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SWINGING 60S

What's New Pussycat? musical opens at The REP



MILTON JONES

promises puns and one-liners aplenty at The Alexandra



ASCARIUM

The Sea Witch returns to the National SEA LIFE Centre



BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET



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ROSIE KAY DANCE COMPANY



October 2021

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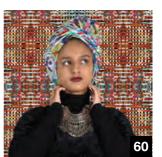












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New Birmingham 2022 **Commonwealth Games** festival announced

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

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.

Award-winning Tokyo Rose at the Hippodrome

Edinburgh Fringe musical Tokyo Rose is being performed in the Patrick Studio at Birmingham Hippodrome this month. The award-winning show tells the story of Iva Toguri, an American woman who was charged with treason in 1949 after she was accused of being the notorious 'Tokyo Rose', a wartime disc jockey who broadcast Japanese propaganda.

The production shows at the Hippodrome from Thursday 28 to Saturday 30 October. For more information and to book tickets, visit birminghamhippodrome.com

BRB 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

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



Renovations to begin on **Digbeth's Junction Works**

Birmingham art gallery & artist studios complex Grand Union is beginning the transformation of Junction Works, a Grade II listed building on Fazeley Street in Digbeth. The project, which has received funding from various sources, will see the development of new office space for creative-sector businesses and the creation of a new arts centre for Digbeth.



Family rave Halloween special at the Nightingale

The original family ravers, Big Fish Little Fish, are this month returning to The Nightingale Club in Birmingham for a spooktacular Halloween special (Sunday 31 October).

Old Skool Drum & Bass and Jungle legend DJ SS are headlining the event, which features a multisensory dancefloor, club visuals, glitter cannons, bubbles and giant bouncy balloons, 'all topped off with the famous parachute dance'.

A toddler play area with tents and tunnels also features, as does a giant themed colouring mural, a homemade playdoh table and artistic facepainting.

Fancy dress - based on the theme of Halloween - is optional but very much encouraged. To purchase tickets, visit eventbrite.co.uk

Divine Comedy at Symphony Hall

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



Dave announces 2022 arena tour

Following the release of his critically acclaimed UK number one album, We're All Alone In This Together, awardwinning 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 santandaye.com





Festive-season favourites back in Birmingham next month

Birmingham's Frankfurt Christmas Market will return to the city's Victoria Square for its 21st year next month.

The market is open from Thursday 4 November to Thursday 23 December (from 10am - 9pm). It will be joined in the city centre by two other

hugely popular festive-season attractions - Centenary Square's big wheel and ice rink. Both will be available to enjoy from 4 November to 9 January, between 10am and 10pm, except on Christmas Day. For more information and to book tickets, visit iceskatebirmingham.co.uk

Harry Potter Platform 9^{3/4} 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.

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 to 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 atglickets.com



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 5.3opm onwards each evening.



SKY Comedy Rep writers announced

Eleven writers of comedy have been selected to take part in SKY Comedy Rep - a partnership between Birmingham Repertory Theatre and SKY Studios which aims to discover and develop new regional comedywriting talent.

Commenting on SKY Comedy Rep, Birmingham Rep Artistic Director Sean Foley said: "We aim to help this first-ever group of 11 brilliant comedy writers take their first steps in our industry.

"Developing and nurturing new talent is a cornerstone of everything The REP does, and it's especially thrilling to see such a diverse group of individuals, hailing from such varied backgrounds and from all over the UK."





Pantomime debut on the horizon for 'Evil' Jason...

Jason Donovan will make his pantomime debut this Christmas when he tops the bill at the Birmingham Hippodrome in a no-expense-spared production of Goldilocks And The Three Bears.

Jason will be playing the part of the Evil Ringmaster and is joined in the cast by panto favourite Matt Slack and 'lazy cow' Doreen Tipton.

Commenting on the production, Michael Harrison, chief executive of Crossroads

Pantomimes, which is producing the show, said: "Audiences are going to truly love Goldilocks, the first circus-themed panto at the Hippodrome for 24 years. The show will incorporate the very best of the production I created for the sell-out London Palladium pantomime in 2019, alongside lots of new material created especially for our Birmingham cast and audience."

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

FREE admission for students at Thinktank...

Students across Birmingham can now get free admission to the city's Thinktank Science Museum every Wednesday throughout the year.

Commenting on the new initiative, the venue's museum manager, Laurence Butler, said: "Our Free Student Wednesdays will open up a world of science, technology and learning for those in further or higher education. Students can immerse themselves in the past or explore how science, technology and medicine have had a huge impact on the way we live now and in the future."

Piano festival returns after two-year break

The Birmingham International Piano Festival returns this month following a two-year break.

Taking place in the University of Birmingham's Elgar Concert Hall, the festival runs from 26 October to 12 November. The 2021 programme includes a selection of free lunchtime concerts, a lecture-recital, a jazz & funk-fuelled family performance, and an evening recital by Alexandra Darlescu.

Beatbox for youngsters...

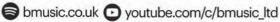
World record-breaking beatboxer SK Shlomo is bringing his hit show, Shlomo's Beatbox Adventure For Kids, to Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday 7 November.
For more information and to purchase tickets, visit thsh.co.uk

Colmore BID needs station volunteers

Colmore BID is looking for volunteers to help out with a new 'community programme' that will bring 'local character, interesting installations, gardening and arts' to Birmingham's Snow Hill Station. Anybody interested in lending their time and energy to the project should email chris.brown@colmorebid.co.uk

B:Music





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Tue 12 Oct 12pm Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space Symphony Hall





Joker in Concert: Film with Live **Orchestra** Tue 19 Oct 7:30pm

Symphony Hall

Halloween Silent Movie Special: The Phantom of the Opera

Sun 31 Oct 8pm **Town Hall**





Sixties Gold Mon 1 Nov 7:30pm Symphony Hall



Tim Peake: My Journey To Space Wed 3 Nov 7:30pm Symphony Hall

Shlomo's Beatbox **Adventure** For Kids

Sun 7 Nov 1pm Town Hall





City of Birmingham Choir: Messiah, The Inside View Sun 28 Nov 2:30pm Town Hall

Adventures of the Yorkshire **Shepherdess:** Amanda Owen

Tue 30 Nov 7:30pm Town Hall





Jason Donovan: Even More Good Reasons Thu 2 Dec 8pm Symphony Hall

Book Online: bmusic.co.uk

Magic & Music

Bedknobs And Broomsticks flies into the Midlands



Half a century after its release, Disney's kids' film, Bedknobs And Broomsticks, has been adapted for the stage, with the new show visiting Birmingham next month. What's On caught up with the production as it prepared to head for the region...

After the last 18 months, aren't we all due a little bit of magic in our lives?
Actor Dianne Pilkington certainly thinks so. Dianne - whose musical-theatre credits include playing Glinda in Wicked, Donna in Mamma Mia! and Elizabeth in Young Frankenstein - is now starring in the brandnew stage production of Bedknobs And Broomsticks, which is visiting the Midlands next month.

"It's my first theatre job after the pandemic," says Wigan-born Dianne, who plays trainee witch Miss Eglantine Price in the show. "It's fun, it's full of magic, and it's absolutely what the world needs right now!"

The production, which will be stopping off at The Alexandra in Birmingham, is the first-ever stage adaptation of the 1971 Disney favourite. And according to Dianne, the theatrical version is every bit as ground-breaking as the movie, with its famous blend of live action, animation and musical numbers: "The film was doing something new and innovative, and so are we. It's faithful to what people love about Bedknobs And Broomsticks, but this creative team never make the obvious choice. They have an amazing creative brain."

Set in the darkest days of the Second World War, Bedknobs And Broomsticks tells the story of the Rawlins siblings, three children who've been evacuated from London. Finding themselves in the fictional Dorset town of Pepperinge Eye, they are put in the care of the eccentric Miss Price - a woman who's far more interested in completing her studies in magic than in taking care of a trio of young evacuees. Before the children know it, she's casting spells on their bed and sending them skywards on a magical adventure...

"She's very quirky," says Dianne. "She's a woman who's lived on her own for a long time and who hasn't had much in the way of love for a very long time. We've been exploring the scary side, but there's a real joy in her too; a

real excitement about being an apprentice witch."

Even before she got the part, Dianne was a big admirer of Murder She Wrote star Angela Lansbury, who immortalised the role of Miss Price on film 50 years ago: "I'm a huge fan of hers, but I'm not like her at all. Also, we're in a different time now. I've tried to come at it from a modern point of view, even though the story is still set in wartime."

Whenever she wants to check she's on the right lines with the character of Miss Price, Dianne has the perfect audience on hand - her eight-year-old son. "I've been practising on Hugo. I've shown him my magic tricks and he doesn't know how they're done, which is gratifying. He's convinced the broom is on rocket boosters! And he could be right - who will ever know?"

As well as the original score, the show features songs that were dropped from the film and a number of new compositions.

"Substitutiary Locomotion is one of the best numbers I've ever sung," says Dianne. "I get so excited that I actually end up believing I'm magic as I'm casting a spell!"

Bringing her up to speed on the art of magic is co-director Jamie Harrison. Jamie created the stage illusions in Harry Potter And The Cursed Child. On one occasion he even had to perform a magic trick for JK Rowling herself. Jamie has also worked on Charlie And The Chocolate Factory in the West End and Pinocchio at the National Theatre, as well as on all the shows produced by Vox Motus, the Glasgow company he runs with co-director Candice Edmunds.

"At the core of Harry Potter is the human being," says Jamie. "What I learnt on The Cursed Child was that magic works if it's part of the personality of the character who's performing it. That's something we're working with in Bedknobs And Broomsticks. We wanted it to feel charming, with a sense of childhood imagination, but at the same time be allowed to take flight."

For Candice Edmunds, the show's fantasy element emerges from the stress felt by the evacuated children: "Using fantasy to bring respite from trauma is really timely. It feels more than ever that we want something to lift us out of our situation. The children are in the depths of a traumatic upheaval; fantasy offers some relief from the dark forces closing in around them. It's very cleverly written to show the way a small child would imagine solutions to problems."

Candice, who grew up in Australia and South Africa before moving to Glasgow, can't believe that she has the chance to direct a story which played a formative role in her childhood:
"When I was about eight, we spent some time in a small town called Maun in Botswana, where my aunt lives. There wasn't much to do there except raid her VHS collection. Pretty much the only kids' film she had was Bedknobs And Broomsticks. My sister and I watched it over and over again - it has a really special place in my heart."

In making the switch to the stage, Bedknobs And Broomsticks has become what Jamie calls "an emotionally powerful journey about belonging, commitment and family". That shift in emphasis was one of the main attractions for Dianne Pilkington: "When I first read the script, I bawled my eyes out for the last 10 minutes, to the point where my husband was quite worried," she says. "What they've done with the story really is incredibly moving."

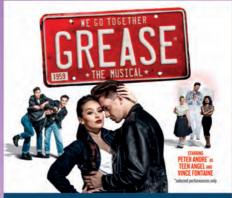
Bedknobs And Broomsticks shows at The Alexandra, Birmingham, from Wednesday 10 to Saturday 14 November, and then at the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre next spring, from Tuesday 5 to Saturday 9 April

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Fried chicken chain opens second outlet

One of Birmingham's leading fast food restaurant chains has opened its second outlet in the city centre. Serving freshly fried chicken & chips, JAQKS is located on Temple Row. The new outlet is the company's biggest and most modern unit, featuring self-ordering kiosks, digital menus and smart new decor.

New brews for familyowned microbrewery

Independent Brummie beer brand Gypsy Brew has unveiled two new tipples.

Craft lager Cushti Bok - brewed with German Saphir hops for a delicately spiced herbal feel - boasts a clean, crisp citrus flavour.

Django's Halo, meanwhile, is an intense, tart and bittersweet medium dry cider. To view Gypsy Brew's full range of beer, visit gypsybrew.co.uk

Birmingham Rum Festival back in 2022

The Cuban Embassy will next summer host the fifth Birmingham Rum Festival (Saturday 2 July).

The popular venue stocks over 100 rums - including Birmingham-based Burning Barn, Island Slice and Bay Noir - and will also provide a range of cocktails and a selection of authentic Caribbean street food. Live salsa, samba and reggae will also feature. To find out more and book tickets, visit birminghamrumfestival.com





Team behind OPUS to open new restaurant in Edgbaston

A new independent eatery is set to open in the heart of Birmingham's Edgbaston Village.
Aiming to launch in early December, Chapter will focus on quality - 'combining produce and products from a family of independent suppliers, with top-class service'.
Commenting on the new venue, owner Ann Tonks, who made the difficult decision to close popular city-centre restaurant OPUS during lockdown, said: "We are so excited to have been

presented with this opportunity by Edgbaston Estate owner Calthorpe Estates to bring a new independent bar & restaurant to Edgbaston Village's thriving neighbourhood.

"After the heartbreak of losing our longestablished restaurant earlier in the year, Calthorpe reached out to give us a new lease of life. We're starting this new chapter from scratch and have already had a huge amount of love from our community."

Birmingham pub now home to Stackz Burger Shack

Stackz Burger Shack has taken up permanent residency at iconic Birmingham pub The Flapper, which recently reopened after being saved from demolition.

Visitors to the popular venue will be able to tuck into Stackz's signature street food - think burgers, fries and fried chicken - seven days a week.

Stackz's owner, Shane Moyne, said: "We're so excited that Stackz will have a permanent home at The Flapper. Collaborating with one of the city's most iconic venues is a dream come true. We're working hard behind the scenes to ensure the kitchen is ready and the menu is top-notch. Our regular customers can expect their favourites, but we're also collaborating with the team at the pub to ensure we're bringing something new and relevant to the

venue.

"We've got some really cool burgers and sides coming to the new menu - we think people are going to go wild for them!"











From Fri 22 to Mon 25 Oct 2021 | Tickets from £10 Fri 22 7.30pm | Sat 23 2pm and 7.30pm | Sun 24 2pm | Mon 25 7.30pm Book your tickets online at macbirmingham.co.uk or call us on 0121 446 3232













REVIEW: Napton Cidery

Transforming 'unwanted' apples into premium-quality cider to suit every palate

Since first taking the plunge into cider-making in 2014 with a simple scrumpy brewed from the apples growing in their farmyard gardens, Warwickshire-based entrepreneurs Joylon and Charlotte Oliver have made it their mission to place sustainability at the heart of their burgeoning cider business, working with nearby villages and surrounding orchards to transform 'unwanted' apples into premium-quality cider blends to suit every palate.

Located in the picturesque village of Napton On The Hill, just a short drive from Southam and nearby Leamington Spa, this forward-thinking family-owned enterprise has continued to blossom since its launch in 2015, with more than 90,000 litres of cider produced on site each year. A lucrative sideline in special events and tours includes specialist cider-making workshops priced at £95 per person, regular comedy nights and ploughman's & cider-tasting tours, priced from £22 for two

people to £66 for a table of six. I am something of a novice ciderdrinker (festival season and family BBQs aside, of course), but our friendly and approachable host Charlotte was on hand to ease us into the evening with a guided sampling of six of Napton's organic cider blends. The sampling took place against the atmospheric backdrop of the cidery's on-site tap-room, a converted 'dairy unit' complete with wooden bench-style seating, a bar and a well-stocked shop serving up everything from oak-aged whiskey cask 'batch cider' to organic cider vinegar.

We were invited to experience one of Napton's popular ploughman's & cider-tasting events. It was fantastic to see Joylon and Charlotte's genuine commitment to local produce extend to other areas of the business, including the outstanding Ploughman's Platter, curated and supplied by long-term supporters and

neighbours Napton Village Stores. The platter consisted of a hearty combination of freshly cooked ham, homemade pork pie, Fowler's artisan cheeses and fresh pickled onions, served with French baguette and organic vegetables. The full-bodied flavours provided the ideal counterpoint to the strong, sweet notes of cider to come.

Our tutored tasting began with an introduction to Napton's award-winning Signature range. First up, Recipe Number 3, Napton's bestselling strong (and, in our case, still) dry cider, made from a blend of 17 varieties of cider apple. Served by the wine glass at room temperature, there was something ceremonial something altogether unique about tasting this blend in this way: undiluted, unapologetic and all the more delicious for it. We moved on to Recipe Number 4: a naturally hazy, sweet cider. rich in tannins and fermented for up to six months for maximum flavour.

Each sample brought with it new and fascinating insights into the making process. From the delightfully named 'scratting' of apples into pomace, to the delicate art of apple-pressing, Charlotte's effortless delivery of the science was at all times insightful without ever intruding on the tasting experience.

As the strength of the cider began to kick in, it was time for a brisk walk around the grounds (perhaps to check whether we still could!). The walk allowed us to check out the fruits of Napton Cidery's industry for ourselves. Accompanied by a chorus of bleating sheep and birdsong, our whistle-stop tour of the company's dairy barns revealed a thriving engine room filled with container upon container of slowly fermenting cider. Alongside these were newly stacked and bottled blends, ready to make their journey to one of Napton's 18 or more handselected stockists across Warwickshire.

Returning to the business at hand, our cider-tasting tutorial continued with the opportunity to sample one of Napton's specialist craft ciders - the intriguingly named Lost Apple. A cloudy cider created from 'forgotten fruit', filtered and blended with real juice for a full-bodied yet highly refreshing flavour, it was my personal highlight of the evening.

Special mention must also go to Napton's premium range, which includes the small-batch brewed Whiskey Cask cider, made with 30-year-old Kingston Black cider apples matured in single-malt whiskey casks - an intensely flavoured, high-alcohol blend that packs a real punch.

By way of contrast, there was a limited-edition Shropshire Perry made with a blend of gin and brandy plus four varieties of locally harvested pears.

My memories beyond the downing of my sixth cider are, I must confess, a little hazy. One thing is clear above all others, though: the future is bright for this pint-sized cidery. By cultivating an 'extended family' of local suppliers and partners, Napton Cidery has slowly but surely established itself as a permanent staple of Warwickshire's independent food & drink culture. Add to this a warm and welcoming ambience, an idyllic countryside location, a well-thought-out programme of special events and experience packages and, perhaps most importantly of all, an award-winning product perfected over several years, and you'd be hard-pressed to ask for anything more. Katherine Ewing

Napton Cidery, Holroyd House Farm, Southam, CV47 8NY Tel: 01926 811910



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CBSO: Enchanted Evenings

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Wed 27 October

Renowned Russian-American concert pianist Kirill Gerstein will perfectly illustrate why he's a Gilmore Artist Award winner when he takes on the challenge of performing both of Ravel's glittering piano concertos.

Kirill's masterclass forms part of a programme that also features Ravel's Daphnis And Chloé: Suite No2 and Moussa's Nocturne.

An evening of first-class music is completed by Debussy's symphonic poem, Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune - known in English as Prelude To The Afternoon Of A Faun. Ten minutes in length, the work is considered by some to have heralded the arrival of modern music.

Kevin John Edusei (pictured) is the concert conductor.

Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra

The Bramall, University of Birmingham, Sun 10 October

One of the region's best known and most admired non-professional orchestras, the Birmingham Phil are the current holders of the What's On Readers' Award for best Midlands orchestra.

This latest concert sees them presenting a programme that features Rossini's William Tell Overture, Dvorak's Eighth Symphony and Elgar's Nimrod.

The orchestra's music director, Michael Lloyd, conducts.



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.

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.



Birmingham Festival Choral Society

Ruddock Performing Arts Centre, King Edward's School, Edgbaston, Birmingham, Sat 30 October

Specialising in a wide variety of choral music from the 16th to the 21st century, Birmingham Festival Choral Society is a 'friendly and enthusiastic' choir which welcomes singers with different levels of experience.

This autumn concert sees them taking on the challenge of Gioachino Rossini's Petite messe solennelle (Little Solemn Mass), a work which the composer described as 'the last of my sins of old age'.

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Yungblud

O2 Academy, Birmingham, Thurs 14 & Fri 15 October

Dominic Richard Harrison - or Yungblud to you and me - brings with him an explosion of raw energy and thought-provoking lyrics. The Doncaster-born 24-year-old has created his own blend of alternative rock-poetry, guitar hooks and break-beats - and thrives on a fierce determination to make a significant dent in pop culture.

To date, he's released two albums: debut offering 21st Century Liability in 2018, and Weird! in 2020. The latter topped the UK album chart, selling 39,000 units in its first week and finishing ahead of Michael Ball & Alfie Boe's Together At Christmas.



Laura Marling

O2 Institute, Birmingham, Mon 4 October

Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter Laura Marling is undoubtedly one of the most talented and prolific young musicians of her generation.

She came to prominence back in 2008 following the release of debut album Alas, I Cannot Swim, which was subsequently nominated for a Mercury Music Prize. So too was her second album, I Speak Because I Can, and her fourth, Once I Was An Eagle. Yet another Mercury nomination came her way for seventh studio album Song For Our Daughter, tracks from which she's performing at the O2 Institute this month.





Erasure

Utilita Arena Birmingham, Sat 16 October
Electropop duo Andy Bell and Vince Clarke aka Erasure - are celebrating the release of
18th studio album The Neon with a new UK
tour, complete with this Birmingham stop-

"The Neon is a place that lives in the imagination," say the boys, "a place that we - you and me - put in the real world. It could be a nightclub, a shop, a city, a cafe, a country, a bedroom, a restaurant or any place at all. It's a place of possibility, in warm, glowing light - and this is music that takes you there."

Vanishing Twin

Hare & Hounds, Birmingham, Tues 26 October

Formed in 2015 by Cathy Lucas and named after her twin sister, absorbed in utero during pregnancy, London-based quintet Vanishing Twin have released two albums: Choose Your Own Adventure (2016) and The Age Of Immunology (2019).

Featuring Cathy on vocals, Valentina Magaletti on drums, Susumu Mukai on bass, Phil M.F.U. on 'strange sounds' and filmmaker/visual artist Elliott Arndt on flute and percussion, the band's stated mission has been to 'synthesise psychedelic traditions around the globe'.

Nick Cave & Warren Ellis

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Sat 2 October Described by Nick Cave as "a brutal but very beautiful record nested in a communal catastrophe", new album Carnage was created in collaboration with Warren Ellis and recorded over a period of several weeks during lockdown. Warren is a long-term member of Cave's band, The Bad Seeds, and although the pair have composed and recorded many soundtracks together, this is the first time they've released an entire album of new songs as a duo.

Megan O'Neill

Glee Club, Birmingham, Tues 26 October Irish-born singer-songwriter Megan O'Neill

visits Birmingham this month on the back of recently released fourth studio album Getting Comfortable With Uncertainty. Boasting a sound described by Time Out London as "a fresh mix of modern country and pop, with a fusion of distinctly Irish elements", Megan's career to date has seen her perform at private Oscars parties in LA and open for the likes of Sir Tom Jones, Lighthouse Family and Jamie Cullum.



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 funnymen.

"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 rolemodels 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 funnymen. 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 selfawareness 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'.



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 Baltese, 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 Baltese'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 Baltese 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.

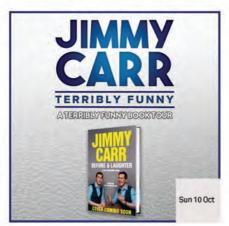
Since then, the musical - which follows a young man's quest for acceptance on his journey to becoming a drag queen - has enjoyed blockbusting success, with numerous Olivier nominations, an extensive UK tour and a recently released feature film testifying to its incredible popularity.

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

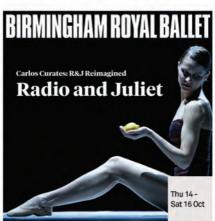
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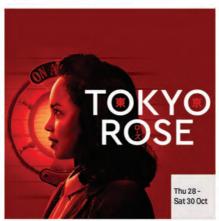


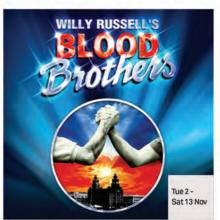


















What's New Pussycat?

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 politic's 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 Revion 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.

B:Music Jazz



Ashley Allen: 01.10 JoyBang: 29.10

Hansu-Tori: 15.10 Juggenaught: 12.11

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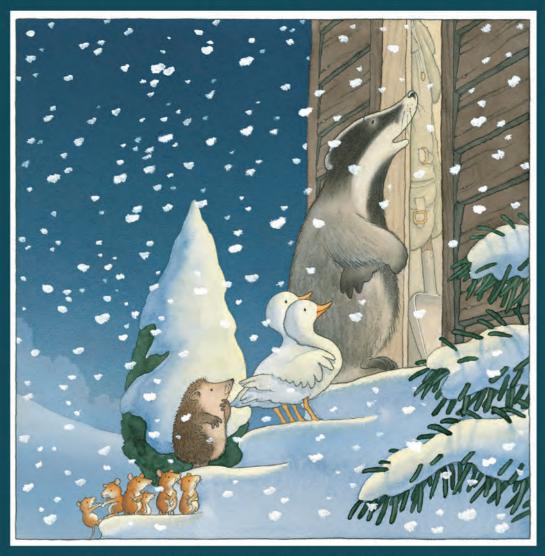




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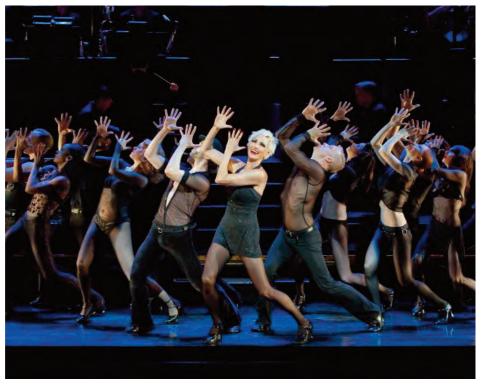
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Chicago

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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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 threetimes 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 superheroplaying 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 fiveminute 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

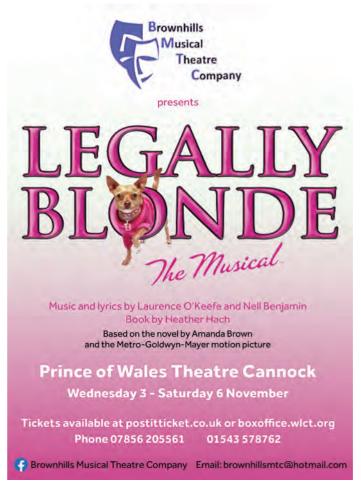
Lichfield Garrick, Wed 27 October; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Fri 29 October; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Sun 31 October

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 allfemale 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.











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 Jumblies 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' bestselling 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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"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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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

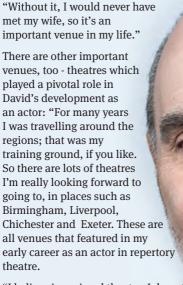
would like to visit as part of the tour,

I desperately wanted to go to the

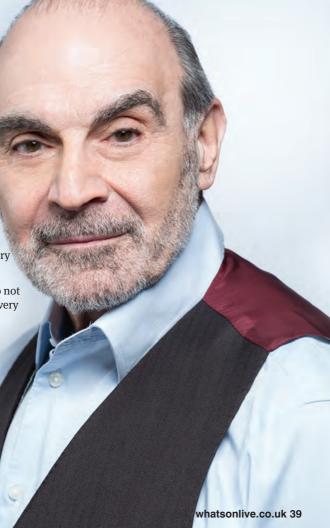
Belgrade," David reveals.

"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



"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.







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 horrormovie 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



Dune CERT tbc (155 mins) Starring Timothée Chalamet, Rebecca Ferguson, Oscar Isaac, Zendaya, Jason Moma, 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

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, Amandla 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





The French Dispatch CERT tbc (103 mins)

Starring Willem Dafoe, Adrien Brody, Timothée Chalamet, Elisabeth Moss, Bob Balaban, Saorise 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 Oscarnominated 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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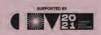
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COVENTRY BIENNIAL 2021





Find out more theherbert.org Denzil Forrester, 'Still Here', 2019. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo by Stephen White & Co.



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.





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 gettogether 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 awardwinning 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.



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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.



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 extraspecial 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.

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.









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.



Ascarium

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

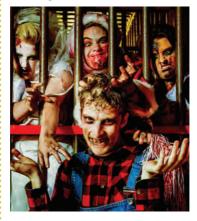
The Sea Witch has made her way back to the National Sea Life Centre and is set to provide a spinetingling trail for the whole family to enjoy. Help find the missing potions ingredients, which are hidden in the depths of the tanks alongside some of the sea's creepiest creatures, and then head over to the Witch's Lair, where the Sea Witch will cast her spell to open her treasure chest and reveal a special reward.

Screamfest

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

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

Returning in 2021 with a promise to be 'scarier than ever before', Screamfest features five spinetinglingly 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.





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Book your space now for daytime visits on Saturday 16 October and Sunday 17 October from 10.00 to 17.00.

Plus:

On Saturday 16 October, visit for a special evening event between 18.00 and 22.00.

With entertainment from the Vintage Class Singers, Miss Beth Belle and Guy Roles this evening should be fun for everyone wanting to experience the war

Avoncrof



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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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 pumpkinthemed 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.



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.

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.



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 INTHE HOUSE

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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 fiance (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 sight 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...

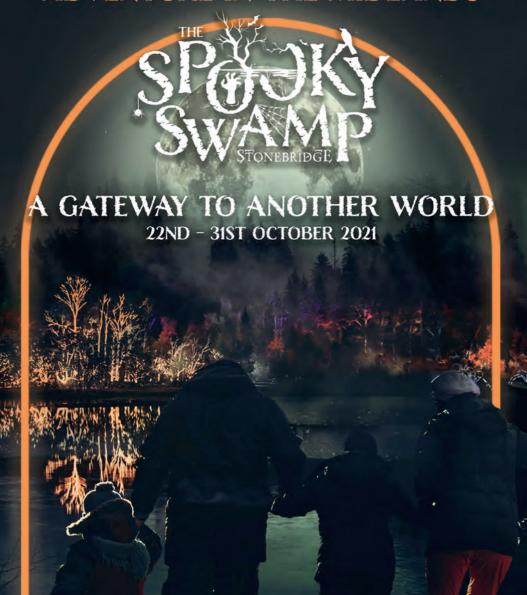
Ghostly footsteps have been heard on the stage, as has old-fashioned music. It's believed that the ghostly sightings could be of a stage manager who used to walk around jingling his keys.

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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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!"



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 overinquisitiveness 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



Heritage and Art

Birmingham-based artist Nilupa Yasmin talks about her first solo exhibition in the city and explains how she celebrates her South Asian heritage through her work...

Inspired by the stories of the generations that came before her, Nilupa Yasmin's first exhibition at MAC Birmingham combines the historic practice of weaving with archival family photographs to create beautifully handcrafted works of art.

Nilupa's new piece, Tera- A Star, celebrates the life of her Bibi - her paternal grandmother - and has been commissioned by Here And Now, a national project uniting 40 arts centres across the country in a celebration of culture within communities. Tera- A Star will be exhibited at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) alongside two of Nilupa's previous bodies of work: Grow Me A Waterlily - a series of self-portraits exploring her own identity - and Shekah, which delves into her lost family history in weaving, using images of her mother. The three pieces of work come together to tell the story of three generations of the artist's family.

Much of Nilupa's work studies notions of culture and anthropology, and she explores

her own identity through gender, religion and her British-Bangladeshi heritage. The practice of weaving is an integral part of this, but it also links to the storytelling that runs throughout the work she produces.

"I first began weaving as part of a project for my BA, when I was studying in Coventry," Nilupa explains. "I was working in Foleshill, which is an area in Coventry where the weaving industry thrived. But I was also interested in Foleshill because it's a place that is heavily migrated. After the Second World War, a lot of the people who migrated to Coventry were placed there. So it wasn't just a project about weaving, it was looking at migration, too.

"Towards the end of that project, I was weaving one day at home and my mum mentioned that my great-grandmother was a weaver in Bangladesh - she used to weave utilitarian objects and make a living out of them. So weaving connects to my own personal background, but also my interest in

the arts and history."

Preserving stories around heritage and culture is important to Nilupa and to her work, and has influenced her decision to share her own family histories with a wider audience: "In Britain, we're a community of people that come from all over the world, and I've found that telling these stories can show people that they're not alone in feeling, for example, too Asian to be in one community or too British to be in another. It's about trying to make these stories relate to people who feel like it represents them.

"A lot of stories about heritage and culture are dying out with the generations that are much older than us. I think it's so important to cast a light on these stories because if *we* don't do it, who will?"

The importance of celebrating the lives of older generations takes centre stage in Nilupa's newest piece. Tera- A Star combines storytelling with an exploration of the grieving



















process by retracing parts of the life of her Bibi, who passed away in January 2020.

"I lived with my grandmother my whole life, and she was a very prominent figure in our family. There are a lot of things in my day-to-day life that I relate to her - like the different kind of saris she'd wear - and they've been implemented into the exhibition, too.

"When I first began working on the piece at MAC, it was about trying to get her involved in the arts, as well as getting her out of the house a bit more."

Around the same time as Nilupa first began the project, she was working closely with MAC's Culture Club, a monthly arts gathering for people aged 65 and over. Originally, her exhibition was intended to involve making work with the Culture Club members, but owing to Covid restrictions, things didn't quite turn out that way.

"I had only just started working with the Culture Club, where we were having all these conversations about weaving and about gender roles and identity, when my grandmother passed away. So I took a bit of time off, but when I did get back into making work again, it was lockdown. A lot of the members were vulnerable or shielding, so there was no way to try and get around to doing something with them.

"At that point, I went back to the drawing board and I realised I wanted to do something about ageing. But because I had to make the work on my own, I turned the lens back on my grandmother and used it as a way of grieving.

"I never intended the work to be so universal, but after the year we've had it's not just talking about losing a grandparent anymore, and for that very reason I think this work is going to be quite relatable to many people."

Creating work that relates to people across the country is an integral part of the Here And Now project, which has commissioned Nilupa's newest piece. The national initiative aims to celebrate culture within communities through a variety of art forms - including exhibitions, films, theatre and music - and in so doing build a picture of modern Britain.

Each project tells the story of the place and the people, and Here And Now promises to be the most representative large-scale art project ever seen in England, recruiting people from a diverse range of backgrounds. Nilupa hopes her piece represents communities in Birmingham, and further afield, by drawing upon both her South Asian heritage and her position as a British Bangladeshi Muslim woman.

"Because I make work that deals with identity and culture, I get a lot of comments from people who say how nice it is to see people who look like them up on a wall, or to see someone with a name like theirs making art. I'm hoping that many people who are South Asian or Bangladeshi will walk into that space."

Tera- A Star fuses cultural identity with gender politics, set within personal stories of loss and belonging. While there are lots of elements to unpack in this exhibition, Nilupa is confident that it's a piece with which every audience

member will be able to connect: "What I really hope people will take away from this exhibition is that there's no standard way of grieving. Everyone's coping mechanism is different, and that's something that's very prevalent in this work and something that I want people to understand.

"Everything ties in together with this project, so I think each person who visits will be able to take something from it. Even if it's not from the piece commissioned by Here And Now, there's something to take away from the previous works that are on display as well."

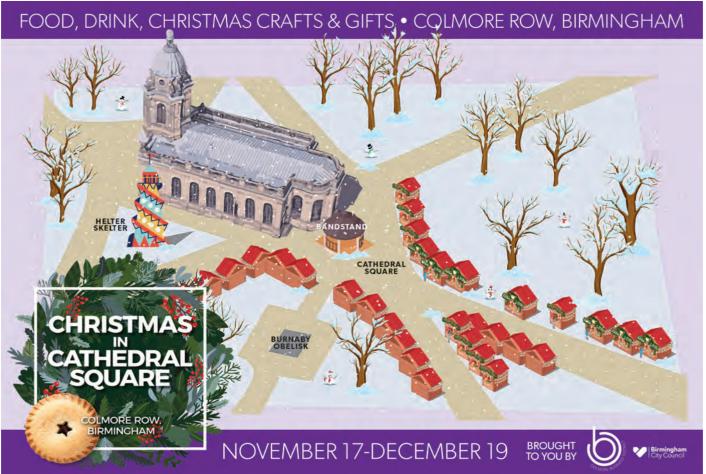
Though her involvement in the national project is a big achievement for Nilupa, she is perhaps more delighted at the prospect of her work being housed in a venue right on her doorstep: "I've visited MAC since I was a child. and it's a place that my family are familiar with. I'm the only person in the arts in my family, and although they're very supportive of my practice, they don't necessarily understand it. Having an exhibition in a place they all know is quite a big deal. This is my first solo show in Birmingham - my home city so the experience has been really fulfilling. I've had a lot of support from the venue, and being able to have my artistic voice heard there has been so uplifting."

Nilupa Yasmin: Tera-A Star তরো shows at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham, until Sunday 7 November

For further information on Yasmin's work, visit nilupayasmin.com







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 lain 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 Dutfield 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,

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

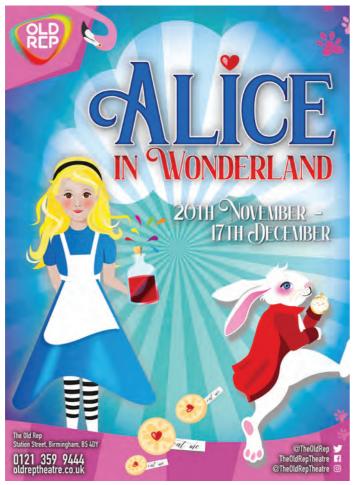
THE SNOWMAN Raymond Briggs' famous festive tale is brought to life in this enchanting live show, which has been thrilling Midlands audiences for the past 25 years, Thurs 6 - Sun 9 Jan, The REP, Birmingham

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







to be back this November...Loads of stallholders, huge variety, lots of bargains and live entertainment!

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Theresa Heskins' adaptation of the muchloved 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 brandnew 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 Nessum 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 wonderous' 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 litup 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 Enginuity, Ironbridge, Shropshire

SANTA HUNTS Complete with brandnew 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 whimtastical 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









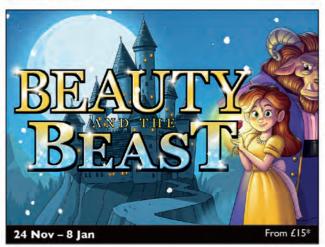












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