independents not only surviving but thriving in a burgeoning bar culture in which 'personalisation' is so often the key to success.

And with Britain's love for gin showing no signs of abating, it didn't take long for local entrepreneur Steve Bazell - owner of That Little Gin And Prosecco Bar in Stratford - to capitalise on the craze by this summer opening his latest town-centre property: That Gin And Cocktail Bar in nearby Warwick.

Located at the heart of Swan Street, just a short walk from Warwick Castle and the historic Market Place, this popular town-

centre hang-out is in the very best of company, with fashionable 'foodie' neighbours The Art Kitchen, Poco Italian Deli and The Chip Shed just a stone's throw away.

Bijoux in size but big in character, the bar not only boasts over 100 varieties of gin - including international best-sellers, local distillers and a choice of non-alcoholic alternatives - it's also home to an extensive wine, cocktail, beer and spirit menu, not to mention five varieties of prosecco.

Complete with sun terrace overlooking the nearby Swan Street, the venue features booths which are bookable in advance, although a walk-in service is also available.

Settling into our seats (conveniently located within

view of the overflowing bar - a mixologist's dream by all accounts) and stirred on by the infectious soul and Motown soundtrack, I couldn't think of a more perfect setting in which to toast a warm midsummer evening with friends.

What sets That Gin And Cocktail Bar apart from the competition is its wholly unique approach to both concept and flavour.

If, like me, you're partial to the occasional gin & tonic, but when it comes to brushing up on your botanicals, you're blasé at best, then this is most definitely the destination for you!

Guided by our knowledgeable bartender, the ingenious addition of 'flavour' cards - from which you pick your preferred flavour to determine your choice of gin & tonic combo - was a

revelation for the untutored palate; the perfect way to navigate the extensive yet at times intimidating choice on offer.

From the refreshingly sweet (passionfruit, peach, blackberry and pink grapefruit) to the fragrant and floral (parma violet), the savoury (rosemary & thyme) and the downright sensational (jalapeño, anyone?), simply name your flavour type and let the recommendations come rolling in.

Armed with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the menu and a genuine passion for his craft, our guide was everything a brand ambassador should be: unpatronising, unobtrusive and genuinely helpful.

Freeing ourselves from the pre-conceptions of a particular brand or label, it felt both intriguing and liberating to put our trust in the hands of seasoned professionals; like 'gin & tonic' roulette, but where everyone's a winner.

Choosing from one of the 22 flavour varieties on offer, my opening gambit of a Bakewell-inspired G&T pairing was perfectly tailored to my tastes - and exquisitely presented too, in fine cut-glass with a generous helping of ice, a two-ended metal straw and a stylish sprinkling of dried fruit and botanicals for added panache.

A quick glance around the room told a similar story, as couples, family groups and friends - catching up after too long an absence from one another - basked in the novelty of their surroundings and the aromas of blackberry and clementine, Sicilian orange and sherbet lemon.

If 'trial by flavour' isn't quite your cup of G&T, don't worry. That Gin And Cocktail Bar also comes equipped with a comprehensive menu of branded gins. Each has been

painstakingly selected for its unique combination of botanicals and its equally unique backstory. Examples are, Monkey 47 - named after Wing Commander Montgomery 'Monty' Collins of the Royal Air Force, who served in World War Two - and the classic Bath Tub Gin, named after the process by which moonshiners watered down the spirit to make it drinkable in the 18th century.

You could spend a week exploring That Gin And Cocktail Bar's menu and still only scratch the surface. Household favourites like Bombay Sapphire and London Dry sit alongside less-than-familiar options. These include malted Genever blend gin (distilled in whiskey barrels for added malty flavour), Poetic

Fireside Gin (mulled for your pleasure), and perhaps most surprisingly, Collagen Gin (drink enough of it and you won't remember what age you are!).

And if so much gin leaves you craving something to nibble on, That Gin And Cocktail Bar also offers a fantastic range of deli boards - including cheese, fruit & veg, charcuterie and sweet treat varieties (starting at £12.95). There are sandwich platters, too (£7.95 per person), as well as shareable combi platters and bespoke afternoon tea served with a choice of tea, coffee, prosecco or a grand gin.

Our choice of charcuterie board - complete with fresh salami, peppered beef, hand-rolled chorizo, pastrami and a choice of

grapes, olives, fresh butter and locally made chutneys - was packed with flavour. It was also every Instagrammer's delight, beautifully presented on slate platter served with fresh rocket and hand-crafted 'salami wheel'.

Oh, and don't leave before sampling a slice of the signature gin & tonic cheesecake... infused with 12.5ml of gin, no less!

For those looking for an excuse to party, the venue also offers private-hire packages for up to 60 people, including food & drink served from its neighbouring bar and function room.

And if all that choice is too much for just one sitting, you can always take home a bottle (or three) of gin, as each and every

flavour infusion is made on site and available for purchase on request.

Quirky, refreshingly unpretentious and uncommonly inventive in its approach, it's a real tonic (yes, I went there!) to see a plucky independent like That Gin And Cocktail Bar come into its own. The venue may be small, but like all the best-thought-out concepts, it packs a real punch when it comes to creativity, flavour and good old-fashioned charm!

True, I'm no mixologist, but I'll drink to that!

Katherine Ewing

That Gin And Cocktail Bar
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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, *Herdin' 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 him.

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 '60s-style patterns on curtains and upholstery. Plus, suits and dresses have a very '60s 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 no-brainer 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 comes-in-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

Leamington Music Festival Weekend
Royal Pump Rooms | Leamington Spa
23 - 26 September 2021

Coull Quartet Martin Outram
Leonore Piano Trio
Richard Watkins Magnus Johnston
Michael McHale
Mark Bebbington Christopher Cromar
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Autumn Season concerts

- 5 Oct** Stile Antico with *Toward the Dawn*
- 8 Oct** Sacconi Quartet Haydn, Shostakovich, Beethoven
- 15 Oct** Roderick Williams baritone - English Song Recital
- 29 Oct** Marmen Quartet Mozart, Simpson, Brahms
- 31 Oct** "Brass Explosion!" Two Brass Bands + Simpson's *Volcano*
- 9 Nov** The Binchois Consort with *Josquin des Prez 500*
- 12 Nov** Jubilee Quartet Tauský, Mendelssohn, Schubert
- 16 Nov** The Mellstock Band with *The Shepherd's Calendar*
- 3 Dec** Carducci Quartet Haydn, Shostakovich, Beethoven

Christmas Concerts

- 7 Dec** Joglaresa with *Lullay Myn Lykynge*
- 15 Dec** The York Waits with *The Waits' Wassail*
- 21 Dec** Christmas with The Carice Singers



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Striggio – Biber – Tallis 20th Birthday Celebration Tour

ARMONICO CONSORT & BAROQUE PLAYERS
 THE ENGLISH CORNETT & SACKBUT ENSEMBLE
 DIRECTOR | CHRISTOPHER MONKS

25th September, 7:30pm
 Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick
 01926 334418
 TICKETS: From £13.50

1st October, 7:30 pm
 Malvern Theatres
 01684 892277
 TICKETS: From £24.64



Oz & Armonico Drink to Music: Gin & Phonic!

MUSICAL DIRECTOR | CHRISTOPHER MONKS
 COUNTERTENOR | WILLIAM TOWERS
 NARRATOR | OZ CLARKE

13th October, 7:30 pm
 The Royal Pump Rooms,
 Leamington Spa
 01926 334418
 TICKETS: £25.50
 (includes two tasting
 glasses of gin)



Jenkins' The Armed Man

ARMONICO CONSORT & ORCHESTRA
 AC ACADEMY CHOIRS
 DIRECTOR | CHRISTOPHER MONKS

10th November, 7.30pm
 Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry
 02476 524524
 TICKETS: From £18.50

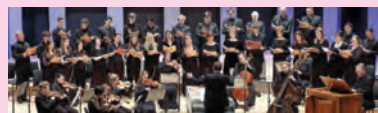


Handel's Messiah

ARMONICO CONSORT & BAROQUE PLAYERS
 DIRECTOR | CHRISTOPHER MONKS

8th December, 7:30 pm
 Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry
 02476 524524
 TICKETS: From £15.00

23rd December, 7pm
 Malvern Theatres
 01684 892277



Come and Sing at Christmas with John Rutter

FESTIVE VOCAL WORKSHOP

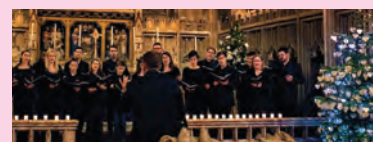
18th December, 2-5.30pm
 Coventry Cathedral
 01926 334418
 TICKETS: £16.50



Carols by Candlelight

ARMONICO CONSORT
 DIRECTOR | CHRISTOPHER MONKS

20th December, 7:30pm
 The Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick
 01926 334418
 TICKETS: From £15.50



Classical music from across the region...



CBSO: Tchaikovsky's Sixth

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Wed 22 & Thurs 23 September

Guest conductor Gustavo Gimeno (pictured) takes the helm for a concert that sees the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra sink its teeth into three works of music first performed in the year 1893.

The programme begins with Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hansel And Gretel*, a piece which the composer himself described as a fairytale opera.

Second on the bill is Ernest Chausson's

Poème de l'amour et de la mer (Poem Of Love And The Sea), a song cycle for voice and orchestra which sees soloist Dame Sarah Connolly joining forces with the CBSO.

The evening is rounded off with Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Sixth, the *Pathétique*. The composer's final completed symphony, its first performance was led by Tchaikovsky himself, just nine days before his death.



Armonico Consort: 20th Birthday Celebration Tour

Collegiate Church Of St Mary, Warwick, Sat 25 September; Malvern Theatres, Fri 1 October

Baroque consort Armonico - one of the largest organisations of its kind in the UK - uses authentic period instruments, regularly performs with some of the best solo musicians in the world, and is this year celebrating its 20th anniversary.

To mark the occasion, Armonico is going on tour with its most epic concert to date, presenting a unique programme of multi-part

polyphonic works from the 16th century. The programme line-up features Tallis' *Spem in Alium*, Striggio's 60-part *Missa sopra Ecco si Beato Giorno*, and Heinrich Biber's *Missa Salisburgensis*. The works will be interspersed with the 'timeless simplicity and beauty' of Hildegard of Bingen's plainchants.

Leamington Music Festival Weekend

various locations in and around Leamington Spa, Thurs 23 to Sunday 26 September

After being cancelled both last year and this spring, Leamington Music Festival makes a welcome return, albeit in shortened form. On this occasion the festival is marking the centenary of locally born composer Robert Simpson.

Greatly admired for his outstanding compositions for brass, Simpson is equally known for, among other works, his 11 symphonies, numerous concertos and 15 string quartets.

Performers at this year's event include festival opener the Coull Quartet (pictured), who will be playing the composer's String Quintet No1, and the Dante String Quartet, bringing the weekend's proceedings to a close with a performance of Simpson's Quartet No8.



The Best Of Gilbert & Sullivan

Malvern Theatres, Sat 11 September

The National Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Company are here joined by the National Festival Orchestra for a whirlwind tour of G&S's Savoy Operas. Along the way, they will share all manner of 'fascinating, historical, gossipy anecdotes that will effortlessly transport you back to the glitter and glamour of the 19th century Savoy Theatre'...

Sounds like an evening of entertainment that no self-respecting Gilbert & Sullivan fan can possibly afford to miss.



The Specials

Coventry Building Society Arena,
Sat 11 September

Coventry ska-punk legends The Specials formed in 1977 and hit the British music scene hard from the word go. Debut single Gangsters shot to number six in the UK chart, and every subsequent single was a

top-10 hit. The band also enjoyed two number ones - Too Much Too Young and the much-loved Ghost Town, which also won Single of the Year 1981 in NME, Melody Maker and Sounds. This hometown gig comes in support of Encore, their first studio album in more than 38 years.

Remi Harris

Huntingdon Hall, Worcester, Fri 10 September

Boasting a unique style that draws inspiration from artists including Django Reinhardt, Jimi Hendrix, Wes Montgomery and Led Zeppelin, Remi Harris presents eclectic shows that feature music which ranges from the acoustic jazz and swing of the 1930s and '40s, through to the electric blues of the '60s and '70s. He's joined for this Worcester gig by Tom Moore and Shane Dixon.



Hawkwind

The Assembly, Leamington Spa,
Sun 12 September

Hawkwind was formed in 1969 by Dave Brock, who remains at the helm today. Within a year, the band had played at the first ever Glastonbury Festival, released their eponymously titled debut album and, most impressively of all, created their very own music genre: space rock. Original member Lemmy left to form Motorhead in 1975. Hawkwind have since gone on to become a massively influential group, releasing in excess of 50 albums.

Genesis

Utilita Arena Birmingham,
Mon 20 - Wed 22 September

Genesis are among the biggest-selling recording artists of all time. The Last Domino? Tour 2021 sees Tony Banks, Phil Collins and Mike Rutherford making their first live outing together since 2007. They will be joined on stage by Nic Collins, on drums, and their long-time lead guitar & bass player, Daryl Stuermer.

Yungblud

Empire Coventry, Mon 13 September

Dominic Richard Harrison - or Yungblud to you and me - brings with him an explosion of raw energy and thought-provoking lyrics. The Doncaster-born 24-year-old has created his own blend of alternative rock-poetry, guitar hooks and break-beats - and thrives on a fierce determination to make a significant dent in pop culture. To date, he's released two albums: debut offering 21st Century Liability in 2018, and Weird! in 2020. The latter topped the UK album chart, selling 39,000 units in its first week and finishing ahead of Michael Ball & Alfie Boe's Together At Christmas.



Hazel O'Connor

Assembly Festival Garden, Coventry,
Sun 19 September

Coventry-born Hazel O'Connor catapulted to fame back in 1980 in hit Brit movie Breaking Glass, for which she also sang the soundtrack. Her performance kickstarted a career which has subsequently seen her enjoy plenty more chart and screen success. Here performing in the unique and spectacular setting of the Queen of Flanders spiegeltent, the award-winning singer-songwriter will be joined by powerhouse band The Subterraneans, with Clare Hirst on sax and Sarah Fisher on keyboards. This is Hazel's only show of 2021.



Symphony Hall and Town Hall re-open for audiences



Grayson Perry: A Show for Normal People

Thu 2 September
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



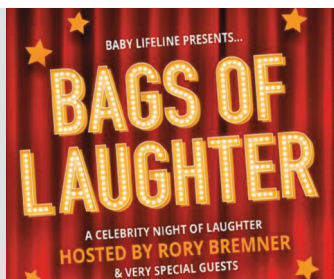
Simon Amstell: Spirit Hole

Fri 29 October
8pm
Town Hall



Bags of Laughter Hosted by Rory Bremner

Thu 23 September
8pm
Town Hall



BAGS OF LAUGHTER

A CELEBRITY NIGHT OF LAUGHTER
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& VERY SPECIAL GUESTS



Marti Pellow: The Greatest Hits Tour

Sun 28 November
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



The Billy Joel Songbook

Fri 24 September
7:30pm
Town Hall



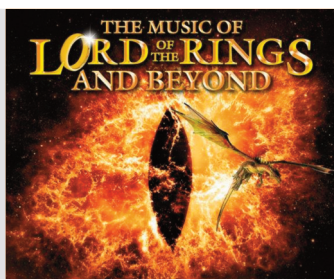
Adventures of the Yorkshire Shepherdess – Amanda Owen

Tue 30 November
7:30pm
Town Hall

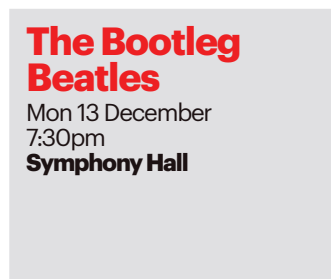


The Music of Lord of The Rings, Game of Thrones And Beyond

Sun 10 October
3pm
Symphony Hall



THE MUSIC OF LORD OF THE RINGS AND BEYOND



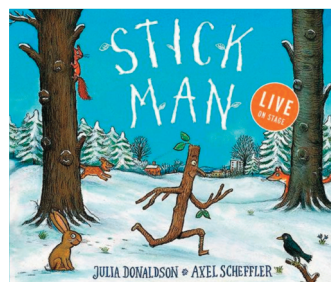
The Bootleg Beatles

Mon 13 December
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



Joker in Concert – Film with Live Orchestra

Tue 19 October
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



Stick Man: Live on Stage

Sun 26 Dec 2021 –
Sun 9 Jan 2022
Town Hall

A portrait of Ed Byrne, a man with dark, wavy hair and glasses, wearing a brown leather jacket with a white shearling collar. He is holding a small, green, leafy plant in his right hand. The background is a blurred, natural setting with green foliage and a cloudy sky.

If I'm Honest...

Ed Byrne back on the road with his latest tour

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 Morissette 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 thought-provoking experience.

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

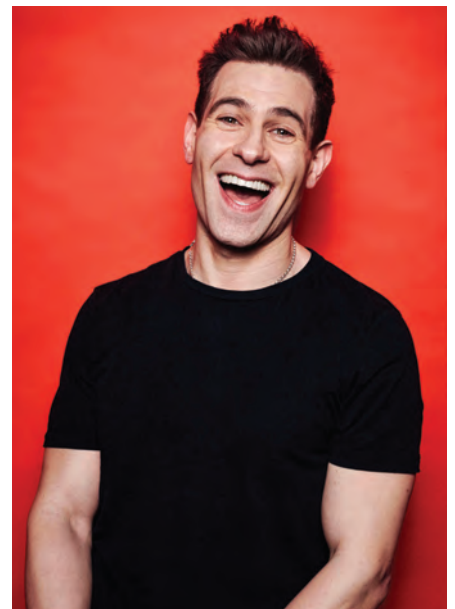
Simon Brodtkin

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

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

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 Brodtkin' 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.



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 '60s: "When I was in my 20s, 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 post-lockdown, 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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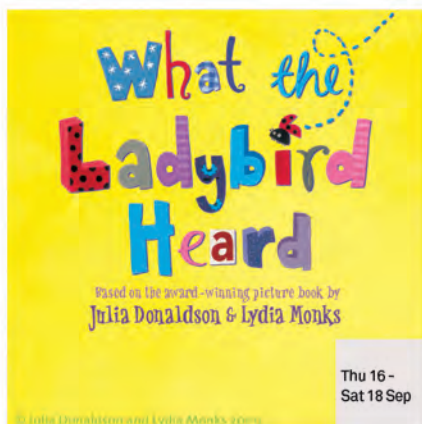
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Sat 11 Sep



Tue 14 -
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Thu 16 -
Sat 18 Sep



Thu 16 -
Sat 18 Sep

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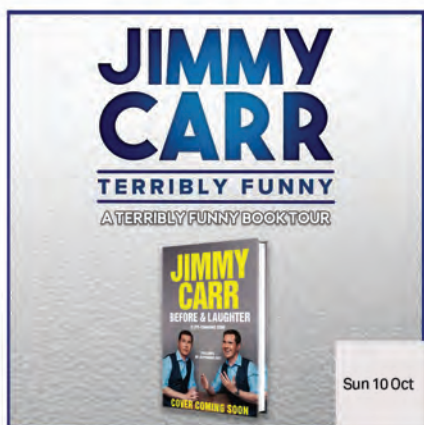
Tue 21 &
Wed 22 Sep



Fri 24 Sep



Mon 27 Sep
- Sat 2 Oct



Sun 10 Oct



Thu 14 -
Sat 16 Oct



Tue 19 &
Wed 20 Oct



LIFE'S A DRAG...

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 same time.

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 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 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 Jamie?

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 back-roller 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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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 semi-

autobiographical 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 On-esque reworking of the novel, the show comes complete with 'high drama, high comedy and highly raised eyebrows'.



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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 crooked 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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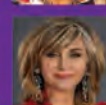


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- 14/9 Lucy Worsley: If Walls Could Talk
- 17/9 Sindhu Vee: Alphabet Tour
- 19/9 Eddie Reader Live
- 22/9 Malcolm Stent in the Afternoon
- 23/9 The Stars of Irish Country Show
- 25/9 Step Inside the 60s
- 26/9 An Audience with Lesley Garrett
- 27/9 Talon - The Best of Eagles
- 28/9 NOT Lady Chatterley's Lover
- 29/9 Graham Gouldman
- 1/10 The Upbeat Beatles
- 2/10 Sukh Ojla: '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 thespians 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 do-gooders, 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 full-length play by the prolific and ever-brilliant 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*.





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, double-murderess 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 amorality' 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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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, Gigglebizz and Giggleguiz, 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.



Back in Motion

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 18-month 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

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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 rumba and the Argentine tango.

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



Get Dancing!



Mariposa

The world premiere of DeNada Dance Theatre's queer tragedy, inspired by Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, shows at The Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome.

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.



Out Of The Deep Blue

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



The Bull And The Moon

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



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.



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.



IRMÃ-sister

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

**Birmingham International Dance Festival takes place from 21 September to 3 October
Visit: bidf.co.uk for full programme**

WELCOME BACK!

As Warwick Arts Centre gets ready to reopen following a major transformation, What's On talks to its director, Doreen Foster, about the venue's bright future...

WARWICK ARTS CENTRE

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 hidden-away 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.



For information on all future programming, visit: warwickartscentre.co.uk



Photography: Adam Fradgley

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 chamber-music 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

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Films released in September...

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 sun-kissed Jamaica. But what's a highly trained ex-Double-O operative meant to do but put down his vodka martini (shaken, not stirred) and spring into action when CIA pal Felix Leiter turns up asking for help...

Craig has been a massive hit as Ian Fleming's famous super-spy, and is surely making the right decision by handing in his Walther PPK at the age of 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

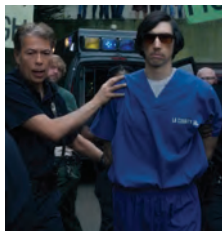


Annette

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. But all is not well for Henry, whose career suddenly hits skid row.



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

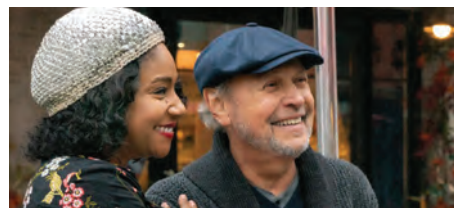
CERT 12 (93 mins)

Starring **Billy Crystal**, Tiffany Haddish, Dierdre Friel, Alex Brightman, Matthew Broussard, 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



Films released in September...

Respect CERT tbc (145 mins)

Starring **Jennifer Hudson, Forest Whitaker, Audra McDonald, Saycon Sengbloh, Hailey Kilgore, Brenda Nicole Moorer**
Directed by **Liesl Tommy**

This two hour-plus memorial to Aretha Franklin, who died three years ago, finds Jennifer Hudson showing all due respect to the legendary Queen of Soul. The performance of Academy Award-winning Hudson - whom Franklin handpicked to portray her in the biopic - is the most impressive aspect of a movie that tries hard to give a real sense of Aretha, both on-stage and off.

Plenty of key elements of Franklin's life receive coverage, including her involvement in the civil rights movement and her friendship with Martin Luther King Jr. Unfortunately, though, the film never really settles anywhere for long enough to gain the kind of traction achieved by other music-legend biopics like *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Judy*.

Released Fri 10 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 Carnahan 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 Murreto 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

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 spine-tingling 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 **Alessandro 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 prequel 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



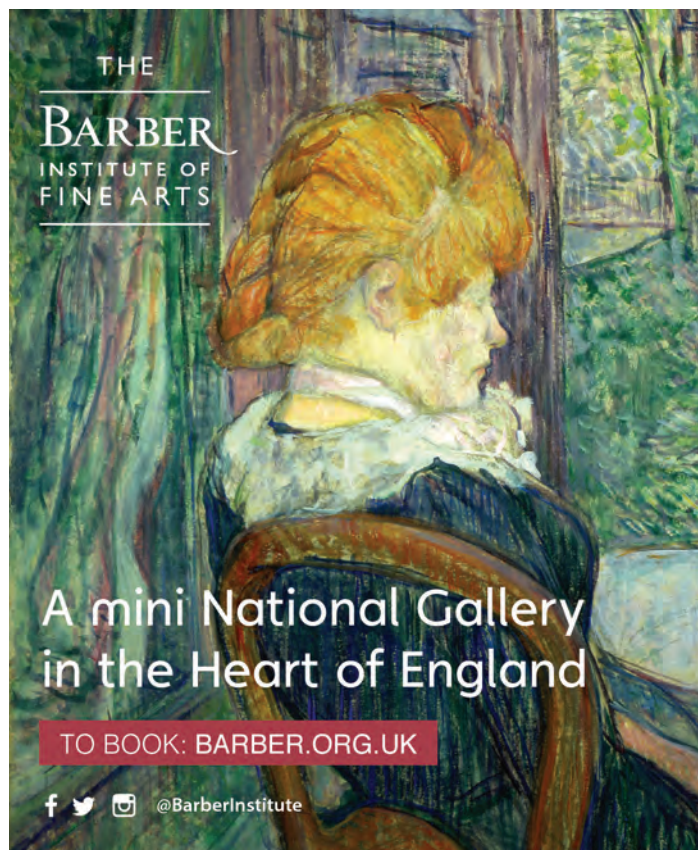
Grinling Gibbons: Centuries In The Making

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.



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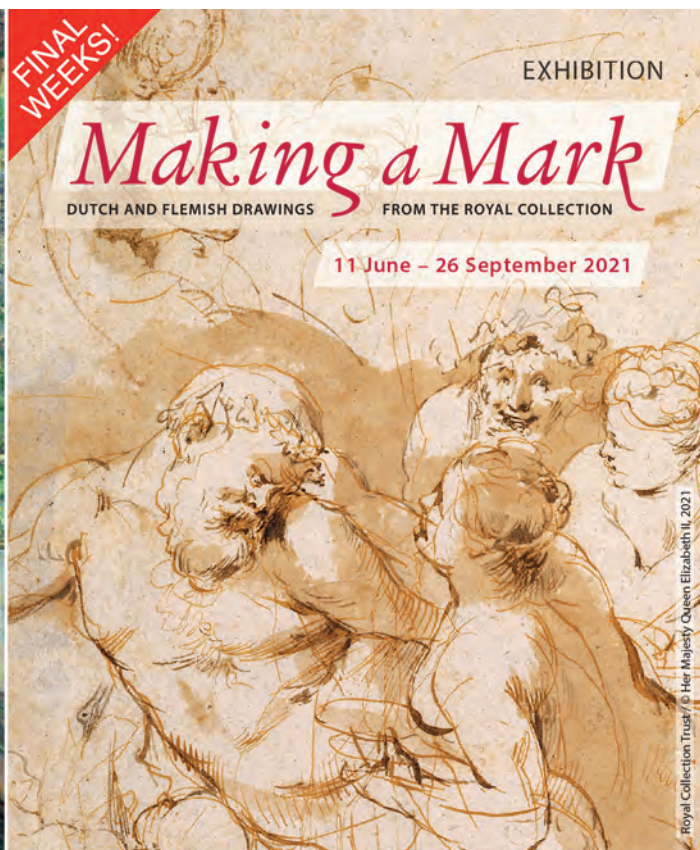
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The Butterfly Effect

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.

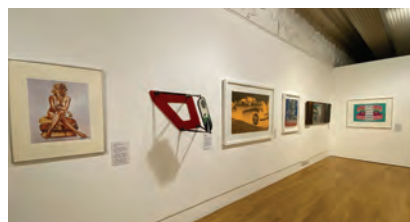
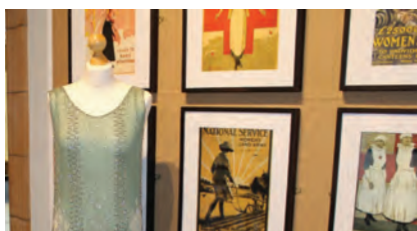
The exhibition, co-curated by seniors from MAC's Culture Club, reflects on what has been an era of rapid transformation, encouraging the viewer to reconsider the featured artworks through a newly acquired pandemic-created lens.

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.

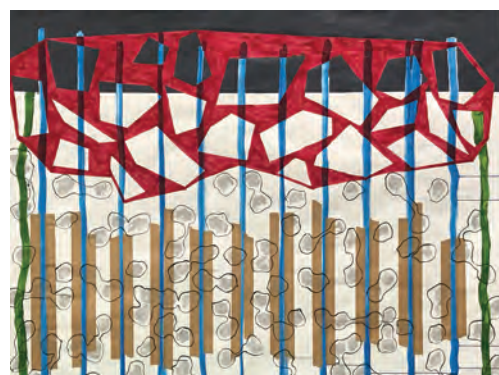
We Thought About It A Lot...

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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Events previews from around the region



The Photography Show & The Video Show

NEC, Birmingham, Sat 18 - Tues 21 September

As Europe's biggest photography and moving-image 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, award-winning 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 three-day-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 green-fingered 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.

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Events previews from around the region



Saxon Weekender

Tamworth Castle, Sat 18 & Sun 19 September

Travel back in time to experience Tamworth during the Saxon period, courtesy of a jam-packed 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 Company 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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Events previews from around the region



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 potato-picking 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.





Brush up on your botanicals

and enjoy a full-on gin experience at Shakespeare Distillery...

With England now the proud home to more distilleries than Scotland for the first time since records began, it's fair to say that the humble and once highly unfashionable 'gin' has undergone something of a renaissance in the last 20 years. From early pioneers like Thomas Dakin, the Warrington-born distiller and creator of the internationally renowned Bombay Sapphire, to modern-day adventurers like Sipsmiths - the first copper-pot distillery to open within Greater London in nearly two centuries following a historic change in British law - the story of English gin production is as intricate, multi-faceted and surprising as the spirit itself.

Where better, then, to celebrate this modern-day English success story than in the historic home of Warwickshire's most celebrated son, William Shakespeare. Located just a short drive from nearby Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Distillery prides itself on its innovative and experimental approach to gin production, fusing 'traditional and, in some cases, forgotten ingredients with modern techniques' to distil the essence of

Shakespeare's England into every product. Taking inspiration from the sights and smells of the Tudor Knott Garden - an aromatic mix of herbs, from marjoram to germander, thyme, rosemary, hyssop and lemon balm - this proudly independent, family-run craft distillery has continued to innovate since first opening its doors six years ago. Recent additions include a coffee & cocktail lounge, a visitor centre and an onsite shop. There's also a growing portfolio of 'experience' packages, from gin cruises to cocktail masterclasses. Hardly surprising, then, that Stratford's only craft distillery was awarded Gold in the New Tourism Business category at the 2020 West Midlands Tourism Awards.

I was invited to take part in one of the venue's award-winning distillery tours (priced at £17.50 per adult and £10 per child). This 75-minute experience package aims to distil the history of gin-making into a 'fun and informative' afternoon, complete with tutored tasting experience, guided tour of the on-site facilities and complimentary gin & tonic as standard.

I arrived with an open mind and a fully lined stomach. My fellow voyagers included a young couple on staycation in Warwickshire, a party of 30-something Hens, a retired party of six celebrating a big birthday weekend, and several couples local to the area. Quite the cocktail! But the proof, of course, would be in the tasting!

First up - a whistle-stop history of 'gin-production', delivered from the comfort of the venue's stunning new coffee shop & bar by Company Director Peter. With so much expertise on offer and so many different audiences to please (not to mention the promise of a free G&T still well over an hour away), it would be so easy for a lesser guide to lose his or her audience before the tour had even begun. Needless to say, I shouldn't have feared - this history lesson was anything but dry! Peter took it all in his stride, winning over his audience instantly with his enthused delivery, humour and passion for his craft.

Punchy and packed full of genuinely interesting facts accompanied by quirky visual aids, Peter's eloquent talk on gin-

drinking distilled over 500 years of history into 15 fun-filled minutes; from the 16th century 'genever' (a hearty mix of malt wine and juniper) lauded by the Dutch for its medicinal properties, to the explosion in London's 'strong water' shops during the height of the 18th century 'gin craze', right through to the present-day 'gin-aissance' in craft distilleries.

There was even a nod or two to Shakespeare, despite the spirit failing to make even a single appearance in any of his 38 plays (... what aspiring playwright living and working in London in the 16th century could have avoided it, Peter assured).

Palates prepared, our history lesson was at an end. Next up - the 'sciency bit' with David, who was on hand to introduce the party to the distillery's prized alembics: 'Portia', 'Ophelia' and - the latest addition to the family - 'Titania', a 200-litre fermenter from which the distillery recently began producing its very own Jester Rum.

Stood inside the distilling chamber - the engine room of any craft distillery - I was struck by just how much of a family affair this was, as our guide eagerly entertained us with tales of head distiller & founder Simon's quest to achieve the perfect 'Stratford Dry Gin', spending two whole years experimenting from a small copper still at home; an origin story worth its weight in marketing gold!

From the distillation of the base grain to the infusion of juniper and botanicals by vapour, no stone was left unturned by our knowledgeable guide in explaining exactly what gives Stratford's signature Dry Gin its

wholly unique flavour: distilled by 'single-shot' method, passed through copper for added smoothness, hand-sealed and bottled on site at 45% alcohol by volume and infused with the aromatic flavours of juniper, English lovage and Mediterranean citrus.

Armed with our new-found knowledge, there was just enough time for a fleeting visit to the bottling and packaging room before our guided tasting began.

Conducted from inside the distillery's gin-tasting room - an immersive laboratory-style space complete with individual copper alembics, pic'n'mix herb & spice dispensers and a fully manned gin cocktail bar - this was like no school I'd ever encountered...except perhaps in the realms of Harry Potter!

Our tutored tasting began with a single shot of undiluted 'Stratford Dry' Gin, which was not only remarkably smooth to the taste but also surprisingly nuanced in flavour, punctuated by floral notes of juniper and lemon.

With spirits high and retention rates falling by the second, our quick-witted host, Sam, knew just how to handle his crowd, introducing each new gin & tonic combination with the care and attention of a skilled craftsman, whilst at the same time embracing the general merriment of his audience, who - by three spirits in - were anything but attentive pupils!

Choosing from a menu of Rhubarb, Mulberry Gin Liqueur and Elderflower and Quince varieties, each new sample brought with it a fresh aroma, steeped in the scents and atmosphere of the English Tudor Garden.

Served with a complimentary choice of mixer to order and lashings of ice as standard, the pairing of Rhubarb gin and ginger ale packed a refreshing punch. Meanwhile, the apple & elderflower-infused flavours of Elderflower and Quince, served with aromatic Fever Tree tonic, was the perfect balance of bitter and sweet.

A final word to the wise... don't leave without sampling a measure of the distillery's very own 'lockdown project'. Jester Spiced Rum is a warming blend of cinnamon, mace, ginger, cloves and orange with a hint of lime, served with Madagascan Cola on ice and guaranteed to warm the cockles. The perfect early Christmas gift!

I only wish there'd been a little more time to savour the tasting experience before exiting through the gift shop to take advantage of our 10% discount off purchases, included with the price of the ticket. But then, as Shakespeare himself wrote: "Pleasure and action make the hours seem short".

If 'G&T?' is the question, then a day trip to Shakespeare's Distillery is most certainly the answer, whether you're looking for a fun and informative afternoon with friends, a chance to brush up on your botanicals, or an imaginative way to toast that special occasion with those closest to you.

Just be sure to bring a designated driver. You can thank them later!

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**To book, visit: shakespearedistillery.com
or call 01789 336559**



CULTURED COVENTRY

With its year as City of Culture well under way, we take a look at what Coventry has planned to keep you entertained during September...

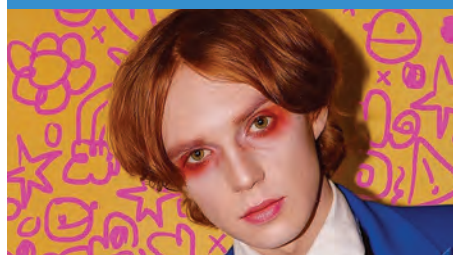
Frontier Sapiens Film Festival

WHERE: Coventry Cathedral Ruins

WHEN: Fri 24 September

An evening of outdoor cinema showcasing some of the very best adventure, cultural and environmental films from around the world. Book a deck chair and embark on a journey around the globe as top filmmakers introduce people who are working towards making a positive impact on the world.

Scaredy Kat AKA Alex Cubb



WHERE: Coventry Assembly Festival Garden

WHEN: Thurs 30 September

Join the star of Ru Paul's Drag Race for an evening of original music, comedy, poetry, freaky dance moves and skit after skit after skit. Oh, and campy - loads of campy.

Elliot Bibby: Magic In A Jiffy

WHERE: Coventry Assembly Festival Garden

WHEN: Tues 14 - Fri 17 September

Edinburgh-based magician Elliot Bibby here presents a fast-paced comedic performance whilst exploring the downside of internet shopping. Plenty of laughs and surprises are promised along the way.



Circolombia

WHERE: Coventry Assembly Festival Garden

WHEN: until Sun 19 September

Be transported to the streets of Columbia in this action-packed show from one of the world's leading circus companies.

Circolombia promises to be a real feast for the eyes and ears, as acrobats perform breathtaking feats up in the air while live music from the streets of Bogotá plays out.



Same Same But Different

WHERE: Indian Community Centre

WHEN: Sun 5 September

Fusing hip-hop, kathak and contemporary dance with live music and physical storytelling, Same Same But Different celebrates individuality, diversity and the bonds that connect us.

A Sonia Sabri Company production, the show takes audiences on a journey to a playful and colourful world, to explore our curiosities and our fears, as well as the times we feel different and when we belong.

Theatre Of Wandering

WHERE: Coventry city centre

WHEN: Sat 18 & Sun 19 September

Blurring the lines between fiction and reality, this new production explores ways in which people experience and live with dementia. Inspired by Coventry residents, Theatre Of Wandering invites audiences to embark on a walkabout theatrical experience through the city centre, following one person's journey in order to learn about the hidden stories behind one of society's greatest challenges. The performance is inspired by an original production from Japanese theatre company OiBokkeShi.



Fashion Spies

WHERE: Coventry Assembly Festival Garden

WHEN: Fri 17 - Sun 19 September

Described as Mighty Boosh meets Devil Wears Prada, this 'surreal choose-your-own-adventure comedy' for families is produced by Quick Duck Theatre. It's fashion week across the globe, and some of the season's most sought-after items have been stolen. The Secret Agency Service come to the rescue, together with the entire undergraduate class of the spy academy (the audience) to solve the mystery of the missing items. Apparently the stakes and shoulder pads have never been higher...



Mummy

WHERE: Coventry Assembly Festival Garden

WHEN: Fri 10 - Sun 12 September

Join comedienne Amy Gwilliam as she resurrects her thought-provoking one-woman show, a production prompted by the death of her own mother - TV comedy director Liddy Oldroyd (Drop The Dead Donkey, Gimme Gimme Gimme).

Basil Brush Unleashed

WHERE: Coventry Assembly Festival Garden
WHEN: Sat 11 September

National Treasure and everyone's favourite fox returns to the stage with a show especially for adults. Hot on the heels of his Edinburgh Festival debut, Basil here shines a light on everything from Love Island to Westminster. He will be joined by yet-to-be-announced special guests. Previous contributors have included Hugh Bonneville, Ed Byrne, Mark Watson and Zoe Lyons.



Loyiso Gola: Pop Culture

WHERE: Coventry Assembly Festival Garden

WHEN: Thurs 30 September

Join South African stand-up comedian Loyiso Gola as he considers the impact of pop culture moments around the world.

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 Warwickshire and Worcestershire

Warwickshire

Baddesley Clinton

Baddesley Clinton House, Baddesley Clinton, Warwick, B93 0DQ

Take the opportunity to explore a National Trust property with 500 years of fascinating and unexpected stories to discover. The house was sanctuary not only for the Ferrers family, who owned Baddesley Clinton for over 500 years, but also for persecuted Catholics, who were hidden from priest hunters in its secret hiding places during the 1590s. The peaceful gardens include fish pools, a walled garden and a lakeside walk that's perfect for a tranquil stroll. Booking not required.

Sat 11 September: 9am to 5pm



Bagot's Castle

Church Road, Baginton, Coventry, CV8 3AR

View artefacts and photographs from excavation work to learn more about the history of the site, then walk to the castle ruins and summer house, taking time along

the way to visit the Bagot goats and Herdwick sheep. Booking not required.

Fri 10, Sat 11, Sun 12, Fri 17, Sat 18 and Sun 19 September: 10:30am to 4pm



Canal and River Trust - Heritage Working Boat

Coventry Canal Basin, 10a St Nicholas St, Coventry, CV1 4LY

Go aboard a heritage canal working boat and check out the living conditions of the boatman's cabin. Experience what life was like and hear about the loads these boats would carry when they were the country's principal form of freight traffic. No booking required.

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



Discover Ladbroke's Heritage

Ladbroke Church, Church Road, Ladbroke, CV47 2DF

In a picture-postcard setting within the small village of Ladbroke, discover the 700-year-old All Saints' Church, with its unusual striped tower, Gilbert Scott interior and fine stained glass. As well as seeing the recent repairs, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and special displays inside the church, you can book one of the friendly tour guides to take you around the building, or indeed the village, for a tranquil stroll. Booking not required, but tour guides must be pre-booked.

Sat 11: 10am to 4pm, Sun 12: 2pm to 4pm, Thurs 16: 2pm to 4pm, Fri 17 September: 10am to 4pm



Packwood House

Packwood House, Packwood Lane, Lapworth, Solihull, B94 6AT

Take a look around this wonderful house and gardens, owned and cared for by the National Trust. Surrounded by beautiful

countryside, Packwood was described by a guest in the 1930s as 'a house to dream of, a garden to dream in'. Lovingly restored at the beginning of the 20th century by Graham Baron Ash, the house contains a collection of 16th century furniture and textiles. The gardens include herbaceous borders, sculpted yews and an 18th century gentleman's kitchen garden featuring herbs, flowers and vegetables. Booking not required.

Sat 11 September: 9am to 5pm



Roman Alcester Museum *Alcester Library & Museum, Globe House, Priory Road, Alcester, B49 5DZ*

Roman Alcester Museum will be open over the weekend, when visitors will be able to view an impressive display of Roman-era artefacts, including pottery, coins, jewellery, gemstones, bottles & glassware. Younger visitors can join in specially run crafting sessions, dress in Roman costumes and handle Roman pottery and other artefacts. No booking required.

Sat 11: and Sun 19 September: 10am to 4pm



Worcestershire

All Saints Church Open Day *All Saints Church, Bromsgrove, B60 1AD*

All Saints is a Grade 2 listed church with significant arts & crafts features. Activities include scavenger hunting in the grounds and a 'find the saints' treasure hunt, with prizes for children. A book swap, a

plant/produce stall and live music also feature.

Sat 11 September: 10am to 4pm



Forge Mill Museum *Forge Mill Needle Museum, Needle Mill Lane, Redditch, B98 8HY*

Forge Mill Needle Museum illustrates the rich heritage of the needle and fishing-tackle industries. Located just a short walk from the museum are the ruins of Bordesley Abbey - a medieval Cistercian abbey which has been extensively excavated. Heritage Open Day attractions include tours by experienced volunteer guides, an exhibition by local artists, and live music from community charity Indigo Arts.

Sun 19 September: 11am to 4pm



Hampton Lovett Church *St. Mary & All Saints Church, Hampton Lovett, Droitwich, WR9 0LU*

Visitors can explore the church's heritage and, during the season of Harvest, celebrate the history of farming and food production from the local area. Displays of photographs and artefacts, depicting past and present examples of farming and food production within the local area, also feature, as does the chance to learn more about the history and heritage of the church itself.

Sat 18 September: 10am to 4pm

Tenbury Tastes *Goff's School, Cross Street, Tenbury Wells, WR15 8EF*

Heritage Open Day attractions include the chance to view temporary exhibitions of artefacts and images relating to the town's brewing traditions. Also featured is a selection of 20th century culinary items used in the preparation of food.

Hands-on activities for children will be available for weekend visitors.

Fri 10, Sat 11, Sun 12, Tues 14, Thurs 16, Fri 17, Sat 18, Sun 19 September: various times



Tudor House Museum Evacuee Stories exhibition *Tudor House Museum, Tudor House, 38-42 Friar Street, Worcester, WR1 2NA*

This Evacuee Stories pop-up exhibition has been created by the museum's Young Curator, telling the stories of children during the 1940s. An Evacuee Experience film of Alec, a volunteer at Tudor House, will be showing, and there will be a number of activities for children to enjoy. No booking required.

Fri 10, Sat 11, Mon 13, Tues 14, Wed 15, Thurs 1, Fri 17, Sat 18 September: 10am to 4pm



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

The image shows the interior of Lichfield Cathedral, which has been transformed into a celestial-themed space. The walls, ceiling, and floor are covered in a vibrant projection of a starry night sky, featuring numerous stars in white, yellow, and blue against a dark blue background. The high, vaulted Gothic architecture of the cathedral is visible, with its pointed arches and ribbed ceiling. In the center of the nave, a large, bright, multi-pointed star hangs from the ceiling, casting a warm glow. At the far end of the cathedral, the altar area is illuminated with warm, golden light, and a Christmas tree is visible on the right side. The overall atmosphere is magical and festive.

Let there be light!

Image: Luxmuralis at Lichfield Cathedral



Midlands artist and sculptor Peter Walker talks about the many strings to his bow, including his work as artistic director of Luxmuralis, a collaborative team of artists from different backgrounds and disciplines who are this month bathing Worcester Cathedral in light...

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 24-hours 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. That's so important to

my practice and is something we've developed more and more in our work over the last 10 years or so.

What's in the pipeline at Worcester Cathedral this month?

As part of our upcoming partnership and tours to many cathedrals, we're taking our Luxmuralis son et lumières to Worcester Cathedral. This month, our light & sound show, Space, will be filling the area. It takes you to the edge of the universe and back in one night, which is truly a wonderful experience. A cathedral is already imbued with history, and you come into the space with preconceptions about what it should be. When we take the subjects and the approaches we do at Luxmuralis, it really opens the door for discussion. We're leaving the relationship between faith, science and art open to the audience. The show isn't meant to be a scientific representation of every star in the universe, but it takes you on a journey through the ebb and flow of human emotion when experiencing and exploring the subject. It's quite a free and abstract journey. It's like going through a series of sculptures or paintings within the building. Some of the sound comes from historic space materials and NASA recordings, but they've all been blended and composed into a very different musical form. Luxmuralis shows always surprise people, so unless you've seen one, you'll never know what to expect!

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Space shows at Worcester Cathedral from Wednesday 22 to Saturday 25 September. For further information, visit: worstercathedral.co.uk

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 biggest-ever 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 Saturns 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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THE BUTTERMARKE
SHREWSBURY

SHROPSHIRE'S LARGEST LIVE MUSIC VENUE

FRIDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

QUEEN
NIGHT LIVE TRIBUTE



SATURDAY 2 OCTOBER

Miles Hunt

With very special guest

Ian Prowse



7.30pm 2ND October 2021

EXCLUSIVE UK GIG!

Tickets: thewonderstuff.co.uk

SATURDAY 16 OCTOBER

LIVE WIRE
THE AC/DC SHOW



Long Live AC/DC
Long Live LIVE/WIRE

SATURDAY 27 NOVEMBER

BLANCMANGE



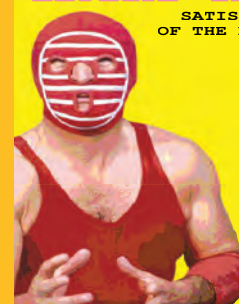
FRIDAY 3 DECEMBER



FRIDAY 10 DECEMBER

HALF MAN
HALF BISCUIT

SATISFYING THE BLOODLUST
OF THE MASSES IN PEACETIME
Plus guests
WEST WICKHAMS



Fri 10 Dec

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