

Staffordshire

ISSUE 417 OCTOBER 2021

What's On

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Alton Towers SCAREFEST

inside:

MEGSON

husband & wife duo play
Lichfield Festival of Folk



SPITFIRE GALLERY

new space unveiled at the
Potteries Museum...



SPOOKY FUN!

Halloween happenings
across the Midlands...



gatehouse theatre



SNOW WHITE

December 10 - 31

Featuring

Maureen Nolan



Rebecca Keatley



Keith Jack





★★★★★
"FOR ONCE, YOU CAN BELIEVE THE HYPE"
BRITISH THEATRE GUIDE

THE SIMON & GARFUNKEL STORY

SATURDAY 9 OCTOBER @ 7.30PM



THE CAVERN BEATLES
FRIDAY 8 OCTOBER
@ 7.30PM

ANYTHING FOR LOVE
THURSDAY 14 OCTOBER
@ 7.30PM



MADE IN DAGENHAM
WEDNESDAY 20 -
SATURDAY 23 OCTOBER
@ 7.30PM

THE DONG WITH THE LUMINOUS NOSE
SATURDAY 23 OCTOBER
@ 1.30PM & 3.30PM

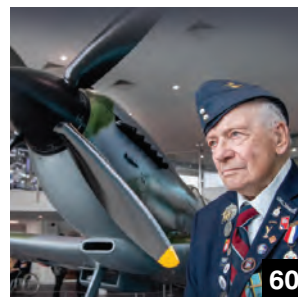
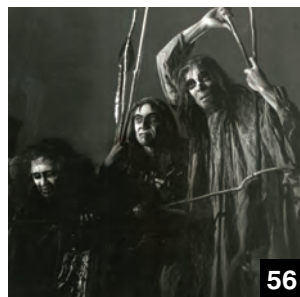
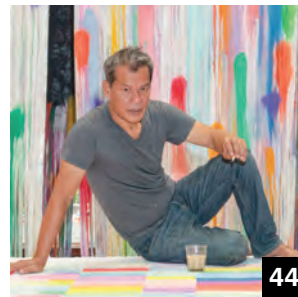
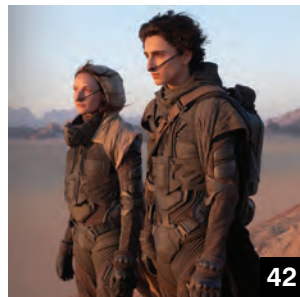
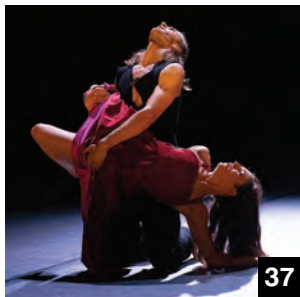
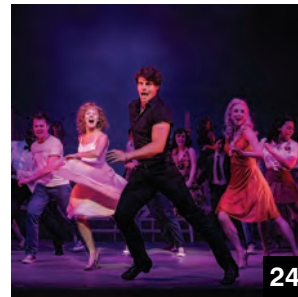
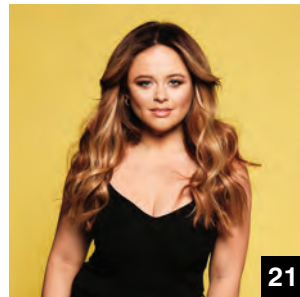


THE ROY ORBISON STORY
FRIDAY 29 OCTOBER
@ 7.30PM

HARRY BAKER
MET STUDIO
FRIDAY 29 OCTOBER
@ 7.30PM



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What's On

MEDIA GROUP

Managing Director: **Davina Evans** davina@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281708
Sales & Marketing: **Chris Horton** chris@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281704
Editorial: **Lauren Foster** lauren@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281707 : **Brian O'Faolain**
brian@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281701 : **Abi Whitehouse** abi@whatsonlive.co.uk
01743 281716

Subscriptions: **Adrian Parker** adrian.parker@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281714 Contributors: Graham Bostock,
Lauren Cole, Katherine Ewing, Marianne Peterson, Ellie Hutchings, Patsy Moss, Sue Jones, Steve Taylor
Publisher and CEO: **Martin Monahan** Accounts Administrator: **Julia Perry** julia@21std.com 01743 281717

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Christmas comes early at the New Vic Theatre

The festive season is arriving two months early at Staffordshire's New Vic Theatre this year, courtesy of a production of Alan Ayckbourn's Christmas-set play, *Absurd Person Singular*.

Telling the story of three married couples in three kitchens at three Christmas parties, *Absurd Person* was written in 1972 and is being presented at the Newcastle-under-Lyme venue by London Classic Theatre. The production runs from Wednesday 20 to Saturday 23 October. For further information, visit newvictheatre.org.uk

V&A exhibition adapted for the big screen

The V&A's blockbuster exhibition, *Alice: Curiouser And Curiouser*, has been made into a documentary film which will be screened at selected West Midlands cinemas from 14 October.

The documentary follows V&A Senior Curator Kate Bailey and broadcaster Andi Oliver as they explore how the titular character from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* has become a cultural icon throughout art.

The film shows at Cineworld Birmingham, Midlands Arts Centre, Showcase in Coventry and Dudley, and Solihull Cineworld.



Harry Potter Platform 9³/₄ Trolley heading for New Street Station

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the first Harry Potter film, the iconic Platform 9³/₄ Trolley will be stopping off at Birmingham New Street Station from 23 to 25 October. The installation allows fans to recreate the moment when Harry first made it onto Platform 9³/₄ by running through a magical brick wall in London's King's Cross station.

Muggles, witches and wizards alike will be able to get a photo of themselves appearing to emulate Harry by running through the wall.

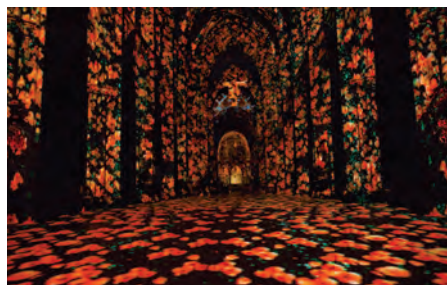


Lichfield Cathedral remembers...

Award-winning artist collective Luxmuralis will mark next month's Remembrance Day by returning to Lichfield Cathedral with light & sound show *Poppy Fields*.

The show sees images of poppies cascade down the cathedral, with the projections being accompanied by specially composed music from David Harper and poetry recorded by Oscar-winning actor Eddie Redmayne.

Poppy Fields is available to view from 6 to 13 November, from 5.30pm onwards each evening.



British Ceramics Biennial continues in Stoke

The British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) continues this month in Stoke-on-Trent. The festival of contemporary ceramics is the single largest event of its kind in the UK, presenting exhibitions of art by some of the country's leading ceramicists.

BCB is underpinned by a year-round programme of artists' commissions and education & community-engagement projects.

For more information about the biennial, visit britishceramicsbiennial.com

Halloween House returns to Merry Hill for third time

The largest Halloween store in Europe has opened its doors for a third time at Merry Hill shopping centre in Dudley.

Halloween House stocks one of the largest collections of Halloween merchandise in the UK. The retail outlet will transform into Christmas House in November.



Corrie's Tom Roberts set to get evil in Telford!

Tom Roberts is set to get evil in Telford this Christmas.

The popular *Coronation Street* actor will be playing legendary panto villain Abanazar in The Place's festive-season production of *Aladdin*, which shows at the venue from 8 December to 2 January.

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

Classic Motor Show returns to the Midlands

The Lancaster Insurance Classic Motor Show is returning to the NEC next month (12 - 14 November). The ever-popular event brings together the world's largest gathering of car & motorcycle clubs with over 3,000 classic and vintage cars and bikes. Live auctions, talks and an autojumble also feature. For more information, visit thenec.co.uk



Divine Comedy to tour to the region

The Divine Comedy, aka Neil Hannon, will perform his greatest hits at Birmingham Symphony Hall next spring (25 April) as part of a new UK tour.

Commenting on the news, Neil said: "The last couple of years have been a reminder of how much touring means to me personally. It really is my favourite thing. And it seems fitting that we'll be coming back with a 'greatest hits' set; you know... just in case everyone's forgotten who I am and what we do!"

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit thedivinecomedy.com



Line-up announced for Utilita Creation Day Festival 2022

Utilita Creation Day Festival will bring a weekend of live music to Wolverhampton's West Park next spring (28 & 29 May).

The event will be headlined by IDLES (pictured) and Happy Mondays. Other contributing artists

include Echo & The Bunnymen, Friendly Fires, Ash, Cast, The Wedding Present, Glasvegas, Sleeper, Echobelly, The Illicit, The Clockworks and Shambolics.

Arts Council to prioritise Black Country region

Arts Council England is aiming to prioritise plans to enhance the Black Country's cultural & creative sector.

The announcement comes as part of the arts council's three-year Delivery Plan for 2021 to 2024.

Commenting on the initiative, Peter Knott, Midlands Area Director for Arts Council England, said: "Creativity brings people together, supports local economies and helps to improve lives - and we know investing in culture makes people happy and proud of the place they live."



Birmingham Royal Ballet to present a different Nutcracker production

Birmingham Royal Ballet will present an exclusive adaptation of Sir David Bintley's Royal Albert Hall production of The Nutcracker at Birmingham Hippodrome next month.

Never before performed outside London, the show replaces - for one year only - the Peter Wright version which BRB traditionally present pre-Christmas. Sir Peter's production is currently undergoing a major renovation.

The Nutcracker runs at the Hippodrome from Saturday 20 November to Saturday 11 December.

Tickets are available now from brb.org.uk

Idlewild in Stourbridge

Rock band Idlewild perform in Stourbridge next month as part of their 25th anniversary tour.

The cult Scottish group will be at the Town Hall on Saturday 13 November. Tickets can be purchased at boroughhalls.co.uk or by calling the box office on 01384 812812.

Dave announces 2022 Midlands appearance

Following the release of his critically acclaimed UK number one album, *We're All Alone In This Together*, award-winning rapper Dave is

heading out on a UK tour in the new year, stopping off at Birmingham's Resorts World Arena on 17 February.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit santandave.com



New Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games festival announced

A six-month celebration spotlighting creativity and culture in the West Midlands will run from March to September next year as part of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games programme. Birmingham 2022 Festival will feature hundreds of creative commissions across the region, including art, photography, dance, theatre and digital art.

The full festival programme will be launched in January. To find out more, visit birmingham2022.com



Illuminations return to National Memorial Arboretum

National Memorial Arboretum is this winter bringing back Illuminated Arboretum. The popular festive event, described as 'a kaleidoscope of colour', will see the 150-acre woodland site in Staffordshire transformed

into an illuminated trail on a daily basis from Tuesday 7 to Saturday 18 December. Tickets for the event can be booked at maximcloud.co.uk

From Eastenders to White Witch



EastEnders favourite Samantha Womack will star as the White Witch when the Leeds Playhouse production of CS Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe* stops off at The Alexandra in Birmingham next spring (8 - 12 March).

Commenting on the news, Samantha said: "The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe has always been a magical read, and having watched incredible actors interpret this role in the past, I'm excited to see what the White Witch holds for me. This production is so beautifully conceived, with thrilling sets and costumes and an amazingly talented cast and creative team. I can't wait to seduce, plot and terrify Narnia into a permanent winter."

For more information and to book a seat for the show, visit atgtickets.com

England football legends raise money for Grand Theatre charity

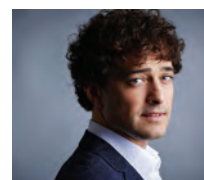
Football legends Paul Gascoigne, Steve Bull, Dave Beasant, Peter Shilton and Paul Parker reunited on stage at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre last month to re-live memories of the 1990 World Cup.

Hosted by Sky Sports' Johnny Phillips, the evening revisited some of England's most iconic moments during the tournament. The event raised more than £10,000, with funds being split between the Grand Theatre's charity and former Wolves player Steve Bull's foundation.

Lee Mead to star in Kay Mellor's Fat Friends

Kay Mellor's *Fat Friends The Musical* will stop off in the Midlands next summer as part of a national tour.

Featuring music by Andrew Lloyd Webber's son, Nick, the hit production stars West End favourite Lee Mead and will show at the The Alexandra, Birmingham, from 29 March to 2 April; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre from 13 to 18 June and then Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn from Mon 20 to Sat 25 June.



There's something for everyone at **Symphony Hall** and **Town Hall**



The Billy Joel Songbook

Fri 24 Sep
7:30pm
Town Hall



Tim Peake: My Journey To Space

Wed 3 Nov
7:30pm
Symphony Hall

Bring Your Own Baby Comedy

Tue 12 Oct
12pm
Jennifer Blackwell
Performance Space
Symphony Hall



Shlomo's Beatbox Adventure For Kids

Sun 7 Nov
1pm
Town Hall



Joker in Concert: Film with Live Orchestra

Tue 19 Oct
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



City of Birmingham Choir: Messiah, The Inside View

Sun 28 Nov
2:30pm
Town Hall

Halloween Silent Movie Special: The Phantom of the Opera

Sun 31 Oct
8pm
Town Hall



Adventures of the Yorkshire Shepherdess: Amanda Owen

Tue 30 Nov
7:30pm
Town Hall



Sixties Gold

Mon 1 Nov
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



Jason Donovan: Even More Good Reasons

Thu 2 Dec
8pm
Symphony Hall

MAKING MISCHIEF

Grown-ups playing kids?
What could possibly go wrong?...





Almost everything they do Goes Wrong but still audiences love a bit of Mischief. With a string of theatrical mishaps under their belt, critically acclaimed theatre troupe Mischief are out on tour with The Play That Goes Wrong and new production Groan Ups. We caught up with co-writer and Artistic Director Henry Lewis to find out more...

What is Mischief's 'mission statement' and how did the company come into being?

Mischief was formed in 2008 as an improvised theatre company. Since then, we've branched out and now mainly create scripted work. At Mischief we are serious about silliness. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to break free from the shackles of everyday life and escape with us to a world of carefully choreographed chaos, merry mishaps and timeless comedy. A place where you can escape reality and laugh until you cry. It is this belief that lies at the heart of our brand and underpins everything we do - we call it ridiculous escapism.

How would you describe The Play That Goes Wrong and where did you get the idea?

The Play That Goes Wrong does exactly what it says on the tin. It's a play where everything that *can* go wrong, does. The Cornley Drama Society attempt to put on a murder-mystery, but props go missing, actors get concussed and the set begins to crumble. The idea came from theatrical clowning, a theatre style myself and the other writers studied at drama school, and we also took inspiration from Michael Green, who wrote the terrifically funny Art Of Coarse Acting - a book all about how to be a bad actor.

Are any of the characters based on anyone in real life?

Other than ourselves, not really. When you develop clown characters it's quite common

for bits of yourself to end up in the character, exaggerated for comedic effect.

How do you kickstart the writing process and decide on the direction of travel?

Usually for Goes Wrong pieces we start with a new genre and come up with a broad idea of how we might have that unravel. We look at how the different Cornley Drama Society characters might approach that particular type of theatre. Then, from there, we start to find jokes and physical comedy ideas.

When you're searching for that next brilliant idea to be the basis of your next play, what criteria do you apply?

The idea has to be original and laugh-out-loud funny.

It's tough to make your mark in theatreland. What particular factors do you feel have allowed Mischief to make such an impact?

I think audiences like a bit of irreverence. The shows are designed to be funny, to be an escape, and I think people really need that, especially at the moment.

You co-write Mischief scripts. What do you each bring to the process as individuals?

Different things at different times, I would say, but in particular Henry S has a great eye for structure, and Jon has a brilliant natural instinct for finding the silliness in situations that really makes audiences laugh.

Groan Ups is funny but not without pathos. What was your purpose in giving the play this extra dimension?

We wanted to see if we could do a show where we kept the audience laughing all the way through but which also put character at the centre of the show. We thought it would be fun to explore five people at different stages of their lives and tell a story that was funny but also moving.

Who were your comedy inspirations when you were growing up?

Monty Python, for sure, and, as I say, Michael Green was a huge inspiration for all things 'Goes Wrong'. Older comedy as well - Laurel & Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd.

What's next for Mischief?

We're always developing new things, I'm sure there'll be more new stage and TV work, and maybe even a film! That would be very exciting.

The Play That Goes Wrong shows at Birmingham Hippodrome from Tues 26 to Sat 30 October, and Malvern Theatres from Tues 9 to Sat 13 November

Catch Groan Ups at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre from Mon 8 to Sat 13 November, and then at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, from Mon 28 Feb to Sat 5 March

Lichfield Arts

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OCTOBER

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Sat 16th-Sun 24th



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L2F ART COMPETITION EXHIBITION
ARGENTINE TANGO WORKSHOP
ACOUSTIC SESSION • QUIZ

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Sunday 31st July Julie Band

NOVEMBER

Saturday 6th Fred Zeppelin
Friday 12th Sheelanagig
Saturday 13th King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys
Wednesday 17th Jazz at The Cathedral Hotel - TBA
Saturday 27th Elles Bailey

DECEMBER

Saturday 4th Kiki Dee & Carmelo Luggeri
Saturday 11th Roxy Magic
Wednesday 15th Jazz at The Cathedral Hotel
Christmas Special

Organised and run by independent charity Lichfield Arts. Charity no: 1156217
www.lichfieldarts.org.uk 01543 262223

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REVIEW: The Beefy Boys

Dirty American-style burgers hit the Town of Flowers

To say I was excited when award-winning independent The Beefy Boys announced Shrewsbury as the location for their second restaurant is an understatement.

Founded in Hereford in 2011, The Beefy Boys are four backyard amateur cooks who share a passion for local produce and dirty American-style burgers and BBQ. In 2014, the boys won the coveted title of Best Burger at Grillstock - the UK's biggest BBQ competition. This led them to represent the UK at the World Food Championships in Las Vegas, where they came second with their Butty Bach Burger.

How I'd failed to try one of these lip-smacking delights over the years I'll never know, but I had.

Whilst the new restaurant, located in the old Zizzi unit on Shrewsbury High Street, was undergoing the necessary renovations, the boys teased the Town of Flowers with two stop-offs in The Square, serving burgers and fries out of their touring truck from lunchtime onwards.

Unsurprisingly, they sold out both times. Each time I saw photos on social media, the queue was at least 100 people in length, perfectly illustrating just

how eagerly the townsfolk were anticipating the arrival of these Dirty Burger maestros.

Everybody loves a burger!

The restaurant has been packed to the rafters since opening mid-August. Rarely do I book a table for food at 9pm, but it was the only slot that was available - and I booked in advance! If you want to visit, definitely plan well ahead.

We ordered drinks - a well-made Espresso Martini and a lager. As well as burgers, the boys also specialise in cocktails and have an extensive list from which to choose.

The food menu boasts a range of classic, dirty, speciality and chicken burgers and has a section for each. There are also three vegetarian burger options and a variety of wings, loaded fries and sides. Burgers include: The Bacon Boy - baconaise, double bacon, American cheese, Swiss cheese, tomato, lettuce, red onion and gherkin; The Macaroni Boy - Mac and cheese patty, American cheese, Swiss cheese, bacon, HPA nacho sauce, lettuce, spicy chipotle ketchup; and Buffalo Chicken Boy - chargrilled breast or buttermilk-fried thigh, smothered in buffalo sauce, blue cheese mayo, lettuce

and red onion. All burgers are served in a sesame-seeded semi-brioche bun. Hungry yet?

Meanwhile, made with 100% Herefordshire beef, freshly ground that day and never frozen, the beef patties are as follows: Thick Patty - 6oz patty served pink; Smashed Patty - 2 x 3oz patties smashed thin and cooked through; Oklahoma Style - 2 x 3oz patties smashed with onion; and Animal Style - mustard-fried thick patty.

There's the option to double or triple up, too - or, for the more adventurous diner, to add as many extra patties as you like at £3 per patty.

It was quite the deliberation, but my partner and I eventually settled for the Jurassic Classic Nozboy (with a thick patty) - priced at £9.50 and designed in conjunction with hip-hop legends Jurassic 5 and local festival Nozstock - and The Blue Boy (with smashed patty), also priced at £9.50. The Beefy Boys have got their pricing spot on. As my partner says, 'a burger should rarely cost over £10', and he's right.

We enjoyed a portion of pastrami fries - topped with a delicious house-cured and smoked pastrami, double Swiss cheese, dirty mayo and gherkins - and Millionaire Fries - topped with truffle oil, parmesan, chives and chipotle mayo. When I next visit, I'll definitely be trying the Pastrami Boy burger!

Ravenous - it was gone 9pm, after all! - we also ordered two portions of chicken wings. The Ninja Wings were smothered in a beautifully balanced soy, garlic & honey sauce and topped with sesame seeds. The Buffalo Wings boasted a buffalo sauce served with a blue cheese dip. Cooked perfectly, they were both thoroughly enjoyable and come highly recommended. You'll need some napkins, though!

On to the burgers. First, the

Jurassic Classic Nozboy. Unfortunately the thick patty was slightly overdone and not as pink as I'd hoped for. Personal preference perhaps, but I feel many would've shared my view - it wasn't juicy, and a thick patty should definitely be juicy! I put that down to the kitchen being overwhelmed, and I certainly won't be holding it against them - they're only just learning the ropes, after all. The other elements of the speciality burger - honey mustard mayo, ketchup, spinach, fried egg, American cheese, Swiss cheese and bacon - were tasty.

The Blue Boy prevailed. The smashed patties were both nicely cooked and seasoned, and the blue cheese mayo, American cheese, Swiss cheese, pickled jalapenos, lettuce, red onion and bacon were the perfect accompaniments.

The restaurant itself boasts a nice atmosphere - buzzing yet relaxed. It features neon signage, low lighting and (some) artwork-covered walls - a decor synonymous with burger joints.

The staff were welcoming, knowledgeable and just downright lovely from the moment we walked in, which is always a nice experience. Sadly you don't get that everywhere.

Were they the best burgers I've ever tasted? No. I do think there are some teething problems that need to be ironed out. Am I pleased they've set up shop in my home town? Absolutely. Will I be returning? Too right!

Lauren Foster

Food:	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Service:	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Ambience:	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Overall value	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
OVERALL	■ ■ ■ ■ ■

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Food news from across the region...

Bread lovers, rejoice!

A celebration of all things flour is taking place at St Thomas Centre in Wednesfield on Saturday 23 & Sunday 24 October (opening at 10am both days).

The free event features bread tasting, baking contests, fairtrade and climate-crisis talks, bake sales from local communities and an art exhibition about the origins of wheat.

Anyone wishing to get involved in the project - which has been bringing people together for a number of years - should call Rachel Arnold on 01902 714 060.

Shropshire team-up creates new tipple

The Shropshire Distillery in Ellesmere and the Wood Brewery from Wistanstow have joined forces to create a new handcrafted tipple: Hopped Dry Gin.

Commenting on the product, Wood's Stephen O'Neill said: "The zesty citrus pine flavour is balanced with light floral notes. An added punch of dried grapefruit and an undercurrent of juniper delivers a smooth, refreshingly hoppy character. This gin is best enjoyed with a citrus slice, premium tonic and good company!"

Bavarian fun in Wolves

There's two days of 'Bavarian' merry-making to enjoy at The Hangar in Wolverhampton this month.

The Oktoberfest-style get-together features a range of German beers, traditional food including bratwursts, chicken schnitzel and pretzels, and entertainment from DJs and oompah bands.

The event runs from 5pm to 11pm on Friday 15 October and then from 12pm to 5pm and from 6pm to 11pm on Saturday the 16th. Tickets can be bought via: oktoberfestparty.co.uk

**Chef Tom Shepherd opens Upstairs eatery in Lichfield**

Acclaimed chef Tom Shepherd is this month opening his first restaurant under his own name (on 8 October).

Upstairs By Tom Shepherd, located above his father's jewellery shop in Lichfield, is described as 'a relaxed and refined space in which to enjoy Tom's modern British menus, based around seasonal ingredients, with subtle influences from Japan and East Asia'.

The venue's flagship tasting menu, priced at £62 for five courses and £77 for seven, includes dishes like Orkney scallop with dashi, celeriac and apple, and poached Atlantic cod with wild mussel, caviar and Champagne.

A three-course lunch menu, available from Thursday to Saturday and priced at £35,

features dishes such as Creedy Carver Chicken with sweetcorn, Israeli couscous and leek.

A three-course Sunday lunch menu, also priced at £35, will showcase Tom's elegant and contemporary takes on classic British comfort food, such as roast salt-aged Herefordshire beef sirloin and king oyster mushroom wellington with winter truffle.

Tom has experience heading up kitchens at some of the best eateries in the UK. Most recently he worked at Adam's in Birmingham, successfully retaining the restaurant's Michelin star and three AA rosettes during his time as head chef.

To make a reservation at his new venue, visit upstairs.restaurant

Late Nights return to Shrewsbury Market Hall

Shrewsbury Market Hall's popular Late Nights have returned, with Saturday 30 October and Saturday 4 December the next dates in the calendar.

The 'perfect addition' to Shropshire's street-food scene, the venue's cafes and bars will stay open until 10pm. The range of food available to enjoy will include dim sum, Thai, South American, Middle Eastern and continental fusion.

Cocktail, wine and gin bars will also be open, as will a selection of lifestyle stalls for visitors who fancy a spot of late-night shopping. For more details, visit shrewsburymarkethall.co.uk.





HANDEL
MESSIAH
THE INSIDE VIEW

City of Birmingham Choir
1921 - 2021

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Classical & Easy Listening music from across the region...



Ex Cathedra: Beethoven's Funeral

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Sun 17 October

Jeffrey Skidmore picks up the baton to conduct Birmingham's highly rated early music ensemble in their first concert of the new season.

"Appropriately we begin with an act of remembrance," says Jeffrey. "Mozart's profoundly moving Requiem Mass was unfinished at his death and completed by a

pupil. 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.

The Carducci Quartet

The Lion Hotel, Shrewsbury, Fri 8 October

Performing nearly 100 international concerts each year, Carducci are regarded as one of the most successful string quartets in the business. Indeed, the Washington Post described their performances as displaying 'a deep and almost familial sense of unity... full of life and vitality... extravagantly beautiful...'

Featuring Beethoven, Shostakovich and Schubert's Death And The Maiden, Carducci's Shrewsbury programme kickstarts Shropshire Music's Vienna To Moscow series, a trilogy of concerts performed by highly regarded string quartets.



CBSO: Prokofiev's Romeo And Juliet

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Thurs 14 October

After living outside Russia since 1918, Sergei Prokofiev was lured home in the mid-1930s not only by the dangled carrot of writing whatever opera or ballet he desired, but also by the opportunity to topple Shostakovich from his position at the pinnacle of the Soviet Union's music scene. Romeo And Juliet certainly promised to herald the composer's return with a great big bang - until, that is, the ballet's orchestration (and indeed its happy ending) fell foul of the politics of the time. Prokofiev then re-used music from the ballet for a solo piano work and three suites for orchestra, the second of which is here performed by the CBSO.

Conducted by François Leleux, the concert also features the William Tell Overture by Rossini, Mozart's Violin Concerto No5 and Roman Carnival Overture by Berlioz.

Ludlow English Song Weekend

St Laurence's Church, Ludlow, South Shropshire, Fri 29 - Sat 30 October

The promotion of both familiar and unfamiliar English Song is at the heartland of this popular annual event, boasting a carefully curated mix of concerts, panel discussions, performance masterclasses, workshops, recitals and films.

This year's line-up of talented performers includes Roddy Williams, Kathryn Rudge and New Zealand-born Samoan baritone Benson Wilson (pictured). One of the UK's hottest vocal properties, Natalya Romaniw - who was recently crowned Royal Philharmonic Society Singer of the Year - also features on the bill.



Russell Watson

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Fri 22 October

It's 20 years since Russell Watson released debut offering The Voice, an album which topped the classical charts in both the UK and the US.

Despite often being accused of sitting on the fence musically, the man widely referred to as 'the people's tenor' boasts an army of loyal and appreciative fans, a Midlands contingent of whom will no doubt be packing out Theatre Severn for this autumn-tour concert.

Expect to hear classics including Caruso, O Sole Mio, Il Gladiatore, Nessun Dorma, You Are So Beautiful, Someone To Remember Me and Where My Heart Will Take Me.





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God Is A Woman**
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**Rachel Fairburn &
George Fouracres**
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**Shaparak Khorsandi:
It Was The 90s!**
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Live music from across the region...

King King

The Robin, Bilston, Wed 20 October

There's no denying the momentum currently being generated by Glasgow rockers King King.

Their fifth album, *Maverick*, follows on from 2017's critically acclaimed *Exile & Grace* and includes a new band line-up.

"Recording the new album with the new line-up has been a whole lot of fun and very interesting" says lead Alan Nimmo.

"Musically, it's more mature and more complex than our previous records, but it also has the simplicity of an album that just has great catchy songs that people will want to sing along with. The essence of King King is still there and always will be. We hope the energy, fun and passion is evident throughout!"



BC Camplight

The Sugarmill, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 22 October

"I'm pretty sure the BC Camplight live experience isn't something you can find elsewhere," says Brian Christinzio, the man behind the stage name.

"It's a journey every night. One moment I'm basically doing a stand-up routine, the next, the band and I are playing like we plan on dying that evening, giving our everything. Then I'm on speakerphone to my mom on stage before assaulting my piano."

Fired by his ongoing battle with mental illness, Brian's fifth album as BC Camplight, *Shortly After Takeoff*, has been described as 'a tumultuous pop masterpiece' by the Guardian.



Fun Lovin' Criminals

KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton, Fri 22 October

Fun Lovin' Criminal and rocker turned BBC Radio 6 Music broadcaster Huey Morgan is suitably excited to be returning to the UK with his fellow FLC band members.

"With the world in the toilet and all the strife and bullsh*t that's been going on, here is the light at the end of the tunnel,"

says Huey. "The FLC are accepting the United Nations' invitation to be the first real motherf*ckers to get back to making rock & roll shows great again. No huge bubbles or liquor-free silly-ass gigs; just some real New Yorkers bringing you the best in live music! You are welcome."

The trio's return to the UK coincides with the 25th anniversary of debut album *Come Find Yourself*. Not that the Crims ever need a reason for a party!

Mad Dog Mcrea

Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury, Fri 8 October

Mad Dog Mcrea play a unique mixture of folk-rock, pop, gypsy-jazz and bluegrass, writing songs about love, life, adventure, and just about everything in between. Having played almost every festival on the circuit, they're now bringing their live show indoors, performing material from new EP *It's A Sign*.

Miles Hunt & Ian Prowse

The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury, Sat 2 October

Originally based in Stourbridge, Miles Hunt has enjoyed considerable chart and live-show success with The Wonder Stuff, who burst onto the rock scene in 1987. Miles is joined for this gig by Amsterdam lead Ian Prowse, a man raised on the rallying cry of protest songs. This Shrewsbury concert is the duo's only show together in 2021.

Lichfield Festival of Folk

various venues across Lichfield, Tues 19 - Sun 24 October

L2F, the Lichfield Festival of Folk, is now established as one of the highlights on the annual folk-music calendar. Presented by Lichfield Arts, the six-day get-together not only features ticketed events and concerts but also a number of free community elements. This year's line-up includes, among others: Megson (pictured), Kathryn Roberts and Sean Lakeman, Sherburn Bartley Sanders, The Reel Hot Ceilidh Peppers and Gerry Colvin Band.



The future is Clinton

Celebrated paranormalist goes Stratospheric
with his brand-new show



Many will recognise Clinton Baptiste as the unsubtle psychic in Peter Kay's Phoenix Nights. The comic creation of Alex Lowe, Baptiste is currently touring the length and breadth of the country with his brand-new show, Stratospheric, in which he hopes to 'heal the world'. Lowe gives us the lowdown on his hapless, careless & clumsy alter-ego...

Comedian and actor Alex Lowe's career certainly got off to an unusual start. His first film role involved a bedroom scene with Emma Thompson while her then-husband Kenneth Branagh directed them.

"It was in his 1992 film, Peter's Friends," explains Alex. "I was supposed to be having an affair with her character. It wasn't easy having her husband behind the camera while she bounced away on my skin-coloured pouch!"

If Lowe, 53, owes his first showbiz break to Peter's Friends, he owes his current success as cod-clairvoyant Clinton Baptiste to being a friend of a different Peter. In 2001, Peter Kay cast him as Baptiste in the third episode of Phoenix Nights. "He called me up and said..." Lowe does a perfect impersonation of Kay... "have I got a part for you!..."

Baptiste was only in a few scenes, which included him receiving a bloody nose after some particularly inappropriate mind-reading. But the character clearly struck a chord because he's now heading out on his first national tour. Who could have predicted that? "He's a hapless, careless, clumsy, terrible medium, who upsets his audience with his rather blunt assertions as to where their lives are going."

Peter Kay has given Alex permission to keep Baptiste going, and Kay certainly knows what works in comedy. Baptiste is a classic creation. In his blonde wig and sparkly shirt, he's the embodiment of somebody dreaming of a success that will never come. "I like him to look pristine, but he's a tacky end-of-the-pier mystic. It's 'bittersweet plucky loser' comedy."

The idea for the tour came when Kay and Alex worked together in 2015 on the run of Phoenix Nights Live at the Manchester Arena in aid of Comic Relief. "It was the biggest thrill of my life. Walking onstage in front of 14,000 people was like being in the Rolling Stones. I just

said, 'Ya alright?' like I did on TV and the place erupted."

Some people take the paranormal world very seriously, so Alex makes it clear that Baptiste is always the butt of the gag. "It's a joke about a charlatan. If he wasn't doing this, he'd be a second-hand car salesman."

As an act that interacts with the audience, however, things can be unpredictable. At a gig in a school in Winchester, somebody took something Baptiste said the wrong way and started heckling him. When Alex realised that the man was angry, he decided to leave the stage, only to see the man follow him.

"I started running, my blonde wig trailing behind me! I had to hide behind a filing cabinet while my agent and the compere rugby-tackled him. But he waited outside for me, so in the end they gave me a box of Quality Street and I had to pretend I was a parent leaving with a prize I'd won."

Alex insists that apart from a pointy nose, there are no obvious similarities between his fictional alter-ego and himself: "Baptiste is from the north-west of England, probably close to where the Phoenix Club was, whereas I'm from the north-west of London - Pinner. Maybe Clinton and I both dream of escaping from a humdrum life, but I don't think there's anymore of a similarity than that."

Both work hard, though. Alex, who's married with two children and now lives near Watford, decided to do his own comedy shows when acting parts were failing to materialise. "I'm very industrious. I can't bear the thought of sitting around waiting for someone to flick me a few crumbs."

As well as developing Clinton, he also created eightysomething absurdist curmudgeon Barry from Watford, a character who's appeared regularly on Steve Wright's Radio Two show. "He's an old-style cockney who's moved out to

the suburbs. He's been 82 for about 15 years! It's interesting that Clinton is more popular in the north, while Barry is more popular in the south."

Alex accepts that Baptiste initially picked up a fanbase by association with Phoenix Nights and Peter Kay: "When you've worked with Peter, it's like being somebody who's been near Jesus. People who remember Phoenix Nights have a huge affection for it, but young people love it too. I wish I'd been doing this 10 years ago. I like to think it will supersede the Phoenix connection, but when people are mobbing me and asking for selfies up north, I'm under no illusions."

Alex is also much in demand as a comic actor. Over the years he's appeared in umpteen TV hits, from The Fast Show to The Thick Of It and Cold Feet, but there's every possibility that Baptiste might actually make him a household name in his own right. He's filming a fly-on-the-wall documentary pilot while on tour. Once again Peter Kay has been helpful: "I run everything past Peter. He even sent me details of a camera I might like to use."

Alex is currently busier than ever. He recently filmed a part in the Idris Elba series, In The Long Run, and also appeared in new Sky One comedy Brassic.

He hopes to be Baptiste for a long time yet, but behind the onstage bravado and satin suit there lurks the usual actor's insecurity: "I've spent my entire life thinking sooner or later I'm going to have to knuckle down and get an office job. But it's getting a bit late for that now!"

Clinton Baptiste takes Stratospheric to Birmingham Town Hall on Thurs 7 October; Albany Theatre, Coventry, Sat 16 October; Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Sat 30 October



Milton Jones

Theatre Severn, Tues 12 October; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Wed 13 October; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Sun 24 October; The Place, Telford, Tues 9 November; Walsall Arena, Fri 18 February; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Fri 20 May

With a style of humour that's mainly based around puns and one-liners, Milton Jones has established himself as one of Britain's most in-demand funny men.

"If my comedy's working well, I put a cartoon in people's heads that surprises them," explains Milton. "So you start off and they're thinking one thing, then you surprise them by changing the ending as

you go along. It's not political or particularly edgy, it's just daft."

Gags include: "Militant feminists - I take my hat off to them. They don't like that," and, "Recently on a flight to America, all the way across, my wife was going, 'Why don't you get an upgrade, why don't you get an upgrade?' It took a bit of time, but in the end I got a better wife."

Simon Amstell

Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Fri 8 October; Birmingham Town Hall, Fri 29 October; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Thurs 4 November

From writing and directing films to converting to veganism, and from finding love to taking spiritual medicine in a shamanic ritual, Simon Amstell has been on quite a journey since his Never Mind The Buzzcocks days. He's even found himself wondering whether he wanted to carry on as a stand-up comedian. "It's certainly a question I asked myself, because I definitely came to a place where I felt like I didn't need to have so much attention from people anymore. But what I realised was that I quite enjoyed being funny and making people laugh, so now it comes from a place of real curiosity and joy. While I thought as a child that fame would make me safe, I discovered that it's actually connecting with people that makes me feel

okay in the world. And I suppose all I've really wanted all along is the kind of intimacy that I was using stand-up as a way of avoiding."

Simon stops off in the Midlands with touring show Spirit Hole, 'a blissful, spiritual, sensational exploration of love, sex, shame, mushrooms and more'.



Desi Central Comedy Show

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Sat 9 October

"We're still in a country where white men dominate many industries," says BBC Asian Network's Noreen Khan, who is one of four comedians billed for this show, "so it's very important to have visible, diverse role-models to help inspire others and to reflect the world we live in."

Desi Central certainly does that, providing a showcase not only for Noreen but also for three other hugely talented laughter merchants: Aatif Nawaz (pictured), Anuvab Pal and Kat B. An evening of high-quality comedy is pretty much a guarantee.



Ross Noble

The Place, Telford, Wed 13 October; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 18 & Tues 19 October; William Aston Hall, Wrexham, Sat 23 October; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Thurs 28 October



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

Heading for the Midlands this month with latest show Humournoid, Ross includes among his jokes, "If the Pope doesn't want to be knocked down, he shouldn't dress up as a skittle".

Emily Atack

Albany Theatre, Coventry, Sat 9 October;
O2 Academy, Birmingham, Fri 22 October

Now in her 30s, Emily Atack is wondering what the future holds for social media: “I feel so fortunate to have been part of a generation - the final generation, really - who can recall what life was like before the internet and Instagram. Quite how things unfold in the future I’m not sure, but I certainly hope that we’re maybe heading for a more mindful period.”

Powering to stardom as Charlotte in Channel Four comedy series *The Inbetweeners*, Emily has been a familiar face on television screens throughout the last decade. And while she very much enjoys her TV work, she’s also looking forward to getting out on the road and visiting the Midlands this month. Her latest stand-up show promises audiences not only an evening of trademark humour, honesty and playfulness, but also the chance to explore all manner of subjects - from the trials of work and the traumas of dating, right through to Emily’s latest obsession... leaving the WhatsApp Group.



Sara Barron

The Glee Club, Birmingham, Sun 24 October

After an initial failed foray into the world of stand-up and eight years spent waiting tables in New York, Chicago-born Sara Barron moved to London for love and has since become one of the UK’s fastest-rising comedy stars. She visits the Glee with touring show *Enemies Closer*. “Essentially it’s a sermon,” says Sara. “I preach self-awareness disguised as stand-up, and drop truth-bombs that segue into stories about trying to hold oneself accountable.”



Tez Ilyas

Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Thurs 7 October; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Thurs 28 October; Slade Rooms, Wolverhampton, Sat 6 November; Glee Club, Birmingham, Wed 24 November

Silly, smart and subversive humour is the name of Tez Ilyas’ comedy game. And as the rapid growth of his fanbase ably illustrates, he’s extremely good at what he does.

Tez’s political stand-up has been likened to candyfloss with a razorblade hidden inside, while his television work has brought him to the attention of a whole new audience. The fact that he’s been able to hit the right notes

with so many people doesn’t come as a surprise to the man himself, though: “It doesn’t matter what walk of life we’re from, I think we’re all united by the British sense of humour. Whatever creed, colour, sexual orientation or gender type we are, we have a connection based around a mutual appreciation of that sort of comedy.”



Michael Spicer

The Old Rep, Birmingham,
Sat 30 October

The creator of internet sensation *The Room Next Door* - which last year made its American debut on *The Late Late Show* with James Corden - Michael Spicer is a real force to be reckoned with on social media, where his name is attached to more than 100 sketches and short films.

His Birmingham show this month - also titled *The Room Next Door* - sees Michael chatting about his online successes, discussing his viral hits, and ‘revealing all’ about a life spent making comedy ‘under the radar’.



Fantasy for families

**Summer Strallen talks about making
her RSC debut in Stratford...**

A brand-new family musical opens at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon this month. Combining fun and fantasy, The Magician's Elephant is based on Kate DiCamillo's bestselling book and sees West End star Summer Strallen displaying her dark side as the Countess Quintet. What's On caught up with Summer to find out what audiences can expect...

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) this month reopens its doors with the world premiere of a brand-new musical production of *The Magician's Elephant*.

Based on Kate DiCamillo's prize-winning novel of the same name, the production is set in the fantastical town of Balse, a place where nothing out of the ordinary ever happens. Until, that is, a magician one day conjures an elephant out of the sky...

Adapted for the stage by Nancy Harris and Marc Teitler, the production stars West End musical-theatre actor Summer Strallen, whose previous roles include Maria in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Sound Of Music* and Dale Tremont in *Top Hat*. She also starred as Meg Giry in Lloyd Webber's *Phantom Of The Opera* sequel, *Love Never Dies*.

This latest role marks two firsts for Summer. As well as making her RSC debut, it's also the first time she's played a villain.

The Countess Quintet is Balse's socialite - a narcissist with little empathy for the townsfolk. It's a role that Summer is really looking forward to sinking her teeth into: "The notion of playing a villain was one of the things that initially interested me. There's something fulfilling in trying to find the good in a villain; trying to unveil the thing that makes them believe they're doing right when actually they're doing something completely wrong. I really do believe everyone is fundamentally good and are sort of taught this fear-based thinking. For me, it's very interesting to try and find her motivation that isn't just about Me, Me, Me..."

Having read the book some time ago, Summer was already familiar with the narrative. She believes that it will resonate strongly in the current climate: "Although a children's book, it does have this socio-political economic undertone. The Countess is definitely in a place of fear that she'll never have enough, and she really doesn't care about how other people think. However much fun she is to play, she reminds me of society at the moment, where many people live in fear."

Unlike her character, Summer is a big advocate for community and the idea of strength in numbers - and that's what *The Magician's Elephant* is fundamentally about.

"It takes this magical moment to occur for Balse to come to life. It gives the people of the town a licence to express themselves and have faith that there might be something else out there. I really love that. I feel that we've lost faith in the mystical and the magic of life. I guess on a personal level I'm this wannabe hippie, wanting to see the magic in every leaf, flower and tree. I have great respect for the omnipresent, so to speak, and that's what this story is all about. If you have a bit of faith in something, and you all work together, you can actually, potentially, make things happen."

Like most people, Summer found lockdown difficult and makes no secret of her personal battles with anxiety and depression: "I have to give myself enough time to feel prepared because anxiety comes from lack of preparation, or feeling out of control. I try to make sure I take the relevant steps to be able to do that, and it's been working so far. The RSC is such a brilliant institution. It's leaps ahead as far as understanding mental-health issues and has put things in place which are very caring and nurturing."

During lockdown Summer created The Strallen Collective - an online initiative bringing together actors, musical-theatre performers and dancers to sell online classes and make some sort of income when no external support was available.

"Many of my colleagues have a side hustle for when they're not acting, such as yoga instructor, wellbeing coach, lifestyle coach or fitness instructor, so I wanted to bring these people together to show their other side. It will continue moving forward but under a different guise. I personally feel I want to bring wellness and mental-health awareness to the forefront. Hopefully my little bit of exposure will help. It definitely needs to be about helping actors best navigate their emotions and mental health."

Summer isn't the only member of the Strallen family to work in the industry. Both of her parents worked in theatre, as do her sisters, Zizi, Saskia and Scarlett - all well-known stars of the West End. Summer is the goddaughter of Christopher Biggins and her aunt is Bonnie Langford.

So was performing always on the cards?

"It wasn't really a choice, in so far as both my parents were working in theatre and my grandmother had a dancing school, so that was a sort of form of babysitting. At that time it was very different - children were looked after differently. They weren't necessarily given the freedom to be who they are, as they are now. I definitely rebelled against it for a long time, and then, at about 13, I realised I had a talent and decided to pursue it. Part of my mental-health situation is because, for a long time, I didn't know if I was actually fulfilling my life's purpose by being in theatre. I now understand why I do it and what it gives to other people. This can be a very isolating job, and you're not always aware of the positive effects that you have on other people. You don't necessarily get people coming up to you saying, 'Oh my God, that made me feel like this...'. Instead they say, 'That was a very good show'. One of my main purposes now is to make people feel things; to make them feel good."

So with performing at the RSC now ticked off her bucket list, what's next for Summer Strallen?

"I think I would like to be in a movie with a great director at some point, but most importantly I just want to be happy doing what I'm doing. A movie is the goal and it could happen, but what's the point if you're there and not happy?"

The Magician's Elephant shows at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre from Thursday 14 October until Saturday 1 January.



Hairspray

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 19 - Sat 23 October

Theatre-goers looking for a memorable night of singalong fun and plenty of laughter should definitely catch this high-energy bubblegum musical when it stops off in the region this month.

A show which has retained its popularity despite doing the rounds for many a year now, *Hairspray* is set in 1960s Baltimore and follows the

trials and tribulations of the lovable Tracy Turnblad, a young girl whose dreams of dancing on national TV and finding her ideal man lead her, somewhat unexpectedly, to fighting a battle against racial segregation.

Featuring hit numbers including *Welcome To The 60s*, *You Can't Stop The Beat* and *Good Morning Baltimore*, this latest touring version of the show stars Brenda Edwards as Motormouth Maybelle and Norman Pace as Wilbur Turnblad.

Blood Brothers

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



Although it's effectively a class-driven 'scouse melodrama', to describe *Blood Brothers* as such is to greatly underestimate the emotional response it produces within its audience. The show features adult actors playing children, a narrator who wanders through the scenes with warnings of impending doom, a good helping of sharp social awareness to counteract the sticky sentimentality, and a raft of much-loved musical numbers, including *Bright New Day*, *Marilyn Monroe* and the emotionally charged *Tell Me It's Not True*.

One-time New Seeker Lyn Paul returns in the iconic role of Mrs Johnstone.

Dirty Dancing

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 12 - Sat 16 October; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry Tues 2 - Sat 6 November

Seen by millions across the globe, Eleanor Bergstein's smash-hit musical tells the classic story of Baby and Johnny, two fiercely independent young spirits from different worlds who come together for what will prove to be the most challenging and triumphant summer of their lives. Hit numbers include *Hungry Eyes*, *Hey Baby*, *Do You Love Me?* and *I've Had The Time Of My Life*.



Everybody's Talking About Jamie

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 recently released feature film testifying to its incredible popularity.

Layton Williams stars as Jamie, with TV soap favourites Shane Richie and Shobna Gulati also featuring.



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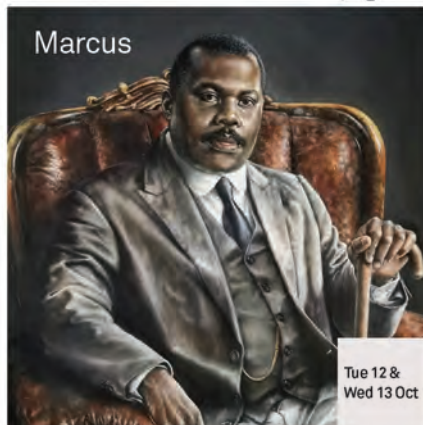
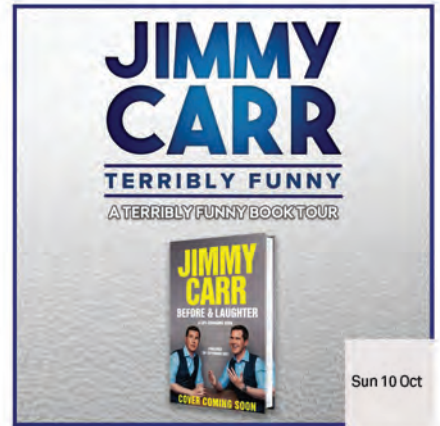


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What's New Pussycat?

The REP, Birmingham, Fri 8 October - Sun 14 November

Swinging London of the 1960s and the music of Sir Tom Jones provides the backdrop to this brand-new musical, a lively adaptation of Henry Fielding's influential 18th-century novel, *The History Of Tom Jones: The Foundling*. The storyline sees Tom rocking up in London with a broken heart but nevertheless full of ambition and boasting a booming voice. He soon encounters an exciting world of dancing, mods, miniskirts and great music - but his one burning question remains unanswered: will he 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?... The show is choreographed by Arlene Phillips. "So many of the songs are heavy with big brass arrangements," says Arlene. "You hear the music and it's triumphant and rhythmical. There's so much there to use as a choreographer! There's also a phenomenal visual design - a real feast for the eyes - and audiences are going to absolutely 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!"

Boris 3: The Johnson Supremacy

Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham, Wed 13 - Sun 17 October

Blowfish Theatre return with another rude and irreverent show based around the adventures of Prime Minister Boris Johnson. As the title makes clear, *The Johnson Supremacy* is following on from two previous Boris-based endeavours, both of which met with a favourable reaction from critics and audiences alike. This latest lampooning of British politics' ongoing nervous breakdown covers the period from the blond bombshell's 2019 election victory through to the political perils of the global pandemic. Expect lots of funny songs and plenty of irreverent fun.



The Hound Of The Baskervilles

Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, Fri 22 - Sun 31 October

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is one of literature's most enduring characters,

The Hound Of The Baskervilles his most famous adventure. Yet no matter how many actors don the deerstalker and solve the mystery of the monstrous moorland beast, the story remains a popular choice for both stage and screen adaptation. On this occasion it's the ever-reliable Blue Orange Arts who are taking their audience on a journey to the lonely wasteland of the desolate moors...

Cupid's Revenge

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Wed 6 - Thurs 7 October; Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham, Wed 20 October

After scoring significant critical hits with previous productions *Feel About Your Body* and *This Is Modern*, ground-breaking makers of devised dance, theatre and comedy Pete Shenton and Tom Roden - aka, New Art Club - return with a show that asks one big question: In today's disposable world - where love is used to sell us everything from plug-in cars to yoghurt - where did *real love* go?



The Revlon Girl

Crescent Theatre, Birmingham, Sat 23 - Sat 30 October

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

Set eight months after the disaster and based on a true story, the play focuses on a group of bereaved mothers who regularly meet above a hotel in Aberfan to provide support for one another. Coming to realise how much their grief has taken its toll on their appearance, they secretly arrange for a representative from Revlon to give them a talk on beauty tips. But the Revlon rep is soon to find that this will be no ordinary assignment for her...

Sunny Side Up

New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Tues 26 - Sat 30 October

Advertised as a 'seaside feelgood rollercoaster ride', John Godber's *Sunny Side Up* is a moving but humorous account of a struggling Yorkshire-coast B&B and the people who run it.

Godber - whose talent for tackling subject matter in an accessible and down-to-earth manner has seen him become one of the UK's most successful playwrights - has not only written but directed the show, and also stars in it. He's joined in the cast by his real-life wife, Jane Thornton.

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Theatre previews from around the region



Chicago

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre,
Mon 25 - Sat 30 October

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 dark underbelly of the Windy City during the Jazz Age.

Kander & Ebb's legendary musical is based on real-life events in the Roaring '20s and 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...

"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!"

The War Of The Worlds

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry,
Wed 13 - Sat 16 October



According to legend, Orson Welles' 1938 radio adaptation of HG Wells' classic sci-fi novel, *The War Of The Worlds*, caused mass hysteria when it was broadcast, with listening Americans being duped by the play into believing that Martians had actually invaded the planet. Exactly how many people in reality fell for the stunt remains a matter of conjecture. What certainly can't be denied, however, is the impact which media such as radio and, latterly, the internet, can have on the way in which people process the stories that they hear.

Talented theatre ensemble Rhum & Clay here explore the subject by playfully reimagining *The War Of The Worlds* for the modern-day era, complete with 'fake news' and 'alternative facts'.

Marcus

Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome,
Tues 12 & Wed 13 October

A young black boy finds himself embarking on a whirlwind adventure of self-discovery when he receives a book about Jamaican political activist, entrepreneur and orator Marcus Garvey. Meanwhile, as two worlds merge, Garvey comes to the aid of a family which has reached breaking point... The show is directed by Tonia Daley-Campbell, an actress, writer, director & producer who has spent her career discovering hidden talent across the West Midlands.



Sexy Lamp

Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton,
Wed 6 October

The exploitation of actors by the showbiz industry is the subject under consideration in

this clever, funny and critically acclaimed one-woman show starring Katie Austen. The 'sexy lamp' of the title refers to American comic-book writer & editor Kelly Sue DeConnick's test for assessing the value and relevance of female characters in a story; namely, if the character were to be replaced with a lamp, would the storyline still function?

Though This Be Madness

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry,
Wed 20 - Fri 22 October

Avaes Mohammad's brand-new play aims to shed light on the difficulties encountered by many modern-day young people, whose experiences of exclusion and gang grooming all too often prove to be a pipeline to prison. Co-created with young people with lived experience, the production has been deemed suitable for audience members aged 13-plus.



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 Gary Meikle Tuesday 26th (8pm) Tickets £22.50	 Geoff Norcott Thursday 28th (7.30pm) Tickets £16.50	 LIMITED AVAILABILITY Michael Spicer Saturday 30th (8pm) Tickets £18	 John Archer Sunday 31st (8pm) Tickets £14.50-£16.50

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Light Entertainment shows across the region...

**Paul Zerdin: Hands Free**

Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa,
Sat 30 October

"As a ventriloquist, I can get away with jokes that other comedians can't," Paul Zerdin explains. "I've got the luxury of taking the p*ss out of myself, but through the characters, rather than me just being relentlessly self-deprecating. I can get away with having a go at the audience much more, too; you get to be cheekier. Mocking the front row is a trademark of my characters, but I'm evolving my audience interaction beyond that."

Comedian and ventriloquist Zerdin, a three-times contributor to the Royal Variety Performance, here returns to the Midlands with a show that's definitely not suitable for children. "They might be cute little puppets," Paul says of his numerous characters, "but leave the kids at home!"

Dad's Army Radio Show

Lichfield Garrick, Sat 23 October

You've seen the TV show, now listen to the radio broadcast!

And what a highly acclaimed one it is too, with a pair of talented actors taking up position behind their microphones to play no fewer than 25 characters between them.

Working from original radio scripts - many of the TV episodes were remade for BBC Radio Four with the original cast - the actors will present three much-loved episodes of Jimmy Perry & David Croft's classic 1970s' sitcom, complete with sound effects and vintage music.

Scottish Falsetto Sock Puppet Theatre

Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham,
Tues 5 October

Scottish Falsetto Sock Puppet Theatre have been making audiences laugh their socks off for a good few years now, regularly scoring a major success at the Edinburgh Fringe with their rude, anarchic and routinely trailblazing performances. This latest offering sees 'Earth's funniest socks' presenting a winning blend of 'songs, sketches, socks and violence' based around the ever-popular subject of superheroes.



Expect satirical nonsense aplenty, not to mention homages to legendary superhero-playing actors Adam West (Batman), Lynda Carter (Wonder Woman) and Christopher Reeve (Superman).

On the same night, the fellas will also be presenting a show featuring "the best of the nonsense we've produced during a year of isolation, including the Eurovision Sock Contest and highlights of our 15 sell-out Zoom shows".

Doreen 'Revolution'

Dudley Town Hall, Thurs 7 October; Prince Of Wales Centre, Cannock, Sat 9 - Sun 10 October; The Place, Telford, Tues 12 October; Tamworth Assembly Rooms, Fri 22 October; Crescent Theatre, Birmingham, Sat 23 October

Vive la Revolution!

Black Country icon Doreen Tipton returns with a 'revolutionary' one-woman show.

In what's been described as a blistering attack on the funny bone, the popular character - played by actress Gill Jordan - is using the show to 'bravely guide her army of followers through the minefield of bizarre nonsense that now shapes modern living'. Gill first played Doreen in 2012, in a five-minute online mockumentary written by playwright David Tristram which satirised benefit scroungers. Since then, the character has blossomed into one of the 21st century's finest comic creations, regularly appearing in pantomime productions and touring the region with sell-out shows.

ME!

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry,
Thurs 21 & Fri 22 October

Hosted by Birmingham Rep and Theatre Absolute associate artist Paul O'Donnell, this intriguing show is being billed as a self-indulgent, self-deprecating and self-celebratory evening of entertainment featuring a line-up of Midlands cabaret performers: "In this world that promotes self-criticism, this region that feels so 'middle', and this city famed for its self-deprecation, let us use this night as an opportunity to put ourselves centre stage. Listen up world: this is ME!"

Fascinating Aida

Lichfield Garrick, Wed 27 October; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Fri 29 October; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Sun 31 October

While we wouldn't go along with The Mail On Sunday's view that if you don't catch Fascinating Aida before you die, your life will have been meaningless, we certainly reckon that an evening in their company will prove to be a gently life-enhancing experience. Once described as 'Absolutely Fabulous meets Noël Coward, as sung by the Andrew Sisters', the Olivier Award-nominated all-female comedy cabaret trio have been treading the boards for many a year. They've also got a big online fanbase nowadays, with their anthem to budget travel, Cheap Flights, having accumulated more than 25 million hits on YouTube and Facebook.

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	9/10	Some Kinda Wonderful	
	12/10	The Music of Stevie Wonder	
	12/10	Pete Allen & his band 2pm	
	12/10	Wanted - drama screening	
	13/10	Steeleye Span	
	14-15/10	The Roy Orbison Story	
	16/10	Blake Live in Concert	
	20/10	Syd Lawrence Orchestra	
		The Ultimate Big Band	
	22/10	Henry's Blueshouse The Shufflepack	
	22/10	Twist and Shout	
	23/10	Simon Goodall & The Bourne	
		Again Shadows Cliff Richard Tribute	
	26/10	The Snow Queen Ballet 2.30/7.30pm	
	29/10	Tarzanna family fun 2pm/4pm	
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Theatre for kids from across the region



Milkshake! Live: Monkey's Musical

Town Hall, Birmingham,
Sun 24 October

Milkshake Monkey's desire to put on a new musical has hit the skids due to a nasty bout of rampant stage fright - so thank heaven that Fireman Sam, Noddy, Shimmer & Shine and all their friends are on hand to help out... If you've watched the TV series and/or been to a previous live production, you'll already know what to expect from this particular Milkshake! show. If not, get ready for an event that promises lots of laughter, bucketloads of family fun, bags of audience participation and plenty of singing and dancing.

The Tiger Who Came To Tea

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry,
Tues 26 - Thurs 28 October; Lichfield Garrick,
Sat 5- Sun 6 March

The tea-guzzling tiger once again drops in on Sophie and her mum, just as they're settling down for an afternoon cuppa...

Adapted by David Wood OBE from Judith Kerr's 1968 book, this 55-minute show comes without an interval, features singalong songs and boasts plenty of magic - not to mention a big stripy tiger, of course!



Spontaneous Potter Kidz

Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Tues 5
October; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sun 10
October

The Spontaneous Players are back with another evening of improvisation inspired by the wizarding world of Harry Potter. Building their show around suggestions from their young audience, the company are old hands at creating Harry magic. Previous improvised comedy plays include: Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Commerce; Harry Potter And The Neville Wears Prada; Harry Potter And The Rise Of The Planet Of The Snapes; and Harry Potter And The Struggle For A Decent Mortgage In This Economy.

The Dong With A Luminous Nose

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Sat 23 October

This brand-new show from Little Angel Theatre is based on the same-titled poem by Edward Lear. Combining music, imagery and puppetry, The Dong With A Luminous Nose is

aimed at children aged seven-plus and tells the story of Edward, a lonely boy who has difficulty facing reality and is desperate for love. Little wonder, then, that his head is so easily turned when the gaudy and seductive Jumbles float into town...



Gangsta Granny

The Alexandra, Birmingham,
Wed 20 - Sat 23 October; Wolverhampton
Grand Theatre, Wed 23 - Sat 26 February



The ever-popular Birmingham Stage Company make a welcome return with their charming adaptation of David Walliams' best-selling book.

Ben's no lover of Friday nights - and why would he be? After all, Friday nights mean having to stay at Granny's house, where he's not only bored senseless but also has to eat an unholy trinity of cabbage dishes - cabbage soup, cabbage pie and cabbage cake. But experiences can sometimes be deceptive, and Ben soon finds out that there's way more to his boring old Granny than meets the eye...

The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Palace Theatre, Redditch, Wed 27 October;
Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Mon 13 - Fri 24
December



In a career stretching back to the mid-1960s, Eric Carle, who died earlier this year, illustrated more than 70 books - most of which he also wrote. None were more famous or successful, though, than his 1969 story of The Very Hungry Caterpillar, a picture book which has since been translated into more than 60 languages, selling in excess of 52 million copies.

This stage version of Carle's much-loved tale is presented alongside three other popular children's stories by the same author: Brown Bear, Brown Bear; 10 Little Rubber Ducks; and The Very Lonely Firefly. The show features no fewer than 75 'lovable puppets'.

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Birmingham Royal Ballet: Romeo & Juliet season



"I'm calling BRB's autumn season my very first season," says Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB) Director Carlos Acosta, "because obviously all my plans for my previous first season had to be ditched due to the pandemic."

Cuban ballet & contemporary dancing star Carlos took over as the company's director in January 2020, just two months before the UK went into lockdown for the first time. It's fair to say that his first 18 months in charge of BRB has been challenging in the extreme. Now, with life returning to some kind of normal, Carlos is looking forward to presenting a mouthwatering programme of work for dance fans of all ages to enjoy. And the magic begins this very month, with not one but *three* stunning interpretations of arguably the most famous love story of all time.

The second week in October sees the company staging Sir Kenneth MacMillan's critically acclaimed version of Sergei Prokofiev's *Romeo & Juliet* (Birmingham Hippodrome, Wednesday 6 - Saturday 9 October). Debuting in 1965, the production is nowadays considered to be one of ballet's greatest modern classics.

Then, mid-month (Thursday 14 - Saturday 16 October) and under the banner of Carlos Curates: R&J Reimagined, BRB presents Slovenian choreographer Edward Clug's *Radio And Juliet*, a modern reinvention of



Romeo & Juliet that sees the characters dancing to the music of Radiohead.

Alongside the production, Rosie Kay Dance Company is presenting its own modern-day and Birmingham-set version of Shakespeare's tragic romance. The 75-minute show premiered at the Hippodrome last month.

"I feel very proud that, despite the pandemic, we have achieved incredible things," says Carlos. "Even while we were closed, we were creating and learning - Lazuri Sky and our first live stream of *The Nutcracker*. I think we've done a really good job at keeping the company together and morale high. We kept reminding ourselves of the positive future to come, which lifted our spirits. And now there's massive interest from companies and individuals in coming and working with us. We want to spread the word about Birmingham Royal Ballet and create alliances. We want there to be this awareness that BRB has set itself a new path and identity. I'm very proud of the team which has worked with me in establishing this direction. Achieving greatness isn't easy, but we will definitely get there."

BRB presents *Romeo & Juliet* at Birmingham Hippodrome from Wed 6 to Sat 9 October; Carlos Curates: R&J Reimagined shows from Thurs 14 to Sat 16 October. For further info visit: brb.org.uk

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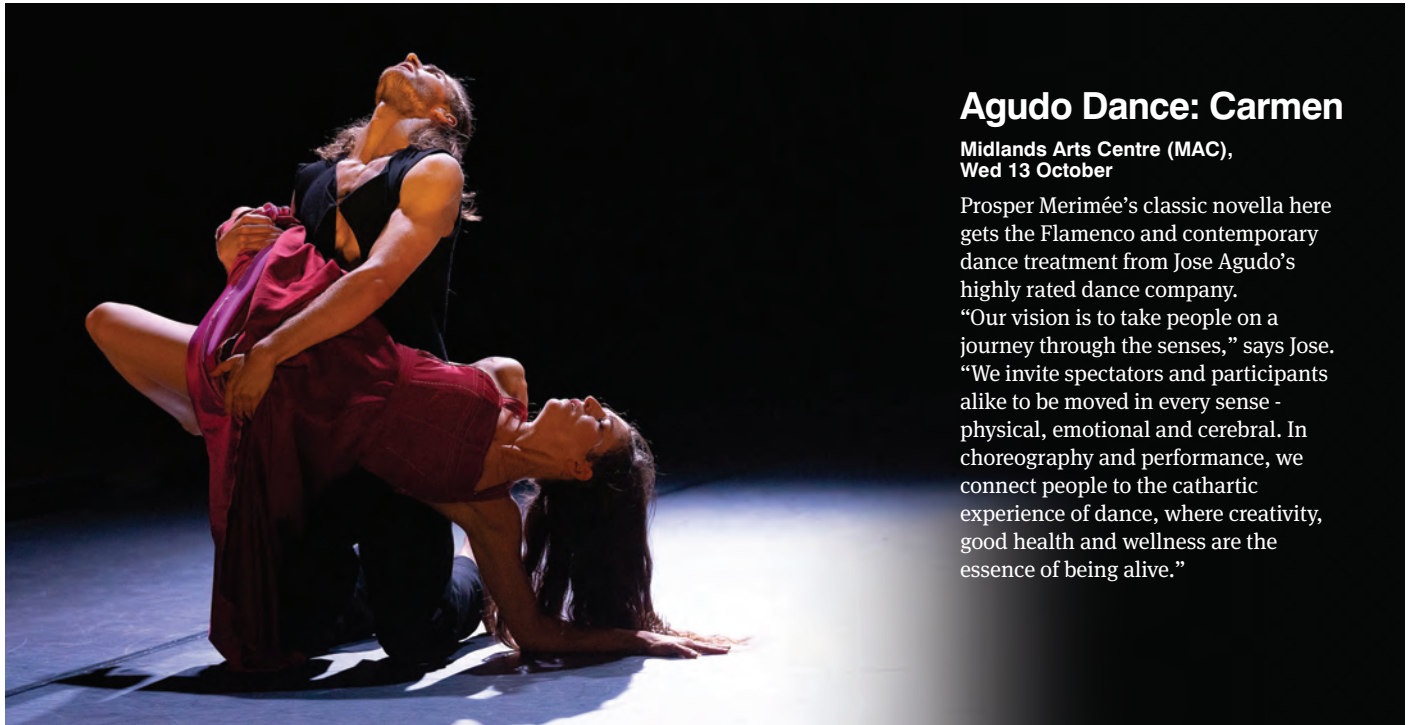
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Dance previews from across the region



Agudo Dance: Carmen

Midlands Arts Centre (MAC),
Wed 13 October

Prosper Merimée's classic novella here gets the Flamenco and contemporary dance treatment from Jose Agudo's highly rated dance company.

"Our vision is to take people on a journey through the senses," says Jose. "We invite spectators and participants alike to be moved in every sense - physical, emotional and cerebral. In choreography and performance, we connect people to the cathartic experience of dance, where creativity, good health and wellness are the essence of being alive."

Motionhouse: Nobody

Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Fri 22 - Mon 25 October; Malvern Theatres, Tues 2 November; Birmingham Hippodrome, Fri 4 February; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Wed 27 - Sat 30 April

"This show is a real use of spectacle, combining dynamic and thrilling dancing with digital film," says Motionhouse Artistic

Director Kevin Finnan in talking about the company's latest production, Nobody. "The show is 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."



Ballet Theatre UK: The Snow Queen

The Core Theatre, Solihull, Tues 26 October; Swan Theatre, Worcester, Sun 31 October; Stourport Civic Centre, Stourport-on-Severn, Thurs 4 November; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Fri 12 November; The Albany Theatre, Coventry, Fri 26 November; Tamworth Assembly Rooms, Sat 4 December; Prince of Wales Centre, Cannock, Tues 7 December

The Snow Queen is ruler of all she surveys. When she kidnaps young Kai, it's left to his friend Gerda to save him from a bleak future in the frostbitten wastelands...

This much-loved Hans Christian Andersen story is here being presented by the ever-excellent Ballet Theatre UK, a company with an impressive history of producing bright and colourful shows designed to promote classical dance as an accessible art form.



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Poirot And More

Sir David Suchet talks about the importance of regional theatre ahead of his eagerly awaited return to the stage this autumn...

The touring show *Poirot And More: A Retrospective* looks back at the 52-year-long career of Sir David Suchet. Having previously toured Australia and New Zealand in early 2020, the show is now making a journey across the UK, retracing the career path of the much-acclaimed actor, who is best remembered for his television portrayal of Agatha Christie's famous Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot.

David's early career saw him spending a lot of time in the Midlands, both with repertory theatres and the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon. Joining the RSC in 1973, he remained a member for 13 years and today is an associate artist. He's performed over 30 roles for the Company, including Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, Shylock in *The Merchant Of Venice* and Caliban in *The Tempest* - all of which earned him Olivier Award nominations for best actor.

He left the RSC in 1986, after playing Iago to Ben Kingsley's Othello. Post-Stratford, his career continued to flourish as he played a wide range of iconic characters, including Lady Bracknell in *The Importance Of Being Earnest* and Joe Keller in *All My Sons*. In 2020, he was knighted for services to drama and charity.

Despite having taken on a variety of eminent roles during a career spanning five decades, it is undoubtedly for his portrayal of Poirot that David is best known. He played the part for 24 years, becoming a household name in the process.

"Poirot is a programme that goes right through my life as an actor. This touring show will of course contain stories about how I got the part and how I approached and developed the role. We go into all of that in great detail. But we wanted to call the show *Poirot And More* because there are other things in there, too. I do a Shakespeare workshop, I do some speeches for the audience, and I tell them about my early career in the repertory theatre system and with the Royal Shakespeare Company, as well as other aspects of my life. I go right back to

the early days of my career and include what I hope will be entertaining and amusing stories that were enjoyed by audiences in Australia and New Zealand."

The performance of the show at Coventry's Belgrade Theatre this month is one that David is particularly looking forward to. It was at the venue that he first met Sheila, the woman who would become his wife, when they were both working there in 1972.

"When I was asked which theatres I would like to visit as part of the tour, I desperately wanted to go to the Belgrade," David reveals.

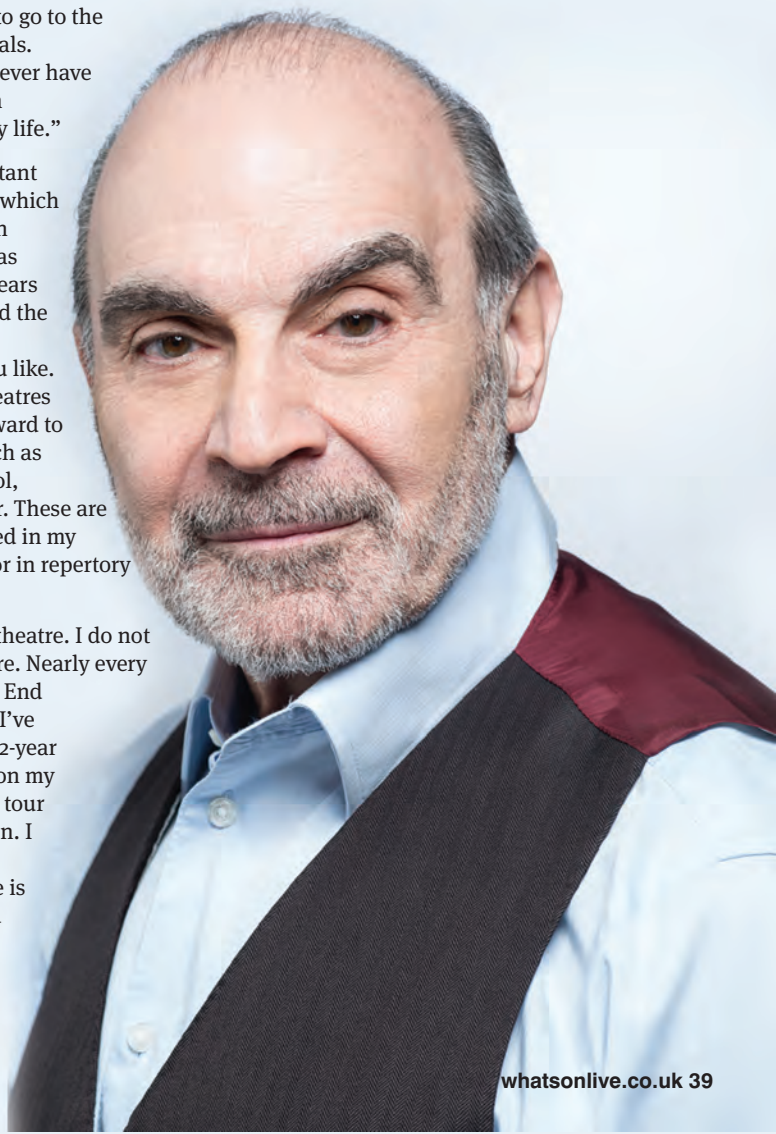
"Without it, I would never have met my wife, so it's an important venue in my life."

There are other important venues, too - theatres which played a pivotal role in David's development as an actor: "For many years I was travelling around the regions; that was my training ground, if you like. So there are lots of theatres I'm really looking forward to going to, in places such as Birmingham, Liverpool, Chichester and Exeter. These are all venues that featured in my early career as an actor in repertory theatre.

"I believe in regional theatre. I do not believe in elitist theatre. Nearly every single one of the West End productions in which I've appeared during my 52-year career has included - on my insistence - a regional tour before we go to London. I love going back to the regions, where theatre is just as important, and I'm so excited to be going on this tour.

"For me, the tour is trying to welcome people back to the theatre after what has been such a terrible time, both for venues and audiences. It's my way of saying thank you to all the towns and cities I'm visiting."

.....
Poirot And More: A Retrospective shows at Coventry's Belgrade Theatre on Sunday 17 October and then at The REP, Birmingham, on Sunday 5 December





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Films released in October...



The Last Duel CERT tbc (152 mins)

Starring Jodie Comer, Matt Damon, Adam Driver, Ben Affleck, Harriet Walter, Marton Csokas Directed by Ridley Scott

Coming complete with an all-star cast, graphic nudity, sexual content, an epic running-time and Ridley Scott in the director's chair, historical drama *The Last Duel* looks odds-on to make a significant impact.

The film tells the story of two friends who become the bitterest of enemies. One of the friends - the Norman squire, Jacques Le Gris - stands accused of raping Marguerite de Carrouges, the wife of the other friend, respected knight Jean de Carrouges. A duel to the death ensues, placing the fate of the protagonists in the hands of God...

Based on actual events - the duel was the last ever to be legally sanctioned in France - the film's story is told from the perspective of each of the three main characters. Killing Eve star Jodie Comer very much holds her own against Hollywood heavyweights Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, the latter of whom is particularly memorable as Count Pierre d'Alençon, in whose castle all manner of shenanigans take place.

Atmospheric and challenging - and certainly not for the faint-hearted - *The Last Duel* is an impressive addition to Ridley Scott's canon of work, while the duel itself must surely be ranked among the director's finest ever fight scenes.

Released Fri 15 October

Hotel Transylvania: Transformania CERT PG

With the voices of Brian Hull, Andy Samberg, Selena Gomez, Kathryn Hahn, Steve Buscemi, David Spade Directed by Derek Drymon and Jennifer Kluska

This is the fourth *and final* installment of the computer-animated monster comedy film franchise - so *Hotel Transylvania* fans should make sure they squeeze every last ounce of enjoyment out of it.

When Van Helsing's mysterious invention, the Monsterfication Ray, goes haywire, Drac and his monster pals are all transformed into humans. Johnny, meanwhile, becomes a monster... And so begins a race against time to switch themselves back to normal before their transformations become permanent.

Released Fri 8 October



Halloween Kills CERT tbc (106 mins)

Starring Jamie Lee Curtis, Judy Greer, Anthony Michael Hall, Kyle Richards, Will Patton, Thomas Mann Directed by David Gordon Green

If ever a movie franchise has suffered from the law of diminishing returns - at least in terms of quality if not box-office appeal - it must surely be *Halloween*. The original film hit the big screen 43 years ago, since which time there have been more sequels than its worth counting and a spectacular number of truly savage reviews. All of that said, the franchise is the most financially successful in horror-movie history, so it's easy to see why its owner, Trancas International Films, is perfectly happy for things to continue to go bump in the night.

This latest offering, a sequel to 2018's *Halloween*, sees notorious slasher Michael Myers escaping from the basement of Laurie Strode's burning house, only to find himself being hunted by a mob.

Released Fri 15 October



The Addams Family 2 CERT tbc

With the voices of Oscar Isaac, Charlize Theron, Chloë Grace Moretz, Nick Kroll, Javon Walton, Snoop Dogg Directed by Greg Tiernan and Conrad Vernon

With the kids growing up, Morticia and Gomez need a plan to strengthen their bond with their offspring. And what better way to spend time together as a family than by going on a road trip across the country?

Described as a computer-animated supernatural black comedy road film(!), and hitting cinema screens two years after the first movie, *The Addams Family 2* looks likely to emulate its predecessor's success at the box office. It is to be hoped, however, that the sequel is a much better film than the original.

Released Fri 8 October



Films released in October...

Dune CERT tbc (155 mins)

Starring **Timothée Chalamet**, **Rebecca Ferguson**, **Oscar Isaac**, **Zendaya**, **Jason Momoa**, **David Dastmalchian**
Directed by **Denis Villeneuve**

One of the most high-profile sci-fi movies of the mid-1980s, directed by David Lynch, *Dune* actually began life as a novel, written by Frank Herbert back in the 1960s. This latest film incarnation is the first of a planned two-part adaptation and will cover around half of the book. Set in the faraway future, the story focuses on Duke Leto Atreides, who accepts stewardship of a dangerous desert planet called Arrakis - also known as *Dune* - which is the one-and-only source of a magical drug called 'the spice'...

But mining the drug is no easy task, not least because of the presence of giant sandworms...

Released Thurs 21 October



Ron's Gone Wrong CERT PG

With the voices of **Zach Galifianakis**, **Jack Dylan Grazer**, **Olivia Colman**, **Ed Helms**, **Justice Smith**, **Rob Delaney**
Directed by **Sarah Smith**, **Jean-Philippe Vine** and **Octavio E Rodriguez**

The first cinema release from the UK-based Locksmith Animation studio, *Ron's Gone Wrong* tells the story of Barney, a socially awkward middle-schooler, and Ron, his new walking, talking and digitally connected device. When Ron suffers all manner of malfunctions, Barney finds himself embarking on an action-packed journey which will soon see him discovering the true meaning of friendship.

Released Fri 15 October



Dear Evan Hansen

CERT 12a (137 mins)

Starring **Ben Platt**, **Julianne Moore**, **Kaitlyn Dever**, **Amy Adams**, **Danny Pino**, **Amanda Stenberg** Directed by **Stephen Chbosky**

The latest in an ever-growing list of movies adapted from hit musicals, *Dear Evan Hansen* has received mixed reviews, with some critics feeling that too much of the Tony Award-winning production's magic has been lost on the ever-precarious journey from stage to screen.

It's not all bad news for Stephen Chbosky's

coming-of-age teen musical, though, with the cast's performances and the film's delivery of its important messages both being roundly praised by reviewers.

For those not in the know, the story revolves around high school student Evan, a young man struggling with Social Anxiety Disorder, who has a therapeutic self-intended letter stolen by a classmate named Connor Murphy. When Connor later dies by suicide, Evan inserts himself into the boy's past, a decision that leads to a series of lies and confrontational events.

Released Fri 22 October



STAGE TO SCREEN



The French Dispatch CERT tbc (103 mins)

Starring **Willem Dafoe, Adrien Brody, Timothée Chalamet, Elisabeth Moss, Bob Balaban, Saoirse Ronan** Directed by **Wes Anderson**

The French Dispatch made a significant splash at Cannes this year, and although it isn't *quite* an example of director Wes Anderson at his very best, it's nevertheless a movie with plenty to recommend it, not least some seriously amusing moments. Described as 'a love letter to journalists set at an outpost of an American newspaper in a fictional 20th-century French city', the film centres on three stories and pays homage to

The New Yorker magazine. "The story is not easy to explain," said Anderson in speaking to French publication Charente Libre. "It's about an American journalist based in France who creates his magazine... It's not a movie about freedom of the press, but when you talk about reporters, you also talk about what's going on in the real world."

Released Fri 22 October



Last Night In Soho CERT tbc (116 mins)

Starring **Anya Taylor-Joy, Thomasin McKenzie, Diana Rigg, Matt Smith, Terence Stamp, Jessie Mei Li** Directed by **Edgar Wright**

Marking the final film appearance of Dame Diana Rigg, psychological horror movie Last Night In Soho tells the story of a young girl named Eloise who gets to see what London was like back in the 1960s. But as well as making a mysterious connection with her idol - wannabe singer Sandy - she also discovers that her idealised notion of

'Swinging London' is maybe a tad wide of the mark... Director Edgar Wright, whose previous movies include Shaun Of The Dead, has cited Roman Polanski's Repulsion and Nicolas Roeg's Don't Look Now as major influences on his new film.

Released Fri 29 October

The Boss Baby 2: Family Business

CERT tbc (107 mins)

With the voices of **Alec Baldwin, James Marsden, Amy Sedaris, Ariana Greenblatt, Jeff Goldblum, Eva Longoria** Directed by **Tom McGrath**

In this sequel to DreamWorks Animation's Oscar-nominated comedy, Tim Templeton and his Boss Baby little brother Ted have become adults and drifted away from each other.

Tim is now a married stay-at-home dad. Ted is a hedge fund CEO. But a new boss baby with a cutting-edge approach and a can-do attitude is about to bring them together again - and inspire a new family business.

Released Fri 22 October



Antlers CERT 15 (109 mins)

Starring **Keri Russell, Jesse Plemons, Jeremy T Thomas, Graham Greene, Scott Haze, Rory Cochrane** Directed by **Scott Cooper**

Released in time for the Halloween weekend, the Guillermo del Toro-produced Antlers is based on a short story by Nick Antosca entitled The Quiet Boy.

When a teacher realises that one of her students is harbouring a disaster-wreaking supernatural monster, she enlists the assistance of her sheriff brother to help find a way to stop it.

"Antlers is really about what it means to be an individual in America today," says the film's director, Scott Cooper. "It's about all the crises that we're facing: the climate crisis, a drug-addicted populace, our treatment of Native Americans, and abject poverty." For all of that, though, Cooper is keen to point out that the film avoids lecturing its audience. "I'm really not a fan of message movies," reassures the 51-year-old.

Released Fri 29 October





Mit Jai Inn: Dreamworld

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, until Sun 21 November

"When I paint," explains Mit Jai Inn, "it's not only with my eyes, but with all of my senses: touch, smell, movement. The whole entity."

Mit's art spans many forms and sees him using hands, fingers and palette knife to dab, slap and pull paint across his canvas.

"For a long time, I never cared about going hungry or my security. I was more concerned about utopian things - a new age for society, humanity. For people in Thailand and Myanmar, the situation is getting worse and worse. There's so much abuse of power and justice. Trying to confront these things matters more to me than my own life. My living this way has often worried my friends and family, especially my mother. She wondered how I could survive. But I lived happily. I was like a hippie. Something would always happen and I'd find some money."

"I see art as a utopian dream within everyday life. Sometimes you want to practise but you can't because the opposing structures are too strong. Making objects might seem conventional, but they really function. Painting is healing. It calms my nerves; like meditation."



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The Turner Prize 2021 is supported by the AKO Foundation, Avanti West Coast and Arts Council England, with additional support from ArtAV, the John Browne Charitable Trust and Lance Uggla.

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*Denzil Forrester, 'Still Here', 2019.
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman
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Turner Prize 2021

Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, until Wed 12 January

The 2021 Turner Prize exhibition is currently showing at the Herbert as part of Coventry's ongoing UK City of Culture celebrations.

This year's show marks the first time a Turner Prize jury has selected a shortlist consisting entirely of artist collectives.

The exhibition is showcasing work by five nominees, all of whom work closely and continuously with communities across the UK to inspire social change through art... Admission to the Turner Prize 2021 is free. Tickets can be booked by visiting coventry2021.co.uk

John Nash: The Landscape Of Love And Solace

Compton Verney, Warwickshire, Sat 23 October - Sun 23 January

Given that he was one of the most prolific artists of the 20th century, it's somewhat surprising that the last major exhibition to pay tribute to John Nash took place more than half a century ago.

Born in 1893 and the brother of fellow artist Paul - in whose shadow he often found himself - Nash was an 'official war artist' in both the Great War and the Second World War.

It was in the final year of the Great War that he produced two of the paintings for which he is probably best known: *Over The Top* - which now hangs in the Imperial War Museum - and *The Corn Field* - which features in this show alongside a number of the artist's other war-era works.

Evidencing Nash's versatility, the exhibition also includes a selection of his botanical artworks - he was a keen plantsman - which are here being displayed for the very first time.



Kurt Jackson: Clay Country

Worcester Art Gallery, until Wed 20 November

A leading figure in contemporary landscape painting and a noted environmentalist, Kurt Jackson is exhibiting at Worcester Art Gallery for the third time, presenting a show that brings together wall pieces and ceramics centred around Cornwall's industrial clay mines.

"These paintings show the other side to Cornwall," says Kurt, "the less glamorous, industrial side; from the 'washing' of the clay from the face with high-pressure monitors, to the pumping, the blasting of the rock and breaking and transportation.

"I am delighted to bring the Clay Country paintings from Cornwall to Worcester, echoing the journey that china clay made from the area around St Austell to the Royal Worcester Porcelain works for all those many years."



Gathering Light

Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery, Shrewsbury, until Sun 12 December

It was in the Shropshire Marches back in Spring 2018 that an anonymous detectorist came across one of the most significant pieces of Bronze Age metalwork ever to be found in Britain.



The sun pendant - also known as a bulla - would have been worn as a clothes accessory. It was purchased last year by the British Museum for £250,000 and is soon to go on permanent display there. The pendant's temporary stay in Shrewsbury provides local people with the opportunity to view what is only the second bulla ever to be discovered in Britain.



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Events previews from around the region



Grand Designs Live

NEC, Birmingham, Wed 6 - Sun 10 October

Based on the popular Channel Four television series and packed with inspirational ideas, Grand Designs Live features new product launches, the latest eco-innovations, hundreds of specialist companies and the chance to explore four unique project zones.

The TV show's presenter, Kevin McCloud, will be on stage across the weekend too, taking part in seminars and debates with a host of industry experts.

Whether you're in the process of building a new home or simply looking for inspiration, Grand Designs Live is sure to have something to stimulate your interest.



On The Home Front: 1940s Weekend

Avoncroft Museum, Worcestershire, Sat 16 & Sun 17 October

Head back to Wartime Britain at Avoncroft Museum this month, courtesy of the venue's annual On The Home Front event. With displays providing visitors with a taste of

life in the Midlands during the Second World War, there'll be plenty to see, ranging from the Women's Land Army and Timber Corps to British troops taking part in training.

The RAF will be on-site too, as will the Air Transport Auxiliary and civilians of the time. Live music, a fashion show and traders selling a variety of period items also feature.

One Earth Show

NEC, Birmingham, Sat 23 & Sun 24 October

Whether you're an all-guns-blazing eco-warrior or maybe just contemplating making some environmentally friendly changes to your life, One Earth Show is the event for you. Bringing together speakers, products and organisations, the two-day get-together offers plenty of hints and tips for adopting a more sustainable lifestyle.



The National Wedding Show

NEC, Birmingham, Fri 29 - Sun 31 October

With the wedding industry finally back up and running, people can now go forward with the planning of their upcoming nuptials. The well-established National Wedding Show features 200 specialists, including award-winning photographers, cake makers and venue co-ordinators. The much-loved catwalk event also returns, showcasing not only the latest bridalwear trends but also fashion for grooms, mothers-of-the-bride, bridesmaids and guests.





A promotional poster for the LEGO Discovery Centre Birmingham Halloween event. The background is a dark, stormy night sky with lightning. In the foreground, several LEGO minifigures are displayed: two glowing green ghost figures in the top left, a skeleton, a werewolf, a mummy, and Frankenstein's monster. A small haunted house is visible in the background. In the top right corner, a devil minifigure holds a sign that reads "BRICK OR TREAT". The LEGO logo is in the top center, followed by "LEGOLAND DISCOVERY CENTRE BIRMINGHAM" and "ARENA BIRMINGHAM" in a red banner.

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www.LEGOLANDdiscoverycentre.com/Birmingham



A promotional poster for the SEA LIFE Birmingham Halloween event. The background is a dark, purple, and pinkish-red scene with a large spider web in the top left. In the center, a woman with long red hair and a necklace is surrounded by glowing blue water. A shark and a manta ray are visible in the water. In the foreground, a young girl in a witch costume and a young boy in a vampire costume are shown. A large cauldron with green liquid and a pig's head is also present. The SEA LIFE Birmingham logo is in the top right corner.

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www.visitsealife.com/birmingham

Events previews from around the region



Lantern Festival

West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley,
Worcestershire, Fri 22 October - Sun 5 December

The latest addition to West Midland Safari Park's events calendar, this brand-new show sees the venue transformed into an after-dark

illuminations experience.

Up to 1,000 individual lanterns will make up a 3km trail featuring over 40 light groupings, including lit-up landscapes, dinosaur lanterns, glowing animal installations, a giant interactive piano keyboard and a rainbow tunnel.

Horse Of The Year Show

NEC, Birmingham,
Wed 6 - Sun 10 October

Equestrian entertainment gallops back into Birmingham this month, courtesy of the 72nd Horse Of The Year Show.

Highlights include 'thrilling competitions and spectacular displays', while away from the arena, visitors can check out a wide range of treats, gifts and equestrian essentials at the retail village.



Spotlight On Science

British Motor Museum, Gaydon,
Sat 23 - Sun 31 October

The mad scientists at the British Motor Museum will be shining a light on headlamps and the science behind them this half term, presenting interactive demonstrations and pop-up sessions designed both to educate and entertain.

Young visitors and their families can also seek out all the museum cats and their colourful eyes, before heading for home with an activity bag to create their own optical illusion.



Halloween at Ironbridge Gorge Museums

Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust, Shropshire

There's a host of spook-tacular events for the whole family to enjoy at Ironbridge Gorge Museums this Halloween - and as an extra-special treat, the activities are all included in the entry price.

Budding witches and warlocks can take part in a magical potion trail at Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron (23 - 31 October). Jars of creepy ingredients will be hidden around the attraction, with visitors challenged to find them all before writing a spell for resident witch Freya to cast with her cauldron.



Meanwhile, the Museum of Iron is hosting an enchanting storytelling tour with its Coalbrookdale Cauldrons event, aimed at children aged three to six (26 & 28 October). Visitors are invited to attend dressed as witches and wizards, and help find the cauldrons hidden around the museum. They will then have the chance to make their very own spell recipe to take home with them.

Next up is a challenge of toil and trouble at Blists Hill Victorian Town. It Was A Dark And Stormy Night invites visitors to create a storyboard and produce their very own comic strip, telling the tale of a robbery at the post office. Suitable for children aged eight to 12, the event takes place in two sessions on 27 October.



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Events previews from around the region



The Haunted Castle

Warwick Castle, Sat 23 - Sun 31 October

There are some spooky goings-on at Warwick Castle this Halloween, as ghosts, ghouls, wizards and witches come out to play. While the famous Witches of Warwick cast secret

spells in their cauldrons and quirky characters host spellbinding shows and activities, visitors can have some creepy fun searching the spooky mansion and navigating the Haunted Hollows. Live entertainment, roaming characters, music and local street-food stalls also feature.

Screamfest

National Forest Adventure Farm, Burton Upon Trent, Fri 15 - Sun 17, Fri 22 - Sun 31 October

This ever-popular Halloween-happening is definitely not for the faint-hearted.

Returning in 2021 with a promise to be 'scariest ever before', Screamfest features five spine-tinglingly spooky attractions, two of which are brand-new scare mazes - Creed Farm and Le Theatre Noir. Other attractions include live music, a DJ, a fairground and zombie paintball.



Tricks And Treats

Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust, Thurs 28 - Sun 31 October

Don your best Halloween costume and jump aboard the Spooky Boat for a trip into the caverns at Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust. Passengers will be given magical black light torches with which to hunt for witches and ghosts, while Karly Kris and his Groovy UV show promises to further add to the fun.



Ascarium

National Sea Life Centre Birmingham, Sat 9 - Sun 31 October

The Sea Witch has made her way back to the National Sea Life Centre and is set to provide a spine-tingling trail for the whole family to enjoy.

Help find the missing potions ingredients, which are hidden in the depths of the tanks alongside some of the sea's creepiest creatures, and then head over to the Witch's Lair, where the Sea Witch will cast her spell to open her treasure chest and reveal a special reward.



7 October, 7.30pm
**George Egg:
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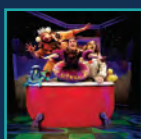
11 October, 7.30pm
**Simon Yates:
My Mountain Life**
Tickets: £15 & £10



13 October, 7.30pm
**Midnight
Skyracer**
Tickets: £15



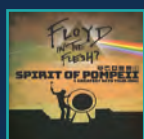
15 October, 7.30pm
**Superstars of
Wrestling
at the Town Hall**
Tickets: £10



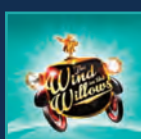
6 November, 11am & 1.30pm
**Half Moon Theatre
& Full House
Big Red Bath**
Tickets: £10



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



13 November, 7pm
**Floyd in
the Flesh**
Tickets: £18 & £16



23 - 27 November 7.30pm
2.30pm Saturday
**Little Theatre Company
The Wind in the Willows**
Tickets: £12 & £11



1 December, 8pm
**Martyn
Joseph**
Tickets: £18

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Events previews from around the region



Scarefest

Alton Towers, Staffordshire, Fri 8 - Sun 10 October and Fri 15 - Sun 31 October

The award-winning Scarefest returns to Alton Towers this month.

Open until 9pm each day, visitors can enjoy a host of live entertainment alongside the park's ever-popular selection of rides and attractions,

including the return of four terrifying mazes. Older families can enjoy the brand-new Trick o' Treat Town, an interactive walkthrough destination where only the brave will knock on the doors of Spooky Avenue. Meanwhile, over in Cbeebies Land, younger families can check out the Monster Ball and the Freaky Fun Zone, complete with meet & greets and games aplenty.



Torchlit Ghost Tours

Aston Hall, Birmingham, Fri 22 - Sun 24 and Fri 29 & Sat 30 October

Considered to be one of Britain's most haunted buildings, Aston Hall by night is not an experience for the faint-of-heart. As you're guided around the dimly lit mansion by torchlight, learn all about the hall's intriguing past - with one or two scares along the way. Due to the content of some of the stories, this event is not suitable for children under the age of eight.

Scream Train

Severn Valley Railway, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, Thurs 28 - Sat 30 October

This adults-only attraction promises to offer a real edge-of-the-seat experience. After boarding the train at Kidderminster, visitors will be shown to their own private compartment, where they will remain trapped while monsters roam the corridors looking for blood. And who knows what else might be lurking just around the corner?...



Halloween Nights - Monsters and Aliens

Black Country Living Museum, Dudley, Fri 22 & Sat 23 and Fri 29 & Sat 30 October

Families are invited to dress up as monsters or aliens when the Black Country Living Museum hosts its very own monster's ball this Halloween, complete with a costume parade featuring all of the best-dressed creatures.

Visitors can also explore the spooky streets of the canalside village, trick-or-treating along the way, and then say hi to some of the village's most interesting characters, including a steambuster robot!



Halloween at Tudor World

Tudor World, Stratford-upon-Avon, Sat 23 - Sun 31 October

Stratford-upon-Avon gets splendidly spooky this Halloween, when one of its most haunted buildings hosts an array of creepy events for all the family to enjoy.

Daytime visitors to Tudor World can take part in a Halloween quiz, complete with the chance to win a ghoulish prize.

A fortune-teller and storyteller will also be on hand every day, while nighttime entertainment comes in the form of a Victorian seance evening and Ghost & Terror Tours.



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Events previews from around the region



Spooky Spectacular

West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley,
Worcestershire, Fri 22 - Sun 31 October

Brighten up the spookiest of seasons by taking part in West Midland Safari Park's pumpkin-themed activity trail for Halloween, complete

with the chance to meet brand-new pumpkin scarecrow character, Patch. The popular 100-acre family attraction will be specially decorated for Halloween, with hundreds of pumpkins filling the pumpkin patch.

Witch & Wizard School

Worcestershire County Museum at
Hartlebury Castle, Tues 26 - Sat 30
October

Budding witches and wizards can make their dreams a reality this half term by enrolling in special magical school sessions.

Little ones can make their very own wands and badges before heading to school to learn how to cast spells and stir up potions in time for Halloween.

A pumpkin trail and the opportunity to carve your own locally grown pumpkin also feature.



Brick Or Treat

Lego Discovery Centre, Birmingham,
Sat 9 & Sun 10, Sat 16 & Sun 17, and
Sat 23 - Sun 31 October

Little monsters can get into the spirit of the season courtesy of some fang-tastic activities at Legoland Discovery Centre's Halloween party. Youngsters can build a pumpkin for the centre's

pumpkin patch, help construct a giant vampire with the master model builders, and solve the 'scarevenger' hunt in the haunted Miniland. The centre's two rides, Lego build & play zones, and the 4D cinema experience will also be available for guests to enjoy. All the Brick Or Treat activities are included in the admission price.

Spooky Science Night

Thinktank Birmingham Science
Museum, Sat 30 October

Spooky scientists, wicked witches and wonderful wizards are invited to come together for a special party at Thinktank this Halloween.

For one night only, the museum will transform into 'spook central', with attractions including a trick-or-treat show, a silent zombie disco and an interactive zombie operation board game.

Visitors who attend in fancy dress will also be able to grab a picture in the photo studio, and be entered into a prize draw on the night.





HAUNTINGS IN THE HOUSE

Image: RSC Macbeth, 1999: The Witches

Whether or not you believe in ghosts, there are reports of strange sightings, sounds and smells in some of the world's oldest theatres that just can't be accounted for. With Halloween happening this month, we take a look at the stories behind some of the most famous hauntings - including in venues right here in the Midlands...

Mention ghostly goings-on in theatres and Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom Of The Opera* instantly springs to mind. Made famous in modern times by Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical of the same name, the story is set in the Paris Opera House (now the Palais Garnier), where a young girl is taught to sing by her 'protective angel of music' - a phantom who resides in the darkest depths of the venue.

Although Leroux's tale is one of fiction, there are reports that some of the eerie details are based on fact. A stage fire in 1873 resulted in the death of a ballerina and left her fiancé (a pianist) disfigured. In 1896, the theatre's grand chandelier fell and killed someone. There is also a lake underneath the opera house.

Meanwhile, on this side of the Channel, one of the UK's most magnificent performing spaces, the Royal Albert Hall, is said to be inhabited by the spirit of the designer of its large pipe organ. Visions of a skull-topped Father Henry Willis have been reported, as have sightings of two young Victorian women chatting and giggling while making their way through the Royal Albert Hall corridors.



Here in the Midlands there are numerous stories of spooky sightings in some of our oldest theatres; nothing quite as dramatic as fires and falling chandeliers, but tales to make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end nevertheless.

Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre reputedly has had two ghosts, one male and one female.

The latter apparently met her demise falling from one of the theatre's boxes. Known as the Lavender Lady - because of a scent of lavender which accompanies her - the deceased was a theatre-goer and, allegedly, a former mayoress of Wolverhampton. The area of the dress circle closest to where she fell, and the box itself, are the places where people have observed a sudden chill and the scent of lavender.



The second of the ghosts is supposedly Percy J Purdey, who managed the theatre in the first half of the 20th century. Purdey lived in a flat on the upper floors of the venue, staying there after he retired. He had the reputation of being a man of habit, and his ghost seems to have followed suit, walking around the building at the end of a busy day - and, it is said, popping down to the old basement bar for a whisky each night. Staff over the years have reported footsteps, figures appearing in doorways, locked doors seeming to have unlocked themselves and items such as bar furniture and glasses changing positions when staff members' backs are turned.

Celebrities who've had ghostly encounters at the theatre include one half of comedy duo Little & Large and actor Victor Spinetti. Syd Little spoke of being haunted whilst visiting the toilet during a party in the theatre's upstairs bar in the 1970s: "It was all in darkness, and I had a very cold feeling beside me. I had a very strong feeling that someone was there, and I knew nothing about the ghost at that time. I don't believe in that sort of thing, but I was terrified. I couldn't get out quick enough!"

Meanwhile, Spinetti recalled once walking into his L-shaped dressing room and starting a conversation with a woman he had glimpsed going into the corner. He had assumed she was a cleaner. Receiving no reply, he looked again to find that there was nobody there.

Ghostly happenings have been recorded at The Alexandra in Birmingham for many years. Originally called the Lyceum, the theatre was built in 1901 on the site of a notorious slum. In 1935 much of the venue was re-built, with an extension to the frontage then being added in 1968. Throughout this time, a number of sightings and strange experiences led to the theatre being considered one of the most haunted buildings in the city.

Staff past and present have witnessed a gentleman in an old-fashioned doorman's uniform in various parts of the theatre - even in the wings during a rehearsal...

Ghostly footsteps have been heard on the stage, as has old-fashioned music. It's believed that the ghostly sightings could be of a stage manager who used to walk around jingling his keys.

One member of staff recalls how her daughter, who was watching a show in the dress circle one evening, sensed someone sitting down next to her, yet when she looked around to acknowledge them, there was nobody there.

A wardrobe mistress once described how clothes would be found scattered around the floor in the morning, when all had been left tidy the night before. She had worked at the theatre when Leon Salberg was its manager and swore it was his ghost causing the disruption when it was unhappy with the costumes. Leon died in his backstage office in 1937. This became a bar for a while, and one night a tray of drinks was said to have travelled by itself.

In 2018, Birmingham's Old Rep theatre commissioned a paranormal investigation of the Station Street building. Complete with detection equipment, the team set about

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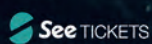
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Hauntings in the House continued...

looking at various parts of the 'veritable warren'. One person picked up on the movement of a female in Victorian attire near the stage, while another figure was reported to have been spotted in the sound room, along with a distinct smell of smoke. Members of staff have also reported experiencing 'strange feelings' whilst in the venue, with one recollecting the time she was changing posters in the balcony area. The stairway was clear on the way up, but on her return she noticed black soot on the flooring and staircase. She made a hasty descent!

As might be expected with its wealth of history, Stratford-upon-Avon has more reports of ghosts than most. Two of them reside in the town's Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST).

Both staff and visitors have spoken of the Perfumed Lady. Her old-fashioned, flowery perfume is said to be frequently smelt when new front-of-house staff are working their first shift - almost as if she is checking out the new arrivals.

A former carpenter at the venue recalls: "I was working on putting up a set in the RST and I smelt perfume very strongly, so strongly that I thought it was one of the other workers, till they said something as well. It was like a vertical column of scent rising directly upwards from a certain point, and then it just disappeared."

Another member of staff to have experienced The Perfumed Lady is front-of-house employee Sue. "During an evening shift, myself and another front-of-house assistant sensed there was a presence in the auditorium. I kept hearing the sound of creaking floorboards. At the interval, my colleague asked me who had been walking up and down the lobby during the first half of the show, and I said no one.

"In the second half, I continued to hear creaking floorboards, but there was nobody there. Suddenly, out of nowhere came this most beautiful smell. It enveloped me for a minute, and I held my wrist to my nose in case I'd forgotten my own scent, but it was nothing like what I was wearing. Then, just as abruptly as the scent came, it melted away. Later on, I found out about the Perfumed Lady and I felt even more spooked. I've worked in the same place since and felt nothing like the strange atmosphere I felt that night. Also, even more strangely, I've walked along the floor behind the seats where the floor creaked on that night, and it doesn't creak at all!"

Over at the RSC's Swan Theatre there have been sightings of the so-called Grey Lady, both on CCTV and on thermal-imaging photographs. Wearing a long grey dress, she appears so real she is often mistaken for a patron. Security guards report that she switches on the Swan Theatre bridge lights every evening.

Another spooky recollection comes from retail merchandiser Pippa. "I was opening up in the old Swan shop on a Sunday morning, which included unlocking the Swan Gallery doors and turning all the lights on. We used to have a TV in the corner of the shop, where you could see a CCTV feed of the upstairs gallery. While I was in there, I was looking at an old costume and I remember feeling cold, but nothing else out of the ordinary. When I went back downstairs, a colleague said that she was surprised to see someone viewing the gallery so early. I said it was only me up there, but she said no, there was a lady standing behind me while I was looking at the costume - she'd seen her on the CCTV. She told me she saw an old woman in a long grey dress standing behind me as I looked at the costume, but there was definitely no one in that room other than me!"



Image: RSC's Marbeth, 1952: The Witches

Theatre to make your blood curdle...

Our pick of spooky shows visiting the region this autumn...

THE WICKED LADY An abandoned house, the chilling disappearance of a child, and a secret past combine in what promoters refer to as 'the ghost story experience of the year', Fri 1 - Sat 16 Oct, The Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham
COUNT MAGNUS: TWO GHOST STORIES BY M.R. JAMES Nunkie Theatre Company bring two of MR James' spinechillers to life. In Count Magnus, a travel writer's over-inquisitiveness leads to a diabolical chase from darkest Sweden to rural Essex... Denmark is the setting for Number 13, in which a hotel room with the famously unlucky number conceals a ghastly, baffling secret, Thurs 21 Oct, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury

JEKYLL AND HYDE Jonathan Goodwin takes on both roles in this one-man staging of Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella, Sat 23 Oct, Selly Manor, Birmingham

STRICTLY SHERLOCK Join the king of the detectives as he brings to life the adventures of the Sussex Vampire and The Creeping Man. One-hander performed by Jonathan Goodwin, Wed 27 Oct, Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton

DRACULA'S GUEST Based on the bone-chilling work of Bram Stoker, this haunting stage show takes audiences 'into the dark heart of Victorian horror, to reveal the very meaning of terror and the consequences of collective evil and personal spite', Thurs 28 Oct,

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre
CARNACKI, THE GHOST FINDER NeuNoir theatre company presents an intimate reading of an Edwardian tale of terror. The story focuses on supernatural detective Thomas Carnacki as he delves into the troubling case of a young woman terrorised by a spectral steed that's reportedly haunted her family for generations, Fri 29 Oct, Stourbridge Town Hall

THE HAUNTED HOUSE Hear about old Granny Smith, who's been rocking in her chair for over 300 years; the haunted stone statue of Scrappy the dog that watches you move around the room; and the tale of Nancy, the young maid who disappeared in 1850 but has never

left the house, blowing out candles at bedtime even to this day! Sat 30 Oct, Lichfield Garrick

THE MONKEY'S PAW A re-telling of WW Jacobs' supernatural tale, in which a family are introduced to a mummified monkey's paw which has had a spell cast upon it. The paw grants three wishes... but there are consequences attached... Sat 30 - Sun 31 Oct, The Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

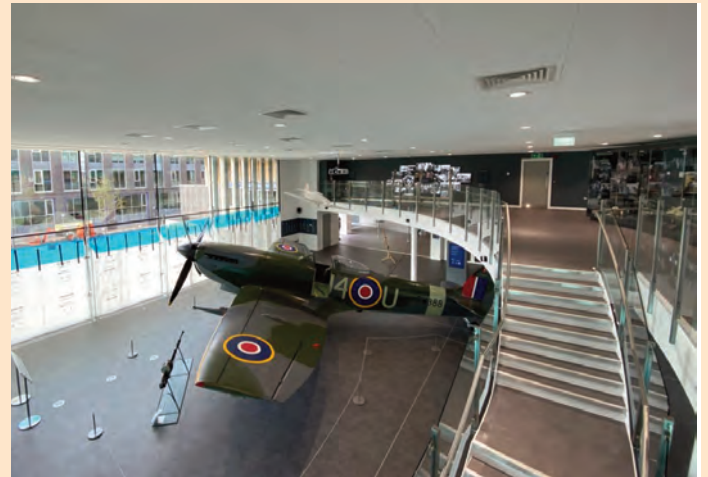
THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW Wendi Peters and Bill Ward lead the cast in a tale which unleashes the terrifying horror of the Headless Horseman, Tue 2 - Sat 6 Nov, Malvern Theatres

The Spitfire returns...

Stoke-on-Trent's restored Spitfire RW388 is back in the city and has a brand-new home at The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery



Picture shows 97-year-old Bert Turner, an RAF flight engineer who was involved in more than 30 missions into hostile territory during the Second World War. Bert visited the Spitfire Gallery on the occasion of its official opening at The Potteries Museum last month.



The brand-new Spitfire Gallery at The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery is now open. It tells the story of Spitfire designer Reginald Mitchell, a one-time local schoolboy who went on to become one of the greatest aeroplane designers of his generation.

The centrepiece of the exhibition is the recently restored Spitfire RW388, returned to its former glory thanks to the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society.

Visitors can walk around the iconic aircraft and also check it out from the gallery's mezzanine level, which provides great views out across the city. Get close enough to the Spitfire and you'll be able to peek inside its newly kitted-out cockpit, which features both genuine and replica parts.

A 'flypast' experience brings the gallery to life with the sights and sounds of Spitfires in flight.

Interactive exhibits and a regular programme of events aims to inspire younger visitors to

follow in Mitchell's footsteps and become the engineers and designers of the future.

There's also a mezzanine exhibition of artefacts and personal stories, highlighting the impact of the Second World War on North Staffordshire. The exhibition takes visitors through Reginald Mitchell's 'journey to the Spitfire' and tells how the aircraft evolved during the war. Featured objects include an aircraft propeller and a stained glass window dedicated to Mitchell's memory. His high-school chemistry book is also available to view, as are a series of loans from the Mitchell family.

Also on display in the gallery are two works by paper-sculptor Suhail Shaik. These represent the partnership of the Supermarine Spitfire and Hawker Hurricane, which fought off the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain. The sculptures are made entirely from paper, cut and glued by hand, and are inspired by intricate technical drawings.

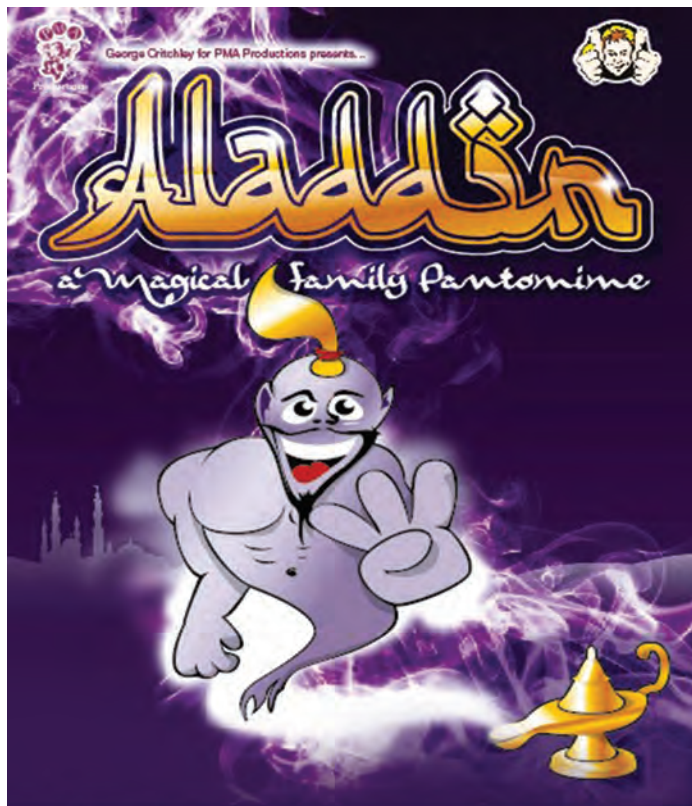
Interactive touchscreens allow visitors to explore objects in the museum collections. The objects have been 3D-scanned in partnership with Staffordshire University. A second screen triggers a presentation of archive footage and cutting-edge animation to bring the story of the Spitfire to life.

When you're done exploring the exhibits, you can check out the newly refurbished - and renamed - Violet's Café. Dedicated to pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary, the cafe offers a unique view while you relax and enjoy a coffee.

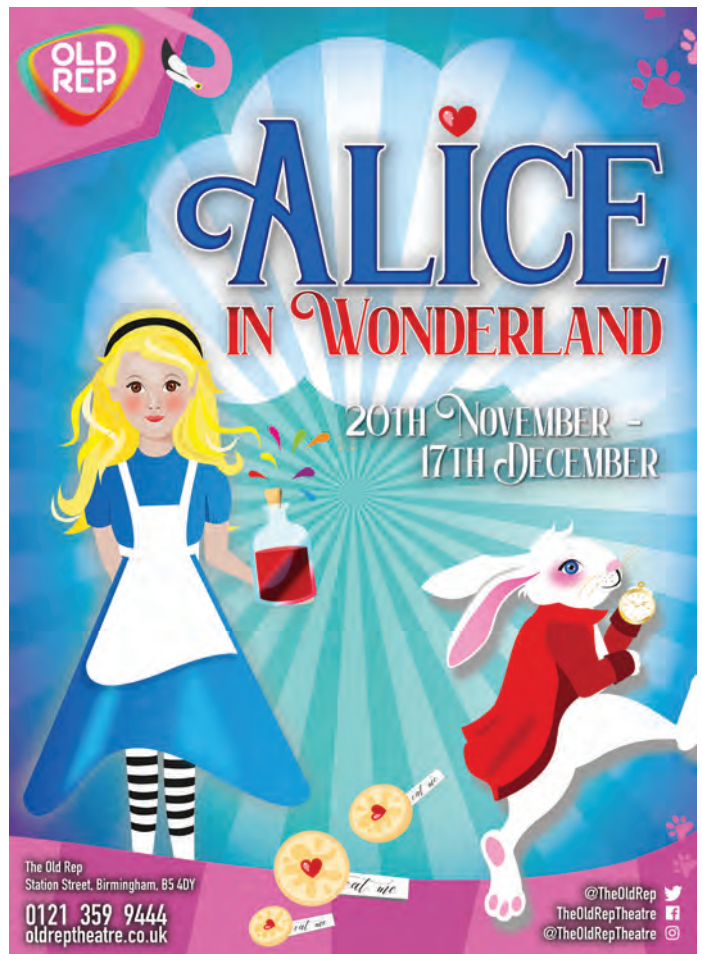
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The Spitfire Gallery is at The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent. The museum is open Monday to Saturday 10am - 5pm; Sunday, 11am to 4pm. Admission is FREE Find out more at stokemuseums.org.uk





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Booking Now! Christmas

Christmas is the most magical time of the year - and after 2020's virtual no-show, we reckon there's a lot of making up to do. With panto castings coming in thick and fast, and dates for festive events old and new being announced on a near-daily basis, we thought that *now* would be a good time to share with you what we know so far and help you get those diaries filled...

Pantos

ALADDIN Join Aladdin as he embarks on the adventure of his life, discovers the magic of the lamp and falls in love with the beautiful Princess Jasmin, Wed 24 Nov - Sat 11 Dec, Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Iain Lauchlan and sidekick Craig Hollingsworth promise comic capers aplenty in a panto staging of this much-loved fairytale, Wed 24 Nov - Sat 8 Jan, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

PETER PAN Swashbuckling adventure featuring Sam Rabone, Thurs 25 Nov - Sun 2 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

THE PANTOMIME ADVENTURES OF PETER PAN Swashbuckling family adventure featuring Brad Fitt, Eric Smith, Victoria McCabe, Harry Winchester & Phil Stewart, Wed 1 Dec - Mon 3 Jan, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury

DICK WHITTINGTON The Big Tiny return with the story of Dick, his cat and their quest to save London town, Thurs 2 - Sun 5 Dec, Festival Drayton Centre, Market Drayton, North Shropshire

ALADDIN Starring JP McCue as Dame Dolly and Sean Dodds as Aladdin, Sat 4 Dec - Sun 2 Jan, Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa

CINDERELLA 'Magical festive fun' featuring AJ & Curtis Pritchard as Prince Charming and Dandini, CBeebies' Evie Pickerill as Cinderella and Five Star's Denise Pearson as the Fairy Godmother, Sat 4 Dec - Sun 9 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

ALADDIN Starring Coronation Street's Tom Roberts as Abanazar, X-Factor finalist Sam Lavery as Princess Jasmine, Carl Duffield as Wishee Washee and Nigel Peever as The Emperor, Wed 8 Dec - Sun 2 Jan, The Place, Telford

PETER PAN Featuring Emmerdale star Tom Lister as Captain Hook, Disney Junior's Art Attack presenter Lloyd Warbey as Peter Pan, and local funnyman, Mark James as Smee, Thurs 9 Dec - Sun 2 Jan, Malvern

Theatres

SNOW WHITE 'All-singing, all-dancing' production, complete with 'terrible jokes, panto magic and plenty of audience participation', Fri 10 - Sun 19 Dec, Walsall Arena & Arts Centre

SNOW WHITE Starring Maureen Nolan as the Wicked Queen, Keith Jack as Prince Joseph and Rebecca Keatley as Snow White, Fri 10 - Fri 31 Dec, Stafford Gatehouse Theatre

CINDERELLA Jonathan Wilkes & Christian Patterson are reunited for a festive rags-to-riches tale, Fri 10 Dec - Sun 2 Jan, Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent

CINDERELLA Doomed to drudgery by her wicked stepmother and spiteful stepsisters, Cinderella dreams of escape and romance. Meanwhile, King Keith of Kings Heath is making plans for a royal ball... Fri 10 Dec - Mon 3 Jan, The Core Theatre, Solihull

GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BEARS Jason Donovan makes his panto debut as the Evil Ringmaster in this London Palladium production. Jason will be joined by Matt Slack as the Ringmaster, Doreen Tipton as the Lion Tamer, Andrew Ryan as Dame Betty Barnum, Alexia McIntosh as Candy Floss and Samantha Dorrance as Goldilocks, Sat 18 Dec - Sun 30 January, Birmingham Hippodrome

Kids Shows

ONE SNOWY NIGHT Meet fox, badger, hedgehog and friends in this stage adaptation of Nick Butterworth's heart-warming story, Tues 16 Nov - Tues 28 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

ALICE IN WONDERLAND Adaptation of Lewis Carroll's classic tale, featuring a brand-new script and songs old and new, Sat 20 Nov - Fri 17 Dec, The Old Rep, Birmingham

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH The Crescent Theatre Company presents its version of Roald Dahl's greatest

adventure story, Tues 7 - Sat 18 Dec, The Crescent Theatre, Birmingham

MISCHIEF & MYSTERY IN MOOMIN

VALLEY Journey to a world where anything is possible in this festive show featuring puppetry, original music and a pop-up book set. There might even be a showering of snow... Fri 10 - Sun 12 Dec, Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton

DEAR SANTA Based on Rod Campbell's much-loved children's book of the same name, this festive family favourite is perfect for younger audiences with its running time of 55 minutes, Thurs 9 - Sat 11 Dec, Stafford Gatehouse Theatre

SANTA'S MAGICAL MYSTERY GUEST

Interactive show in which children get the chance to give their letter to Santa in person, Thurs 9 - Fri 24 Dec, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

THE MINCE PIE MICE Interactive show for children aged from three to six in which two very different mice must learn to get along, and get baking, Sat 11 - Fri 24 Dec, Lichfield Garrick

DEAR SANTA Based on Rod Campbell's much-loved children's book of the same name, this festive family favourite is perfect for younger audiences with its running time of 55 minutes, Wed 15 - Fri 24 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome

THE VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR CHRISTMAS SHOW A menagerie of 75 puppets bring four of Eric Carle's

stories to life, complete with a festive twist. The featured stories are: Brown Bear, 10 Little Rubber Ducks, Dream Snow and, of course, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Sat 18 - Fri 24 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH Blue Orange Arts presents its version of Roald Dahl's greatest adventure story, Sat 18 - Thurs 30 Dec, Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham

STICK MAN: LIVE ON STAGE Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler's children's favourite is brought to life via a fusion of puppetry, songs, live music and funky moves, Sun 26 Dec - Sun 9 Jan, Birmingham Town Hall

THE SNOWMAN Raymond Briggs' famous festive tale is brought to life in this enchanting live show, which has been thrilling Midlands audiences for the past 25 years, Thurs 6 - Sun 9 Jan, The REP, Birmingham

Something Different

THE MAGICIAN'S ELEPHANT New family musical adapted from Kate DiCamillo's prize-winning novel, Thurs 14 Oct - Sat 1 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon *Find out more by reading our feature on page 22*



Jersey Boys - The Alexandra, Birmingham



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BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Theresa Heskins' adaptation of the much-loved fairytale, featuring storytelling, music, humour and magical moments aplenty, Fri 26 Nov - Sat 29 Jan, The New Vic, Newcastle-under-Lyme

THE PLAY WHAT I WROTE Sean Foley directs a brand-new production of the hit West End show. Expect a plethora of well-known mystery guests to pop up during this festive run, Sat 27 Nov - Sat 1 Jan, The REP, Birmingham

ERIC'S CHRISTMAS CAROL The most famous of all festive tales gets an Eric-shaped makeover, Wed 1 - Sat 11 Dec, New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme

A CHORUS LINE Nikolai Foster's brand-new version of the legendary Broadway musical, Fri 3 - Fri 31 Dec, The Curve, Leicester

THE SNOW QUEEN Ballet Theatre UK presents a retelling of Hans Christian Andersen's classic fairytale, Sat 4 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

JERSEY BOYS Smash-hit musical telling the story of Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons, Tues 7 Dec - Sat 1 Jan, The Alexandra, Birmingham

A CHRISTMAS CAROL David Bradley stars in Simon Callow's acclaimed one-man adaptation of the classic Christmas tale, Mon 13 - Thurs 23 Dec, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

THE NUTCRACKER Birmingham Royal Ballet presents a special adaptation of its London production - complete with the Dickensian tones of Simon Callow as Drosselmeyer, Fri 19 Nov - Sat 11 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome

A CHRISTMAS WASSAIL A festive feast of music, comedy and spoken word, Mon 13 - Tues 14 Dec, Highbury Hall, Birmingham

A CHRISTMAS WASSAIL A festive feast of music, comedy and spoken word, Sat 18 Dec, Hartlebury Castle, Nr Kidderminster

A CHRISTMAS WASSAIL A festive feast of music, comedy and spoken word, Sat 19 - Tues 21 Dec, The Crescent, Birmingham

A DICKENSIAN CHRISTMAS Toast the Christmas spirit with Charles Dickens and celebrate with the very best of Victorian carols, classics and a selection of readings from A Christmas Carol, Wed 22 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Concerts

KATE RUSBY AT CHRISTMAS Sat 4 Dec, Malvern Theatres

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT An atmospheric sequence of music and readings - old and new - celebrating the Christmas story in all its guises, Tues

7 Dec, Coventry Cathedral; Sat 11 Dec, St Peter's Collegiate Church, Wolverhampton; Fri 17, Sat 18 Dec & Mon 20 - Wed 22 Dec; St Paul's Church, Birmingham

ARMONICO CONSORT: HANDEL'S MESSIAH Wed 8 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry; Tues 21 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent; Thurs 23 Dec, Malvern Theatres

GRAND CHRISTMAS CLASSIC WITH ALAN TITCHMARSH Alan Titchmarsh presents a very special concert of seasonal classics, festive readings and joyful song, all crowned by a selection of your favourite carols, Sun 12 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

LOVE ACTUALLY IN CONCERT: THE FILM WITH LIVE ORCHESTRA Screening of the seasonal romcom accompanied by a full live orchestra, Wed 15 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WITH THE CBSO Feelgood festive favourites, magical sounds and seasonal music old and new are here delivered by a special guest celebrity presenter and the CBSO's Simon Halsey CBE, Thurs 16 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR Festive fun and special effects in the company of West End vocalists, a full orchestra and the Jingle Belle Dancers. Tim Howard and Kelly Ellis star as guest singers, Sat 18 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

EX CATHEDRA: ANGELS, STARS & KINGS Hour-long family-friendly concert where younger audience members are encouraged to attend dressed as an angel, a star or a king, Sat 18 Dec, St Paul's Church, Birmingham

THE ROCK ORCHESTRA BY CANDLELIGHT Join the Festival Of The Dead's Rock Orchestra for a selection of hits from the last 40 years, including Metallica, Rage Against The Machine, Linkin Park, Led Zeppelin and more... Sun 19 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

LET ME IN PRESENTS WHITE WINTER HYMNALS An evening of winter folk, including songs by Nick Drake, The Staves, Bert Jansch and more, Sun 19 Dec, The Hub @ St Marys, Lichfield

THE GREATEST SHOWTUNES Enjoy the best of West End and movie musicals in a concert performance featuring some of the greatest show tunes of all time. Performed live on stage by four West End stars and the London Concert Orchestra, Mon 27 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

NEW YEAR'S EVE GALA Bring in 2022 with the London Concert Orchestra and a programme of classics including Nessun Dorma, Hornpipe, Land Of Hope And Glory and more... Fri 31 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham



A Victorian Christmas - Blists Hill, Ironbridge

Festive Markets

FRANKFURT CHRISTMAS MARKET Now in its 21st year, Thurs 4 Nov - Thurs 23 Dec, Victoria Square, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS IN CATHEDRAL SQUARE This brand new event for 2021 will feature a mix of craft, gift and food and drink stalls, Wed 17 Nov - Sun 19 Dec, Cathedral Square, Birmingham

TOWERS STREET CHRISTMAS MARKET Discover over 60 'fantabulous and wonderful' market stalls and enjoy live music and festive food at this brand-new event for 2021, various dates between Sat 27 Nov - Thurs 23 Dec, Alton Towers, Staffs

CHRISTMAS MARKETS Featuring live music, a food & drink court, activities, outdoor shopping and the chance to meet Father Christmas, Sat 27 Nov - Sun 5 Dec, Alderford Lake, Whitchurch, North Shropshire

CHRISTMAS FOOD & CRAFT FAYRE Featuring over 100 artisan food and craft stalls, with live music on both days, Sat 4 - Sun 5 Dec, Weston Park, Shropshire

Festive Events

LANTERN FESTIVAL An after-dark illuminations experience featuring lit-up landscapes, glowing animal installations, rainbow tunnel and more... Fri 22 Oct - Sun 5 Dec, West Midlands Safari Park, Bewdley

SIMPLY CHRISTMAS: THE CRAFTY CHRISTMAS SHOW A seasonal dream with exhibitors showcasing exclusive ranges of bespoke and unusual gifts including glassware, jewellery, art, candles, ceramics, clothing and more! Fri 4 - Sun 7 Nov, NEC, Birmingham

MALVERN WINTER GLOW Four festive experiences in one - an ice rink, personalised Santa experiences, an illuminated light trail and a giant

observation wheel, Fri 12 Nov - Sun 9 Jan, Three Counties Showground, Malvern

SANTA'S WINTER WONDERLAND This 'family festive extravaganza' features a new, larger theatre experience for 2021, as well as real snow, Sat 13 Nov - Sun 2 Jan, Snowdome, Tamworth

FESTIVE GIFT FAIR Gifts galore - from popcorn to prosecco, beer to brownies, cheese to chutneys, spices to spirits, puddings to preserves, chocolates to champagne and hampers to hog roasts! Plus live music throughout the day, Thurs 18 - Sun 21 Nov, NEC, Birmingham

LUMINATE COOMBE Immerse yourself in Coombe's mesmerising mile-long trail with stunning lighting elements and fabulous light play - all set to ambient music, Thurs 18 Nov - Fri 24 Dec, Coombe Park, Warwickshire

STEAM IN LIGHTS Experience a festive night-time adventure with thousands of lights and colourful displays - plus new music and narration for 2021, various dates between Fri 19 Nov & Thurs 23 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Kidderminster

THE POLAR EXPRESS TRAIN RIDE Enjoy stories while you travel to the North Pole, where Santa awaits, Fri 26 Nov - Thurs 23 Dec, Churnet Valley Railway, Staffordshire

CHRISTMAS AT TRENTHAM A brand-new illuminated trail designed to sprinkle a little Christmas magic, accentuate the flora & fauna and show off Trentham's historic landscape in a new light... Fri 26 Nov - Sun 9 Jan, Trentham Gardens, Staffordshire

MINI CHRISTMAS Activities will include festive crafts, tree decorating, decoration making and reindeer trail, Sat 27 - Sun 28 Nov, Thinktank, Birmingham

THE ENCHANTED EXPRESS A brand new Christmas experience featuring festive story, music and visit from Santa, Various dates between Sat 27 Nov & Sun 19 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Kidderminster

Booking Now! for Christmas

SANTA TRAINS Steam into Christmas and enjoy an all-new professional festive show aboard one of SVR's vintage trains, various dates between Sat 27 Nov & Fri 24 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Kidderminster

WINTER WONDERLAND AT COALBROOKDALE A 'magical' Winter Wonderland Grotto experience with the elves. Follow the path through the twinkling lights & trees, pausing to take photographs, before taking a seat around Santa's big chair, various dates between Sat 27 Nov & Thurs 23 Dec, Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron and Ingenuity, Ironbridge, Shropshire

SANTA HUNTS Complete with brand-new storyline for 2021, various dates between Sat 27 Nov and Fri 24 Dec, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

NORTH POLE ADVENTURE Journey through the Magical Portal to the North Pole where children will receive a personalised gift from Father Christmas. There's also a Victorian high street and sweet shop to explore, as well as numerous festive activities to enjoy, Sat 27 Nov - Fri 24 Dec, National Forest Adventure Farm, Burton-upon-Trent

CHRISTMAS AT THE CASTLE Indoors and outdoors, there's plenty to explore at Warwick - including festive tales with Santa and his elves, skating on the ice rink, a light trail experience, and, new for 2021, Christmas afternoon tea in the Conservatory Tea House, Sat 27 Nov - Mon 3 Jan, Warwick Castle

LIGHTOPIA A brand-new immersive journey through the four seasons, transporting visitors to a whimsical land where time can be controlled, Sat 27 Nov - Sun 2 Jan, Alton Towers, Staffs

A VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS Meet the people of Ironbridge as they prepare traditional festive treats, take some time to try out the site's ice skating rink, and finish off your visit with some seasonal favourites - mulled wine and mince pies... various dates between Mon 27 Nov & Sun 2 Jan, Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge, Shropshire

WORCESTER CHRISTMAS FAYRE Complete with carousel and fun fair, costumed characters, 200 stalls across the city centre and a programme of live entertainment, Thurs 2 - Sun 5 Dec, Worcester City Centre

FOLLIES SAFARI A 'magical' adventure by Land Rover through the illuminated woodland to see Santa in his real hillside grotto, Fri 3 - Thurs 23 Dec, Hawkstone Park Follies, Weston-under-Redcastle, North Shropshire

SANTA'S MAGICAL WOODLAND GROTTO Find Santa by taking the woodland trail, lit with firefly fairy lights and surprises around every corner, various dates between Fri 3 & Thurs 23 Dec, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

CHRISTMAS EVENINGS AT AVONCROFT 1800 - 1950 Presented by Avoncroft Museum and the Artisans and Reenactors Marke, Sat 11 Dec, Avoncroft, Bromsgrove

BLISTS HILL CHRISTMAS WEEKENDS Enjoy a festive welcome from brass bands and carol singers, browse gift ideas, enjoy festive treats and test your skills on the town's real ice rink, Sat 4 - Sun 5 Dec & Sat 11 - Sun 12 Dec, Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge, Shropshire

THE SANTA EXPERIENCE All-new Christmas fun for 2021, including the Flying Reindeer School Show, various dates between Sat 4 & Fri 24 Dec, Park Hall Farm, Oswestry, North

Shropshire

ILLUMINATED ARBORETUM Suitable for all ages, this nighttime event invites visitors to stroll through a 'kaleidoscope of colour' as they journey through the 150-acre woodland site, Tues 7 - Sat 18 Dec, National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire

AN ENCHANTED CHRISTMAS Join Santa and his elves as they attempt to stave off the naughty Rat King, who, together with his army, are trying to ruin Christmas, Sat 11 - Sun 12 & Sat 18 - Sun 19 Dec, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

ENCHANTED WESTON See Weston's Temple Wood transformed into a magical illuminated forest and enjoy an array of street food, local ales, fizz, warming winter cocktails and live music in the Stables Courtyard, Thurs 9 - Sun 12; Thurs 16 - Sun 19 and Tues 20 - Thurs 23 Dec, Weston Park, Shropshire

CHRISTMAS ADVENTURE QUEST Follow the trail, find the clues and discover the castle's amazing stories and secrets, Sun 26 Dec - Mon 3 Jan, Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire



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Romeo + Juliet**



Top: Mayowa Ogunnaike and Subhash Viman Gorania in the title roles of *Romeo + Juliet*. © Joe Bailey. Right: *Radio and Juliet*. © Marta Tiberiu.

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