

Worcestershire

ISSUE 419 DECEMBER 2021

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CHRISTMAS AT THE CASTLE

Santa stops off at Hartlebury



FESTIVE FUN!

check out what's happening across the region this month...



Changing Christmas

Please note: the Christmas offer at Avoncroft Museum has had to change from that previously advertised!

4 and 5 December:

Crafts, cards and carols

Have a go at making your own cards and decorations



11 and 12 December:

Christmas through the ages

See Avoncroft come alive with people and festive traditions from the past. Plus browse the artisan market for unique gifts and warm up with hot food, hot chocolate and other festive goodies

Extended opening on Saturday 11 December from 10am to 8pm



18 and 19 December:

Homemade Christmas

Spend time with loved ones, making simple things together, playing games, and enjoying the peace before the feast!

For more information and to book tickets please visit our events page on the website

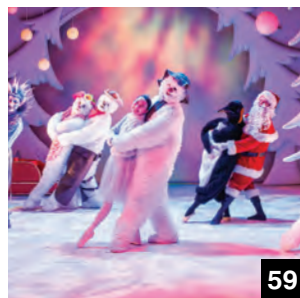
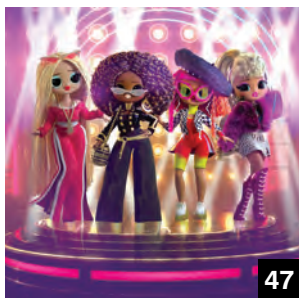
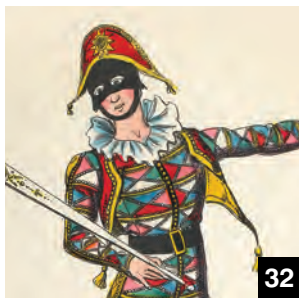
www.avoncroft.org.uk/whats-on



The Museum is 2 miles
south of Bromsgrove
off the A38 Sat Nav
B60 4JR

Avoncroft
Museum





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What's On

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Caravan & Motorhome Show returns to the NEC

After a two-year hiatus, the Caravan, Camping & Motorhome Show will return to Birmingham's NEC from Tuesday 22 to Sunday 27 February.

Campervans, motorhomes, caravans, tents and holiday homes all feature at the event, with more than 350 exhibitors on hand to showcase their latest creations. To purchase a ticket for the show, visit ccmshow.co.uk



Griff Rhys Jones running late at Malvern Theatres

Griff Rhys Jones visits Malvern Theatres next spring in *An Hour And A Half Late* - a comedy about a couple whose five minutes of candid conversation 'launches an outpouring of emotions, home truths, wine, nibbles and anarchy'.

Olivier Award recipient Griff - who shot to fame in 1970s' sketch series *Not The Nine O' Clock News* and has since forged an impressive career as an actor, writer and presenter - is joined in the production by fellow Olivier winner Janie Dee. The show runs in Malvern from 14 to 19 March. For tickets, visit malvern-theatres.co.uk

04 whatsonlive.co.uk

NEC hosts festive film drive-in cinema event

The Luna Drive-In Cinema is this month presenting a programme of Christmas films at NEC Birmingham (3 - 22 December). Featured festive favourites include *Love Actually*, *Home Alone*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, *The Holiday*, *Elf*, *Frozen* and *Last Christmas*. Younger film fans are catered for with special screenings of *The Gruffalo*, *Stick Man*, *Zog*, *The Snail And The Whale* and *The Snowman*. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit: lunawintercinema.com

Going Cuckoo at Warwick Arts Centre

A show which takes audiences on a journey through the last 20 years of Korean history - as told by 'a bunch of talkative rice cookers' - is visiting Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, this month (Wednesday 8 & Thursday 9 December).

Performed in Korean with English surtitles, Jaha Koo's *Cuckoo* combines 'personal experience with political events and reflections on happiness, economic crises and death'. For more information and to book tickets, visit warwickartscentre.co.uk



Further funding announced for Coventry City of Culture

Coventry City of Culture Trust has announced that it has received a further £175,000 in grant funding to support the staging of events and programmes during its year as UK City of Culture.

Backstage Trust initially awarded £100,000 but then released another £25,000 to match a generous donation from David & Sandra Burbidge.

The Eveson Charitable Trust, meanwhile, has donated £15,000, with a further £10,000 coming from The Radcliffe Trust.

New South Pacific tour heading to the Midlands

The critically acclaimed Chichester Festival Theatre production of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *South Pacific* is coming to Birmingham next autumn as part of a UK tour.

The Tony and Pulitzer Prize-winning musical is a powerful love story set on a South Pacific Island during World War Two.

South Pacific will show at The Alexandra from Tuesday 27 September until Saturday 1 October. Tickets are now on sale.



Broken Angel on show in Coventry Cathedral

A site-specific installation titled *Broken Angel* is now available to view at Coventry Cathedral.

The installation, by Anne Petters, is temporarily replacing the Angel of the Eternal Gospel, a window destroyed in an act of vandalism in 2020.

Anne's broken piece of window glass is magnified and projected onto the screen where the original Angel used to be, appearing as an abstract reflection of an angel's wing.

The *Broken Angel* project will next year feature the work of two other artists.

Knife Angel to visit Worcester

A 27ft-tall 'Knife Angel' - created using over 100,000 knives and blades confiscated by 43 UK police forces - is set to visit Worcester in the spring (1 to 31 March).

Designed by Alfie Bradley with the aim of bringing the issue of knife crime to the forefront of society's consciousness, the sculpture usually resides at the British Ironwork Centre in Oswestry. The Knife Angel's month-long visit to the grounds of Worcester Cathedral will be accompanied by a series of workshops.



Warwick film festival returns

Warwick's third Big Picture Festival runs until 5 December.

The popular movie event features short films, a Q&A with local filmmakers, a screening of the film adaptation of hit musical *In The Heights*, and an online programme of feature-length movies. Taking the theme *Small Voices Big Impact*, the festival is this year presenting stories about inspirational individuals and communities. For more information, visit bigpicturefestival.org.uk



RSC's window trail is back

After scoring a major hit last year, the Royal Shakespeare Company's Stratford Christmas Window Trail has made a welcome return. The trail comprises 24 'fun and engaging' window displays created in partnership with local shops, community groups and independent businesses based in Stratford-

upon-Avon town centre.

The windows have been inspired by the RSC's current family musical, *The Magician's Elephant*, and will feature a hidden elephant for families to have fun trying to find. A full schedule for the Christmas Trail, featuring a list of participating businesses and locations, can be found at rsc.org.uk/christmas-trail

Rugby stars out on tour

England rugby stars James Haskell and Mike Tindall will next spring visit The Alexandra in Birmingham with 'the world's most popular rugby podcast' (Saturday 28 May). Since launching in summer 2020, *The Good, The Bad And The Rugby* has attracted more than three million listeners and 20 million-plus viewers online.

James and Mike will be joined for the show by their podcast co-host, former Sky Sports rugby presenter Alex Payne.

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



A gift of a Christmas at Compton Verney...

Compton Verney's Winter Festival Christmas Gift Market takes place from Thursday 9 to Sunday 12 December.

Visitors are invited to enjoy the sights, smells and sounds of Christmas by exploring hand-selected stalls and the venue's always popular gift shop, which comes complete with 'a wide range of home and fashion gifts, and lots of lovely stocking fillers'. For more information about the market, visit comptonverney.org.uk



A merry little Christmas at Brum's Symphony Hall

Birmingham's Symphony Hall is offering its patrons plenty by way of seasonal cheer in the run-up to Christmas (and beyond). Festivities get under way on the 12th when the ever-personable **Alan Titchmarsh** presents a concert of 'seasonal classics, festive readings and joyful song, all crowned by a selection of your favourite carols for all'. Six days later, a company of West End vocalists teams up with a full orchestra and the splendidly named Jingle Belle dancers to present **Christmas Spectacular**, a show that comes complete with high kicks, festive fun, special effects and all the trimmings. Also on the 18th - and running until the 24th - is **Carols By Candlelight**, a concert of carols and seasonal classics staged in full 18th-century costume in an evocative candlelit setting. Travel back to the 19th century on the 22nd to enjoy **A Dickensian Christmas**, a celebration comprising Victorian carols interspersed with readings from the most famous festive-season story of them all - A Christmas Carol. And be sure to be in good voice the following day (the 23rd), when Jonathan Cohen

presents a **Christmas Carol Singalong**, a festive favourite that's been raising the Symphony Hall roof for over 20 years. On the same day - and rounding off the venue's programme of *pre*-Christmas magic - is a show presenting the biggest-selling festive album of all time - live on stage. **Now That's What I Call Christmas Live!** offers its audience the chance to sing along to iconic festive-season classics and 'be part of the ultimate party, with all your favourites wrapped up in one great show'... On the other side of three days of merrymaking, Symphony Hall's Christmas concert season recommences with **The Greatest Showtunes** - a 'show-stopping' concert performed live on stage by four West End stars and the London Concert Orchestra. Then, the day after (the 28th), settle back to enjoy the big band sounds of the 1940s in the company of the always exceptional Glenn Miller Orchestra, directed by legendary band leader Ray McVay. The same day there's also a concert paying tribute to the brilliance of John Williams, whose iconic film scores include *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *ET*, *Harry Potter* and *Superman*.

As the year draws to a close, Symphony Hall keeps the entertainment coming with three concerts on the final three days of 2021... First of all there's **Now! That's What I Call The 80s Live** (on the 29th), offering the chance to burn off all those mince pies by dancing (and singing) along to your favourite hits from the ultimate '80s album. The London Concert Orchestra is back in town on the 30th to present **The Music Of Zimmer vs Williams** - a celebration of two of the greatest-ever film composers: Hans Zimmer and John Williams (yep, that's the same John Williams who has a whole concert dedicated to him on the 28th - but then the man's an absolute genius, so quite right too!). Last but certainly not least in Symphony Hall's exceptional season of Christmas concerts is the venue's traditional **New Year Gala**, a 31st of December celebration featuring, among other classics, Proms favourites *Rule, Britannia!*, *Nessun Dorma*, *Hornpipe* and *Land Of Hope And Glory*, all brilliantly performed by the London Concert Orchestra. **For information on all upcoming events, visit: bmusic.co.uk**



Community Spirit 2022



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- **Do you want to perform in the world-renowned Symphony Hall?**
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bmusic.co.uk/community-spirit



Finding redemption

**David Bradley talks about starring in
A Christmas Carol at Coventry's Belgrade Theatre**

Harry Potter and Game Of Thrones actor David Bradley takes to the stage at the Coventry Belgrade this month when he stars in Simon Callow's one-man adaptation of A Christmas Carol. What's On recently caught up with the ex-RSC actor and Aston Villa supporter to talk about the considerable challenge of playing all of the parts in Charles Dickens' famous cautionary tale...

After years of appearing in films and on television, 2020 saw Harry Potter and Game Of Thrones actor David Bradley make a much-anticipated return to the theatre, to star in Simon Callow's one-man version of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol. Now he's treading the boards in the show once again, and is very much looking forward to the production's pre-Christmas run at the Coventry Belgrade.

"I did it last year at Chipping Norton Theatre," says David. "It was very different with the restrictions and a lot of people wearing masks. Despite that, I enjoyed the run there very much, but it still feels like unfinished business, so it's great to get another crack at it. It went down so well with a small, socially distanced audience, and I was especially excited because I hadn't been on a stage in many years. It's always so different getting a character to work on camera compared to on the stage. We take our grandchildren to Chipping Norton Theatre to see the panto there too, so when I was rung up and asked to do a Christmas show to replace the panto that couldn't go ahead, I was really surprised."

Adaptations of A Christmas Carol are plentiful, but what makes this one extra special?

"On the one hand, the one-man format does allow you to get deeper into characters. But on the other, if you mess up or people don't like it, there's only one person to blame! But if you get it right, it's an absolute dream to be in. Not only do I get to tackle the iconic character of Scrooge, but also the ghosts, old Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim. Simon Callow really has done a truly wonderful job of getting a novel that size into a performance that still feels like a whole story

"We've had singer-songwriter Sophie Crawford do beautiful music, songs and

comic or spooky sound effects for it too, so we share responsibility for performing the show each night.

"I've seen A Christmas Carol on stage with a full cast before and it's truly one of the greatest stories of all time. People know the story really well, or at least think they do. I was amazed how much I loved reading Simon Callow's abridged version because I was going through and finding bits and pieces of the story I'd forgotten about. But essentially it's about a man who learns how to love - and I'd forgotten just how lonely he was. There's also a lot of rich comic characters in there, as you'd expect from Dickens. It's just such a good time, and it's really reminded me why I came into this business in the first place. And it was absolutely clear when we last staged A Christmas Carol that the story is more relevant now than it has ever been."

In taking on the iconic character of Scrooge, David joins the ranks of distinguished actors to have played the old miser, among them Alastair Sim, Patrick Stewart and writer Simon Callow himself.

"Although I've seen The Muppet Christmas Carol with Michael Caine, I don't have any other memory of a specific Scrooge. I've taken on Scrooge before in The Swan at the RSC with a troupe called Kaleidoscope, with a cast mainly made up of dancers. It was for their production of The Chimes - another one of Dickens' Christmas stories, which is loosely based on A Christmas Carol. But all you can hope for when taking on such a character is to look for a fresh way of doing it, without being too influenced by past performances by others, regardless of how much they impressed you. I think the secret is just to look at everything as an entirely new piece of work, regardless of history. I'll be bringing my own timing, sense of humour

and taste to Scrooge and the other characters. It's much more fun for me and the audience to try and do it that way. I'm trying to make it my own, and I've had such a lot of fun finding my own version of this tragicomic figure."

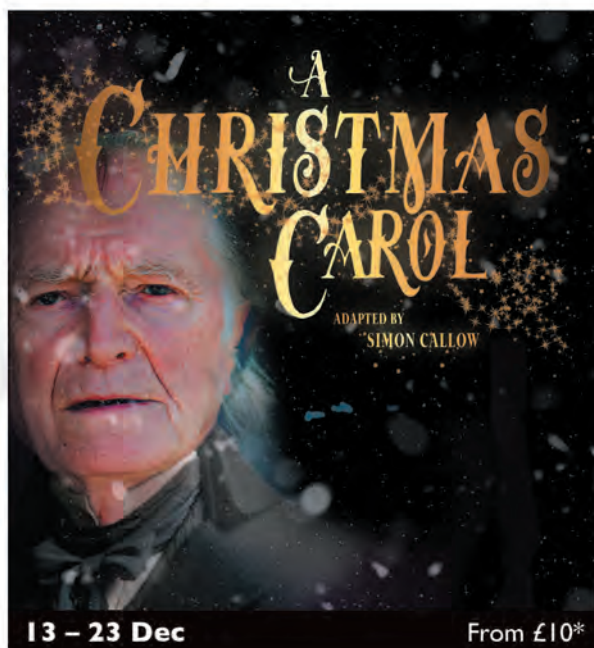
As for Dickens, David ranks him - as many do - amongst the greatest storytellers in history: "I think Dickens was such a humanitarian by nature, and that really shows through in his stories. He was genuinely concerned with the issues of poverty, child exploitation, deprivation and greed. A Christmas Carol was probably his greatest hit and really raised a lot of awareness amongst Victorian philanthropists. And even though it's set many many years ago, there are parts of the tale that still remain relevant.

"He wrote all his characters based on true life, without sentimentalising them too much. These are very real people. Dickens used to walk around earwigging people, writing down what they said and how they behaved. He didn't just write these characters, he walked the streets seeking them out. There are people we recognise even now, and that's the beauty of it."

David is focused on making sure the audience has the very best experience when they see the show: "I think everyone will leave glowing with good-heartedness and humour. But I want it to be educational and powerful too, as well as entertaining. It's a truly heartwarming tale of someone who gets a second chance, and we all seem to love those stories of redemption at Christmas."

.....

A Christmas Carol shows at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, from Monday 13 to Thursday 23 December



BOOK NOW www.belgrade.co.uk

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



REVIEW: The Cottage Tavern

Five-star country pub blends tradition with effortless elegance and style

Since reopening its doors to the public in June - under the management of lifelong friends Tim Sidwell and Mark Andrews - The Cottage Tavern has attracted more than 100 five-star reviews on Trip Advisor, with satisfied customers mentioning a warm and welcoming atmosphere, exceptionally friendly staff and an unmissable three-course Sunday lunch.

Located in the picturesque hamlet of Ashorne, just a short drive from the nearby towns of Warwick and Wellesbourne, this newly renovated bijoux country pub & restaurant marries traditional home-from-home comfort with an effortless sense of elegance and style, all underpinned by a genuine passion for providing only the very best in freshly prepared, seasonal dishes.

Our choices from a small but carefully created menu of starters were deep-fried whitebait with homemade tartare sauce and cider-battered chicken goujons with BBQ and sweet

chilli dip. What the menu lacked in choice was more than made up for in quality, from the feather-light cider-batter coating on the chicken goujons (made with premium chicken fillet) to the acidic tang of the homemade tartare sauce.

The whitebait, too, was as light as a feather, coated in an airy, shallow-fried batter just bursting with the flavours of the sea. This was traditional pub grub elevated to an artform.

Savouring a glass of The Cottage Tavern's excellent New Zealand Sauvignon, it was time to turn our attention to the main course. And what self-respecting lover of the great British pub could leave without sampling one of The Cottage Tavern's chargrilled 8oz ribeye steaks served with hand-cut chips, portobello mushrooms, onion rings, grilled tomato and - in my case - a side order of homemade peppercorn sauce! Locally sourced from Barry the Butchers in Stratford-upon-Avon, every mouthful was a joy to eat. Infused with a subtle flavour of charcoal, and tender

as you like, the texture and flavour of the beef was second to none - as were the homemade hand-cut chips, lovingly prepared with the skins left on to deliver both crunch and a silky-smooth interior all in one bite!

Having robbed my carnivorous partner of the luxury of a steak supper, his (somewhat) begrudgingly selected second choice of panfried salmon, garlic mash, roasted vegetables, dill and white wine sauce turned out to be *the* highlight of the evening. It was by far and away the tastiest and most skilfully prepared fish dish I've had the pleasure of sampling in recent years. Lightly fried in its skin on a bed of seasonal roasted vegetables, the flakiness of the salmon fillet married perfectly with the creaminess of the homemade mash, whilst the natural crunch of mange tout, French green beans and baby carrots provided a very welcome counterpoint in texture and flavour.

Every element of the dish was executed with the utmost finesse.

At this point, Chef Ryan Davies - a protégé of Jamie Oliver's Fifteen Academy and Michelin-starred Chef Bistro Bruno Loubet - took time away from the kitchen to talk us through his approach to 'hearty, fresh, seasonal produce' - and to explain his peculiar passion for preparing fish despite not being able to eat it himself!

With our evening drawing to a close, all thoughts turned to dessert - which, in our case, consisted of a smorgasbord of sweet treats: white chocolate & raspberry tart with lime syrup, cinnamon & vanilla cheesecake with chocolate ice cream, warm apple tart tatin served with salted caramel ice cream or custard, dark chocolate brownie with strawberry ice cream, and last but definitely not least, mint chocolate cheesecake made with

real After Eight mints.

They were all marvellous, particularly the warm apple tart with salted caramel ice cream - an autumnal treat if ever there was one.

With the festive season just around the corner, Head Chef Ryan has been hard at work creating the perfect Christmas menu to enjoy with friends. Choices range from the classic roast turkey and roast goose to pan-seared scallops served with chestnut veloute, and roasted hake fillet served with dauphinoise potatoes and seasonal vegetables. For dessert, there's a naughty-but-nice tipsy pear crumble served with cinnamon custard!

With a combined CV boasting placements at The Cotswold Hotel, the Michelin-starred Royal Oak in Whatcote and The Howard Arms in Ilmington (UK Dining Pub of the Year 2004), it's safe to say that local entrepreneurs Tim and Mark really know their onions when it comes to perfecting a prize-winning business model. And if my experience at The Cottage Tavern was anything to go by, the same can be said when it comes to starters, main courses and desserts too!

Contemporary yet comforting, worldly in outlook yet fuelled at its heart by a genuine warmth and passion for the community, The Cottage Tavern is playing its part in breathing new life and soul into the 21st-century 'country pub'. Long may it continue! *Katherine Ewing*

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

The Cottage Tavern
 Ashorne
 Warwick
 CV35 9DR
 Tel: 01926 651458

B:Music

Give the gift of music:
the perfect stocking filler



Adam Ant plus Support

Tue 1 March 2022
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



Yes – Relayer: The Album Series Tour 2020

Fri 24 June 2022
8pm
Symphony Hall



Paul Carrack plus Support

Fri 11 March 2022
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



George Thorogood & The Destroyers Good to be Bad Tour: 45 Years of Rock

Tue 26 July 2022
8pm
Symphony Hall

Marti Pellow: The Greatest Hits Tour

Wed 27 April 2022
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



Loudon Wainwright III In Concert with Support

Thu 15 September 2022
8pm
Town Hall



In Conversation with The Sopranos

Sat 18 June 2022
7:45pm
Symphony Hall



Al Stewart with his band The Empty Pockets

Tue 18 October 2022
7:30pm
Town Hall

Book Online: **bmusic.co.uk**

Food news from across the region...

Worcestershire curry house wins top award

Entouraj Indian Kitchen & Bar in Kidderminster has scooped the BCA Best Regional Restaurant of the Year award for 2021.

Commenting on the success, owner Murshed Tuhin said: "Winning this award is a proud moment. It recognises the talent of our chefs and the contribution we are making to this industry. We are thrilled to be 'curry champions'! We have worked hard to win, and now we need local people to come and experience our food and restaurant."

Liqueur business set for expansion

Warwickshire liqueur business St Maur is to move to a new premises at Alcester Park Farm.

Launched in lockdown by William and Kelsey Seymour, St Maur has already won numerous awards.

Commenting on the move, Kelsey said: "We now have space to dedicate to drink production after previously taking over my parents' house!"

Kouzina Greek Meze pops up in Coventry

Street Kitchen Brothers have launched a Kouzina Greek Meze pop-up in Coventry's Greek Community Hall. Operating every Tuesday from 5pm to 10pm, the pop-up's menu includes mixed grill, souvlaki, gyros, calamari, prawn saganaki, gemista and gigantes. You can book a table by visiting: kouzinagreekmeze.co.uk



New artisan local produce shop and 1950s-inspired dessert diner launches at Coombe Abbey Hotel

Award-winning Warwickshire hotel Coombe Abbey has launched a new artisan produce shop and 1950s-inspired dessert diner. Showcasing local food & drink, The Abbey Artisan Market sells craft beers, handcrafted chocolate, baked goods, handmade pies, preserves & pickles, sausages, bacon and assorted hampers from award-winning Leamington Spa butcher & deli Aubrey Allen. Meanwhile, milkshakes, crepes, waffles and

desserts are on the menu at retro American-style diner The Sundae Club Dessert Diner. Ron Terry, Operations Director at Coombe Abbey Park Limited, said: "This is a first for Coombe Abbey Hotel. Quality local food is at the forefront of our vision for The Abbey Artisan Market. This is something we really value as a business, and we're really excited to be working with so many local and regional producers."

Locally produced cider features in new CAMRA guide

A locally produced cider has been featured in a new guide published by CAMRA. Napton's 7.7% Whisky Cask Kingston Black Cider is made from a blend of Kingston Black apples from a 30-year-old orchard. It is then matured in single malt whisky casks from Auchentoshan distillery using wild yeasts and natural sugars. The cider is featured in Modern British Cider, a new book by self-titled 'ciderologist' Gabe Cook (pictured).



Orchestra Of The Swan: The Twelve Tales Of Christmas

Stratford Play House, Stratford-upon-Avon,
Tues 7 December; Royal Birmingham
Conservatoire, Wed 8 December

Orchestra of the Swan deliver an evening
of festive cheer in the company of talented
vocal quintet Papagena.

The concert features a programme of
Christmas music interspersed with
excerpts from classic seasonal literature
by TS Eliot, Charles Dickens, CS Lewis and
Dylan Thomas.



CBSO: New Worlds

Symphony Hall, Birmingham,
Thurs 9 December



Gergely Madaras (pictured) here picks up
the baton to conduct the City of
Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in a
programme which brings together
Sibelius's Finlandia with the UK premiere
of Jonathan Dove's In Exile - a work
described as a heartfelt musical journey
for two great British soloists: baritone Sir
Simon Keenlyside and cellist Raphael
Wallfisch.

The programme is completed by Dvorak's
ever-popular From The New World.



Armonico Consort: Handel's Messiah

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Wed 8 December; Malvern Theatres, Thurs 23 December

If you've never heard Handel's Messiah,
you've missed out on one of music's most
uplifting experiences.

Originally written for Easter and featuring a
series of much-loved classics - including For
Unto Us A Child Is Born and the legendary
Hallelujah! - the oratorio was first
performed in 1742. The work proved so

popular that female audience members
were asked to wear dresses 'without hoops'
in order to make room 'for more company'.
Armonico organist and conductor
Christopher Monks is the man with the
baton for this latest concert in the baroque
consort's 20th anniversary season.

The Carice Singers

St Mark's Church, Leamington Spa,
Tues 21 December

North Cotswolds ensemble The Carice
Singers are celebrating their 10th
anniversary in 2021 and continue to
develop both their unique sound and
imaginative choice of repertoire.
Named after Elgar's daughter, who
founded the Elgar Birthplace Museum
near Worcester, The Singers stop off in

Leamington this month to present 'a
festive collection of Christmas favourites
and novelties'.



Ex Cathedra: Christmas Music By Candlelight

Coventry Cathedral, Tues 7 December; St
Paul's Church, Birmingham, Fri 17, Sat 18 &
Mon 20 - Wed 22 December

What better way to get into the Christmas
spirit than by enjoying an evening with one
of the country's finest choral music
ensembles?

Under the directorship of its founder, Jeffrey
Skidmore, Ex Cathedra this month presents
its atmospheric and much-loved Christmas
Music By Candlelight evening, an event that
features festive favourites from around the
globe and across the ages, interspersed with
a variety of seasonal readings.

Live music from across the region...

Mica Paris

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry,
Sat 11 December

One of the UK's finest and most respected singers, Queen of Soul Mica Paris visits Coventry in support of her most recent offering, *Gospel*. Weaving together new material, timeless gospel classics and contemporary versions of hit songs, the record was released to great critical acclaim in December 2020 and shot straight to the top of the UK R&B album charts.



The Brand New Heavies

Leamington Assembly, Sat 4 December

Pioneers of the London acid jazz scene, The Brand New Heavies have been responsible for some of the UK's biggest R&B and soul tracks (think *Dream On Dreamer*, *Never Stop*, *Dream Come True* and *Midnight At The Oasis*). Boasting 16 top-40 singles and more than two million album sales, the band currently features vocalist Angela Ricci and founding members Simon Bartholomew and Andrew Levy.



Damon Albarn

hmv Empire, Coventry, Tues 7 December

Damon Albarn's eclectic musical style and observational lyrics have made him one of the UK's most influential and consistently interesting musicians.

Founding member of Blur, Gorillaz and The

Good, The Bad & The Queen, he's the recipient of six Brits, two Ivor Novello Awards and a Grammy.

This stripped-back solo set sees Damon performing tracks from his new album, *The Nearer The Fountain, More Pure The Stream Flows*, as well as selected favourites from across his songbook.

St Agnes Fountain

Huntingdon Hall, Worcester, Sat 4 December

Comprising Fairport Convention's Chris Leslie and the BBC Radio Two Folk Awards' 'best duo' of 2009 - Chris While and Julie Matthews - St Agnes Fountain bring their annual Christmas tour to Worcester, presenting a show that blends sparkling musicianship and heartfelt renditions with a healthy smattering of festive-season humour.

The Bootleg Beatles

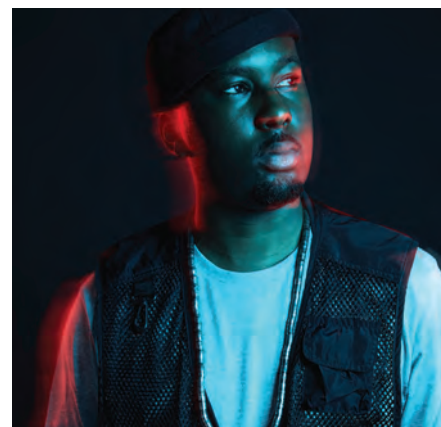
Symphony Hall, Birmingham,
Mon 13 December

Formed in 1980 from the cast of the musical *Beatlemania*, the Bootleg Beatles remain one of the most popular tribute acts in the country, despite the emergence of numerous rivals. Their ongoing success is down to the accuracy of their portrayal of the Fab Four, not only managing to look uncannily like them but also sounding incredibly authentic. An evening in their company offers a nostalgic but vital journey through the Beatles years, as 'John', 'Paul', 'George' and 'Ringo' transform from happy-go-lucky mop-tops to bearded, drug-addled hippies.

Theon Cross

Drapers' Hall, Coventry, Fri 3 December

Award-winning tuba player and composer Theon Cross transcends traditional genre conventions with his heady brew of low end theory combined with strains of jazz, dub, hip-hop, soca, grime, and various other sounds from the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. His new album, *Intra-I* (meaning 'within self'), is described as 'synthesising the diversity of his musical art and experience to deliver an essential message to a world gripped by tribulation'.



CHRISTMAS IN

The festive season is upon us and venues across Warwickshire are pulling out all the stops to get you in the Christmas spirit. From Victorian markets and seasonal fairs, to illuminated displays and ice skating in front of some of the region's most iconic buildings, there's certainly no shortage of events and activities to choose from...

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

The Magician's Elephant - the Royal Shakespeare Theatre until Saturday 1 January 2022
rsc.org.uk/the-magicians-elephant

Christmas Craft Workshops including willow Christmas angels and ceramic animals - Bonds Lifestyle from Saturday 27 November bondslifestyle.co.uk/events

Victorian Christmas Market - Stratford-upon-Avon, Thursday 9 - Sunday 12 December

Santa At Shakespeare's Schoolroom
Saturday 11 - Thursday 23 December
shakespeares-england.co.uk

The Ice Kingdom - Christmas at Magic Alley two sessions for children under four and over four - until Saturday 8 January 2022 (limited availability) magicalleystratford.com

Festive Afternoon Tea - The Arden Hotel
theardenhotelstratford.com

WARWICK

Late night Christmas shopping and market - until Wednesday 22 December
cjseventswarwickshire.co.uk

Christmas Tree Festival - St Mary's Church until Sunday 5 December
stmaryschristmas.org.uk

Christmas at the Castle including stories with Santa, light trail, ice rink, Christmas decorations, afternoon tea and more... Warwick Castle until Monday 3 January
warwick-castle.com



Winter Festival at Compton Verney
immersive experience including woodland grotto, storytelling with Mother Christmas, Toscana Strings Christmas Stories, craft workshops and luxury festive afternoon teas - Friday 3 - Friday 24 December,
comptonverney.org.uk



Christmas Magic children's drop-in sessions at Hill Close Gardens - Thursday 9 December
hillclosegardens.com

Winter opening - Lord Leycester Hospital, 10am - 4pm, lordleycester.com

Festive Lates at Compton Verney - Thursday 9 - Saturday 12 & Thursday 16 - Saturday 18 December comptonverney.org.uk

Carol Concert with the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire - Compton Verney, Friday 10 December comptonverney.org.uk

Festive lunches - British Motor Museum, Gaydon, Sunday 12, Thursday 16 & Friday 17 December britishmotormuseum.co.uk

Saturnalia - celebrate the Roman mid-winter festival at Warwickshire Museum, Friday 17 December, eventbrite.co.uk

Carols by Candlelight - St Mary's Church, Monday 20 December
warwickdc.ticketsolve.com

Aladdin Pantomime - Royal Spa Centre, Saturday 4 December to Sunday 2 January 2022, warwickdc.ticketsolve.com

Traditional Christmas Market Sunday 5, Sunday 12 & Sunday 19 December, cjseventswarwickshire.co.uk

LEAMINGTON SPA

Luminate Leamington Lantern Parade - Royal Pump Room Gardens, Sunday 5 December leamingtonlanternparade.co.uk

Festive Afternoon Tea vegan and vegetarian options available along with New Year's Day Sparkling Afternoon Tea - Mallory Court Country House Hotel and Spa
edenhotelcollection.com/christmas-at-eden

WARWICKSHIRE

COVENTRY

Luminate Coombe winter light trail plus the opening of a new Abbey Artisan Market and The Sundae Club Dessert Diner in the Visitor Centre - Coombe Abbey until Friday 24 December coombeabbey.com



Beauty and the Beast Pantomime - Belgrade Theatre until Saturday 8 January, shakespeares-england.co.uk

Coventry Glides ice-skating at Coventry Cathedral until Sunday 9 January coventry2021.co.uk

The Turner Prize 2021 Exhibition at The Herbert Art Gallery, until Wednesday 12 January theherbert.org

Christmas Makers Market - Fargo Village, Saturday 4 - Sunday 5 & Saturday 11 - Sunday 12 December fargovillage.co.uk/events



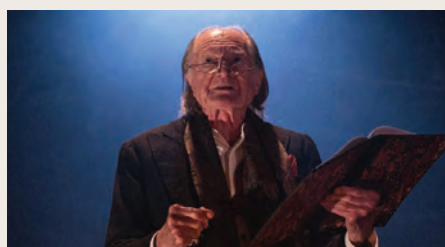
Visit Santa! Vintage sleigh ride and winter wonderland at Coventry Transport Museum, Saturday 4 - Thurs 23 December, transport-museum.com

Tea with Carols and High Tea with Carols festive afternoon teas with entertainment - Coombe Abbey Hotel coombeabbey.com

Music by Candlelight - Coventry Cathedral, Tuesday 7 December coventrycathedral.org.uk

Santa's Magical Mystery Guest - B2, The Belgrade Theatre, Thursday 9 - Friday 24 December belgrade.co.uk

A Christmas Carol at B2, Belgrade Theatre, Monday 13 - Thursday 23 December belgrade.co.uk



Christmas Pick 'n' Mix Bingo - Fargo Village, Saturday 18 December fargovillage.co.uk/events

Christmas Brunch Family Bingo - Fargo Village, Sunday 19 December fargovillage.co.uk/events

The Snowman Tour - Coventry Cathedral, 2.30pm, 4.45pm and 7pm on Thursday 23 December, coventrycathedral.org.uk



Winter openings of Lord Leycester Hospital, Warwick

KENILWORTH

Christmas Trail At The Castle - Kenilworth Castle until Thursday 2 January english-heritage.org.uk

Christmas Fair - Stoneleigh Abbey, Sunday 28 November stoneleighabbey.org



Christmas Markets Saturday 11 December cjseventswarwickshire.co.uk

RUGBY

Christmas Calligraphy Workshop suitable for adults - Rugby Art Gallery and Museum, Saturday 4 December ragm.co.uk/adult-workshops



Cinderella Pantomime - Benn Hall, Friday 24 - Wednesday 29 December shakespeares-england.co.uk

ALCESTER

Christmas Fair - Greig Hall, Saturday 4 December whatsonalcester.co.uk/events

For more event listings please visit www.shakespeares-england.co.uk/events



THE ROSES
Tewkesbury's Traditional Family Panto!
Saturday 27 November - Friday 31 December

KING ARTHUR Brand new for 2021!
THE PANTO!

Written by **Maurice Gran**
(writer of *Birds Of A Feather*)
and **Nick Wilkes**
(writer of *Almost A Christmas Carol*)

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ORCHESTRA OF The Swan

The Twelve Tales of Christmas

Orchestra of the Swan and vocal quintet **Papagena** present a magical and enthralling blend of music and words featuring excerpts from classic seasonal literature by T.S. Eliot, Charles Dickens, C.S. Lewis and Dylan Thomas.

Stratford Play House
Tuesday 7 December 2021, 7.30pm

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire
Wednesday 8 December 2021, 8.00pm

Find out more and buy tickets...
orchestraoftheswan.org

A MUST SEE - DON'T MISS THE AWARD WINNING
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- BUT IT'S NOT ALL SKA - CHECK OUT OUR OTHER DISPLAYS THAT CELEBRATE KING - BELLA BERRYSHIRE - HAZEL & CONNOR - THE ENEMY - THE PRIMITIVES - THE SORROWS - RUN BOY THREE - PETER WATERMAN... AND MANY MORE

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74-80 Walsgrave Rd
Coventry, CV2 4ED
WWW.COVMUM.CO.UK

Admission: Adults £4.00. Concessions (Students, Seniors and People of Determination) £2.00 Children* £1.00
* between 5 and 15

Matilda

It's no Miracle that Dennis Kelly and Tim Minchin's iconic musical is celebrating 10 glorious years in the West End...

The Royal Shakespeare Company production of Matilda The Musical continues to delight West End audiences with its story about an ordinary girl with extraordinary powers. A toe-tapping score, wondrous staging and a cast of 'revolting children' contribute to the show's popularity, making it one of the most sought-after tickets in musical theatre.

Matilda The Musical recently celebrated 10 years at London's Cambridge Theatre with a star-studded birthday performance. It's a perfect time, then, to take a look at some of the show's impressive statistics...

FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT MATILDA THE MUSICAL...

- The show has been seen by more than 10 million people across 91 cities worldwide
- Matilda The Musical is the 25th longest running West End show of all time, the 16th longest running West End musical at present, and the ninth longest running West End show currently playing
- Matilda The Musical has been played by 105 girls across the globe, including 45 in London
- There are four Matildas at any given time
- The show has won a whopping 99 international awards, including 24 for best musical
- There are 17 musical numbers in the show
- The production gets through over 100 tubs of chocolate spread every year
- Miss Honey and Matilda enjoy a cup of real hot tea, complete with milk and a biscuit, at each performance during the song My House
- The sound effect of the crying baby in Miracle is a recording of sound designer Simon Baker's youngest son
- There are 2,500 aeroplanes flown into the auditorium each year
- The blackboard moves 15.5 miles over the course of a year, at a top speed of 1.5mph. It would take just over two and a half days to travel from the Cambridge Theatre in London to the production's original home of Stratford-upon-Avon
- The orchestra is situated in a purpose-built studio hidden beneath the stage as part of the production's sound design. Despite this, the musical director can still see everything on stage with the use of a zoom cam
- The sound effect of the Crunchem Hall School bell played at the start of the production is a recording of the actual hand bell used by RSC front-of-house staff in Stratford-upon-Avon
- At 4ft 4in tall, Matilda Wormwood is the smallest leading lady in the West End

Bookings for Matilda The Musical at London's Cambridge Theatre continue until 18 December 2022.
For further information, visit: matildathemusical.com



Image credit: Manuel Harlan



Mo Gilligan

Utilita Arena, Birmingham, Fri 10 & Sat 18 December

London standup Mo Gilligan has enjoyed a meteoric rise to fame and fortune since first coming to wider public attention just a handful of years ago.

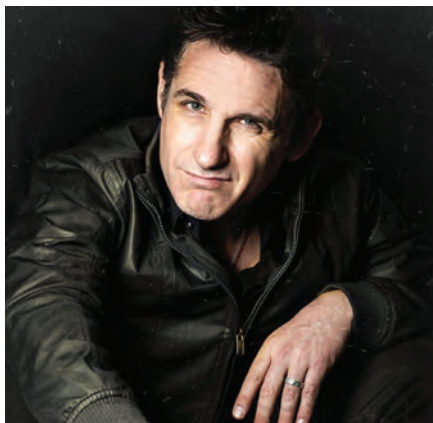
It was back in December 2016 that Mo uploaded a video about grime MCs - since which time he's found himself catapulted to celebrity status. Hired by Channel Four to

front The Lateish Show and rewarded for his television work with a coveted Bafta gong, Mo admits that his life has started to feel just a little bit crazy. "I wake up in the morning and think, 'this is nuts!'" admits the 33-year-old. "It's what I'd always dreamt about, and now that it's happened, I'm determined to make the most of it."

Tom Stade

Bilston Town Hall, Thurs 16 December

Clever, controversial and Canadian pretty much sums up Tom Stade, a familiar face on television programmes including Live At The Apollo and Mock The Week. Having racked up 30 years on the comedy frontline - in the process presenting a brand-new show each and every year since 2011 - Tom visits Bilston this month with You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet, in which he reflects on his new-found sense of freedom now that the kids have left home.



Jason Byrne

Birmingham Town Hall, Sat 18 December



Watching Jason Byrne on stage has been likened by one reviewer to watching footballer Lionel Messi: it's not a matter of 'if' the magic will come, but 'when' and 'how often'.

Byrne this month visits the Midlands with brand-new offering Jason's Audience Precipitation, a 'laugh out loud, must-see show' which comes complete with 'a light drizzle of audience participation'.

Sukh Ojla

The Glee Club, Birmingham, Sun 12 December

With her life experiences including a teenage suicide attempt, a Spanish-retreat encounter with the psychoactive brew ayahuasca, and a train-station breakdown involving a cheese & onion pasty, Sukh Ojla has plenty of fantastic raw material around which to build a show.

She also lives at home with her mom & dad, another situation that provides her with plenty of comedy gold: "Living at home with my parents is essentially like living in the most passive-aggressive Air B&B of all time," says Sukh, "except that you can't even leave them a bad review!"



Jumprov

Birmingham Hippodrome, Sat 18 December

Fancy trying out something new in the run-up to Christmas? If so, an evening in the company of Jumprov might be just the experience you're looking for.

The UK's first Black and Brown improv group here present a night of live sketch comedy, all of which is completely made up on the spot using suggestions from the audience.



Bill Bailey

Utilita Arena, Birmingham, Tues 21 December

Bill Bailey presents an act that nicely mixes displays of his musical virtuosity with straight-down-the-line standup.

He visits Birmingham this month with his new touring show, *En Route To Normal*, which he describes as 'an attempt to see a way through the weird unreality of our new world'.

Changing priorities, the wonder of dogs, how little things can keep you on track and a new-found love of skydiving are among the subjects which Bill puts under the microscope.



Jimmy Carr

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry,
Tues 21 - Thurs 23 December

Jimmy Carr's comedy is all about quickfire, deadpan one-liners - and so many of them, in fact, that he's not sure whether their content actually matters all that much: "People don't really remember the individual jokes I tell because I tell such a lot of them; what they *do* remember is how those jokes make them feel."

Jimmy is a comedian for whom no subject is off limits: "I'll talk about anything as long as I feel the joke justifies it. Sure, it may cause controversy - but then controversy is an easy story on a slow-news day. And I never apologise for jokes. After all, I'm not making a serious political statement, I'm just trying to make somebody laugh."

Jimmy visits Coventry with *Terribly Funny*, his brand-new show 'containing jokes about all kinds of terrible things'.



Live At Christmas

 Birmingham Town Hall, Tues 14 December

Fast-rising Netflix star Phil Wang's first-ever five minutes behind the microphone as a standup comedian were spent telling other people's gags.

"I thought standup was like karaoke with jokes," recalls Phil, who's one of four comedians contributing to this festive-season laugh-in at the Town Hall. "Most of the material I used was stolen, but I learned fast

and immediately started writing my own stuff."

Inspired to become a comedian by his desire to avoid having to get up in the mornings, Phil is here joined by 'hairy-Enya and lo-fi master' David O'Doherty, Taskmaster champion Lou Sanders and podcast favourite John Robins, who will be hosting proceedings.

Gary Delaney

Stourbridge Town Hall, Sat 18 December

"The hardest part of running competitively in Wales must be keeping up with the Joneses," quips the ever-popular Gary Delaney. And Gary's certainly no one-joke pony: "My girlfriend's dog died, so to cheer her up I went out and got her an identical one. She was livid and yelled, 'What am I going to do with two dead dogs?'"

Suffice it to say there will be plenty more gags where those came from when the Solihull-born star of *Mock The Week* stops off in Stourbridge with brand-new show *Gary In Punderland*.

Barbara Nice's Christmas Cracker

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham,
Fri 17 December

Everybody's favourite Kings Heath housewife makes a welcome return to MAC to light up the season of good will.

As well as containing more jokes than you'd find in an oversized holiday gag-bag (does such a thing even exist?!), Barbara's fabulous festive favourite usually features a tombola and raffle, no shortage of mince pies, and sometimes even a special guest or two. Expect to head for home at the end of the evening in a suitably festive mood.



**Jason's making
his panto debut!**

Oh yes he is...

Jason Donovan is this month making his pantomime debut, starring as the Evil Ringmaster in Birmingham Hippodrome's spectacular production of Goldilocks And The Three Bears. What's On recently caught up with the Australian star to chat about his first ever visit to Pantoland...

You might know Jason Donovan best as Scott Robinson in hit Australian soap opera *Neighbours*. Or perhaps you're more familiar with him thanks to his Olivier-nominated performance in *Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

The Australian actor has been a stalwart of British popular culture for over 30 years, during which time he's gone from soap opera, to pop music, to stage, to reality TV and more. So it's no surprise that he's now turned his attention to panto.

Jason is making his pantomime debut this month, playing the Evil Ringmaster in Birmingham Hippodrome's *Goldilocks And The Three Bears*. The festive extravaganza - the UK's biggest regional panto - tells the story of Dame Betty Barnum, her daughter Goldilocks, and their desperate attempt to save their Big Top from a rival circus owner.

"When I was asked if I wanted to do a panto, I said I'd only do it if I could play a character that isn't some sort of Prince Charming," explains Jason. "I didn't want to play the classic romantic lead. I wanted something a little more chunky."

Goldilocks And The Three Bears will see Jason star alongside Hippodrome panto favourite Matt Slack and Midlands comedy legend Doreen Tipton. The show is produced by the chief executive of Crossroads Pantomimes, Michael Harrison.

Having worked with Michael previously, Jason is positive the panto will be a spectacular show: "Michael has produced many great pantos, and I think the production values on this one are going to be huge. He's not known for doing things by halves!

"I've been to see a Birmingham panto before, and that was one of the reasons why I signed up for this. If you're going to do something, you might as well do the best of the genre, and I'm working with some great performers who know their craft. We're all excited and we're all ready to do this."

“
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great performers
who know
their craft.”

Originally due to take place in 2020, this year's panto has been eagerly awaited by both audience and cast - including Jason. "I'm travelling a lot at the moment, so to be able to be in one place for a long period of time is going to be nice. I love Birmingham, so I'm looking forward to that, but predominantly I'm looking forward to the audience. After the time we've been through, it'll be nice to be able to enjoy things and have some fun with it. You have to dig deep with performing, and with most of the shows I've done before, you have to be really true to the character, but I think with panto you can afford to be a bit more relaxed."

Despite his enthusiasm, Jason confesses that he wasn't familiar with pantomime when growing up in Australia. "Panto isn't big in Australia at all. It's very English. The first panto I ever saw was in the early '90s, at the Hackney Empire in London."

Before Jason travels to Pantoland, he's got a tour to finish. His *Even More Good Reasons Tour* - featuring greatest hits from his career - stops off at a sold-out Birmingham Symphony Hall on 2 December.

"The tour's been fantastic. I'm really looking forward to the show at Symphony Hall. I've got another two dates after that, and then it's the panto. It's very busy."

As if he wasn't busy enough, Jason has just finished his first run as a producer, working on *Priscilla Queen Of The Desert*. "It's a show I know well because I've done it many times, but it's been a big learning process. I'm very passionate about the product."

It's clear that Jason likes to keep his schedule full, so it's no surprise that he's already got his next venture planned - a return to the stage in *Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, this time playing the Pharaoh. The new production, which sees him star alongside Alexandra Burke, visits Birmingham in April.

Unsurprisingly, Jason confesses he's not very good at relaxing. However, being able to spend time with his family is important to him, especially during the festive period.

"Because I have kids, I'm normally busy with family around Christmas, which is part of the reason I haven't done any panto until now. The concept of doing two shows a day at this time of year never sat comfortably before."

"The best Christmas I can have is spending time with my family. I had a really great Christmas a few years ago when I went back to Australia and my whole family was together. The last few years I've spent a lot of time here in the UK, so it was nice to be back there."

And what has Jason got planned for Christmas Day this year? "By the sounds of it, I'll be sat on the couch recovering from panto!"

.....

Jason stars as the Evil Ringmaster in *Goldilocks And The Three Bears*, showing at Birmingham Hippodrome from Sat 18 December until Sun 30 January



Jersey Boys

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 7 December - Sat 1 January; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Tues 8 - Sat 19 February; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 7 - Sat 18 March 2023

Rockin' and rollin' New Jersey boys Frankie Valli And The Four Seasons scored some truly massive hits during the mid-1960s - and this award-

winning jukebox musical tells their story.

Taking a documentary-style format, the show is structured as four 'seasons', each being narrated by a different member of the band. Featured hits include Walk Like A Man, Bye Bye Baby, Big Girls Don't Cry, Sherry, Can't Take My Eyes Off You, Working My Way Back To You and December 1963 (Oh, What A Night).

Fagin's Last Hour

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre,
Wed 22 December

James Hyland's one-man show catches up with fictional ne'er-do-well Fagin - the famous 'receiver of stolen goods' from Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist - just 60 short minutes before he faces execution...

James, who founded his theatre company, Brother Wolf, some 23 years ago, has garnered plenty of praise for his unusual interpretations of literary classics - he's previously dabbled with, among other stories, A Christmas Carol (also showing at the Gatehouse this month), Alice's Adventures In Wonderland and Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde.

"If I believe there's a refreshing way to communicate a story whilst staying true to the source material, I will move forward with the project," explains James. "From that point on, the characters will often reveal themselves to me, sometimes in a flash of inspiration. Background research is the key, whether the story is based on a novel, a particular event in

history, or something from your own imagination. It's important to delve deep and explore thoroughly."



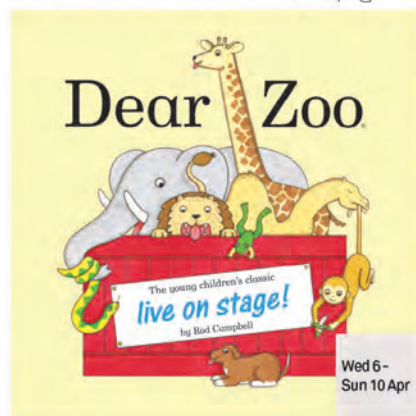
Beauty And The Beast

New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme,
until Sat 29 January

Postponed from 2020 for obvious reasons, the New Vic's retelling of this classic fairytale sees the venue's artistic director, Theresa Heskins, bringing to bear all of her trademark inventiveness to present a production that promises to breathe new life into an old fable. Expect a show replete with enchanting storytelling, an impressive score and a generous helping of family-friendly humour.



Beauty And The Beast in rehearsal





The Magician's Elephant

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, until Sat 1 January

Combining fun and fantasy, *The Magician's Elephant* 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...

This Royal Shakespeare Company production, based on Kate DiCamillo's prize-winning novel of the same name, sees West End favourite Summer Strallen displaying her dark side as the Countess Quintet.

"It takes this magical moment to occur for Baltese to come to life," explains Summer. "It gives the people of the town a licence to express themselves and have faith that there might be something else out there. I have great respect for the 'omnipresent', so to speak, and that's exactly what this story is all about."

The Play What I Wrote

The Rep, Birmingham, until Sat 1 January; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 24 - Sat 29 January

Originally directed by Kenneth Branagh and liberally praised by the critics, *The Play What I Wrote* premiered in 2001, with its two main writers, Hamish McColl and Sean Foley, also taking the starring roles.

Sean is now artistic director at the Birmingham Rep, of course, and is the man at the helm for this latest version of the West End and Broadway hit.

"We're putting on a fantastic show for this 20th anniversary production," says Sean. "We're using our original script, and I've been talking to Hamish and we've updated it. We have a few new tricks up our sleeve!"

"It's a significant anniversary of the original production and it's great to revisit that material. It was, and is, a truly great piece of comedy theatre."

Featuring script contributions from Morecambe & Wise writer Eddie Braben, the production comes complete with



a celebrity guest star. Festive-season alternatives to pantomime really don't get any better than this.



James Hyland at Stafford Gatehouse

A Christmas Carol

Albany Theatre, Coventry, Sat 4 - Sun 26 December; Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton-upon-Trent, Wed 8 December; Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham, Fri 10 - Fri 24 December; Lichfield Garrick, Sat 11 - Fri 24 December; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Mon 13 - Thurs 23 December; Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Thurs 23 December

Of all Charles Dickens' festive offerings, *A Christmas Carol* reigns supreme.

The covetous sinning of the miserly Scrooge, the eternal hope offered by Tiny Tim, the eerie visions of redemption - visiting Ebenezer in the shape of three seasonal ghosts - all combine to give the story a real 'olde worlde' charm...

And there's certainly no shortage of opportunity for Midlands theatre-goers to enjoy a live-on-stage adaptation of Dickens' cautionary tale this festive season...

Kickstarting proceedings on the fourth of the month is the Albany Theatre in Coventry, presenting a show that features



Guy Masterson at Brewhouse Arts Centre

'breathtaking sets, spellbinding costumes, heaps of Christmas spirit and a sprinkling of spooky goings-on'...

Guy Masterson presents a one-man version at Burton's Brewhouse Arts Centre - complete with original music by Robbie Williams - while David Bradley also 'goes it alone' at the Coventry Belgrade, in a highly acclaimed adaptation by *Four Weddings And A Funeral* actor Simon Callow...

Another one-man endeavour, at Stafford Gatehouse, sees James Hyland telling the story from the perspective of Scrooge's deceased business partner, Jacob Marley...

Over in Birmingham, meanwhile, Old Joint Stock Theatre's production takes the form of a live 1940s radio broadcast - including vintage commercials for fruitcake!

And last but certainly not least, Lichfield Garrick's version sees Apollo Theatre Company making a welcome return to the venue, having previously scored major hits there with comedy shows *Round The Horne* and *Hancock's Half Hour*.

B:Music

**A musical feast
this festive season**



Kate Rusby at Christmas

Sat 11 December 2021
3:30pm and 7:30pm
Town Hall



Now That's What I Call Christmas Live!

Thu 23 December 2021
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



Grand Christmas Classic with Alan Titchmarsh

Sun 12 December 2021
3pm
Symphony Hall



The Best of John Williams

Tue 28 December 2021
7:30pm
Symphony Hall

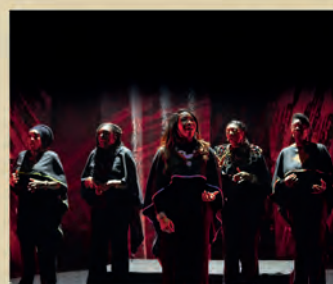
Carols by Candlelight

Sat 18 December and
Fri 24 December 2021
7:30pm and 2:30pm
Symphony Hall



Ronan Keating: Twenty Twenty

Thu 27 January 2022
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



The Soul of Nina Simone with Black Voices

Sun 19 December 2021
7:30pm
Symphony Hall



Test Match Special

Tue 26 April 2022
7:30pm
Symphony Hall

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WITH ALAN TITCHMARSH**

A very special concert of seasonal classics,
festive readings and joyful song.



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SAT 18 DEC 7.30PM, FRI 24 DEC 2.30PM
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Carols and seasonal classics, staged in full 18th century
costume in an evocative candle-lit style setting.



WED 22 DEC 7.30PM
A DICKENSIAN CHRISTMAS

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some of the greatest icons of entertainment



One Snowy Night

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham,
until Tues 28 December

Slot Machine Theatre return to Midlands Arts Centre with another festive offering: an adaptation of Nick Butterworth's classic Percy The Park Keeper story, *One Snowy Night*. "The Percy The Park Keeper books are so well loved," says Slot Machine co-artistic director Nicola Blackwell. "One Snowy Night is about a really kind and elderly park keeper who's friends with all the animals. One night, it snows in the park, so one by one the animals knock on his door and squash into the hut to keep warm. Then a certain amount of chaos ensues!"

Nicola really enjoys bringing the magic of theatre to Slot Machine's appreciative audiences: "There's nothing better than seeing so many generations sitting side by side in the theatre. Also, seeing the reactions of children who wouldn't usually be able to go to the theatre is amazing."

James And The Giant Peach

Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, Sat 18 -
Thurs 30 December; Crescent Theatre,
Birmingham, Tues 7 - Sat 18 December

Roald Dahl's classic tale tells the story of a young orphan boy named James, who is sent to live with Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker, a terrible pair of vile old nasties who make his life an utter misery. Then one day James meets a mystical old man who gives him a bag that contains the strongest magic the world has ever known. When the young lad accidentally spills the contents of the bag near an old peach tree, the most wondrous things start to happen - and James suddenly finds himself presented with a golden opportunity to escape his thoroughly miserable existence...

Alice In Wonderland

The Old Rep, Birmingham,
until Fri 17 December

A timeless classic telling the magical and decidedly topsy-turvy story of a little girl who disappears down a rabbit hole and discovers a weird world, Alice's Adventures In Wonderland first made its way onto the stage during its author Lewis Carroll's lifetime; in 1866, to be precise. It's since been adapted for the theatre countless times and in all manner of ways, including as a ballet, a musical, an

opera and a traditional pantomime. With its cast of nonsensical and amusing characters, including the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, it invariably makes for a great Christmas show.

This Old Rep production is presented in association with Birmingham Ormiston Academy.

Horrible Histories: Barmy Britain

The Alexandra, Birmingham,
Wed 1 - Sat 4 December

If you love the Horrible Histories series - and why the heck wouldn't you?! - then Barmy Britain is

a show well worth catching. Alongside providing answers to such searching questions as 'what would happen if a Viking moved in next door?' and 'would you stand and deliver to dastardly Dick Turpin?', the show also invites its audience to escape the clutches of Burke & Hare, move to the groove with the partying Queen Victoria and prepare to do battle in the First World War. In short, and as its publicity states, it's 'a truly horrible history of Britain - with all the nasty bits left in!'



Mischief And Mystery In Moominvalley

Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton,
Fri 10 - Sun 12 December

This unique participatory storytelling experience is based on the hugely popular characters created by

Finnish illustrator Tove Jansson in the 1940s. Created for children aged between four and seven, the 50-minute show features puppetry, original music, interactive play and an 'ingenious' pop-up book set.



Dear Santa

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Thurs 9 - Sat 11
December; Birmingham Hippodrome, Wed 15 -
Fri 24 December

Presented with the intention of giving children aged two to seven both a fun introduction to theatre and a memorable yuletide treat, Dear Santa tells the tale of Father Christmas's backfiring attempts to sort out the most fantastic of festive gifts for a girl named Sarah. With the assistance of his cheeky Elf, he finally settles on the perfect prezzie...

Tickets Make Fantastic Gifts



Various **Cinderella Pantomime**

14/1 **Ben Hart - Wonder**

21/1 **The Billy Fury Years**

22/1 **MAMA An Evening of Genesis**

25-26/1 **One Night in Dublin**

29/1 **Go Now! Moody Blues Tribute**

4/2 **Quill**

7/2 **Legends of American Country Show**

8/2 **Fairport Convention**

10/2 **Great Balls of Fire!**

12/2 **Back to the Sixties - Brothers in Song**

17/2 **Someone Like You - Adele Songbook**

18/2 **The Neil Diamond Story**

23/2 **Ed Byrne - If I'm Honest...**

26/2 **Andy Fairweather Low & The Low Riders**

9/3 **The King Elvis Presley Lives On**

17/3 **Lost Voice Guy: Cerebral Lol-sy**

18/3 **The Manfreds**

19/3 **Crooners - Mini-Big Band with humour**

24/3 **Revenge - Detective drama**

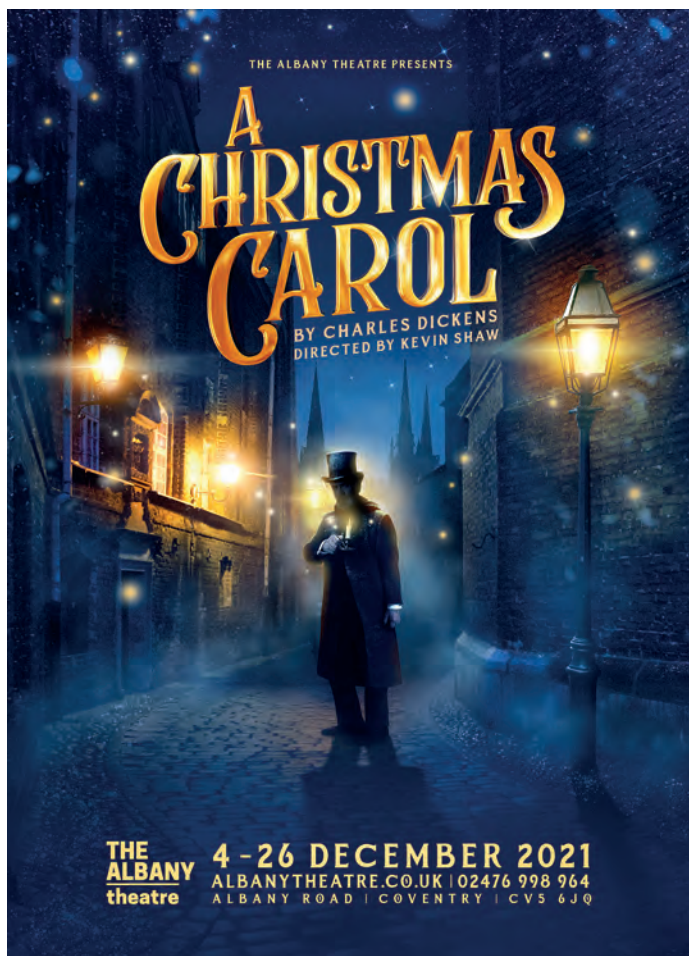
30/3 **Herman's Hermits**



This is not a full list - see website for full listings.

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Theatre for younger audiences...



The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry,
Sat 18 - 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 *Dream Snow*.

The show features no fewer than 75 'lovable puppets'

Stick Man

Symphony Hall, Birmingham,
Sun 26 December - Sun 9 January

Suitable for children aged three-plus and featuring a trio of talented performers, Freckle Productions' 50-minute adaptation of Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler's ever-popular picture book brings together puppetry, songs, live music and 'funky moves'... In a first for Birmingham, all performances will be 'fully relaxed', meaning that families can enjoy watching the show on their own terms, with every reaction being 'embraced, encouraged and welcomed'.



The Mince Pie Mice

Lichfield Garrick, Sat 11 - Fri 24 December

With troublesome Tina Mouse causing plenty of problems on Christmas Eve, Michael Mouse must grit his teeth and find a way to get along with her... An interactive show about being tolerant in the face of provocation - and about making mince pies! - *The Mince Pie Mice* is suitable for children aged between three and six.

Santa's Best Ever Christmas

Tamworth Assembly Rooms, Mon 13
December; Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton-
upon-Trent, Fri 17 December

After scoring a major yuletide hit with previous theatrical offering *Santa's Christmas Cracker*, Honalee Media make a welcome return with another show designed to excite and delight youngsters aged between two and seven. In this one, there seems to be some considerable confusion about exactly what Santa has been up to: Dotty the Elf thinks he's been planning a surprise Christmas party, Pompom the Penguin reckons he's been making Christmas crackers, and Dasher the Reindeer is convinced he's been busy acquiring their biggest-ever Christmas tree... Featured songs to sing along to include *Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer*, *Jingle Bells*, *The Twelve Days Of Christmas* and *We Wish You A Merry Christmas*.

Santa's Magical Mystery Guest

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry,
Thurs 9 - Fri 24 December

If your little one is aged between two and six, this show could well be the ideal way to get their Christmas celebrations under way. When a magic cabinet conjures up a pirate who seems to be lost, it's up to Santa, Ellie and Rudolph to help him find his way home in time for Christmas.

Featuring sackfuls of singalong songs and no small amount of festive cheer, *Santa's Magical Mystery Guest* also provides youngsters with the opportunity to give their Christmas wish-list to the man himself, who in turn will be handing out a present to every child.

A Christmas Hug

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury,
Fri 17 - Fri 24 December

This yuletide yarn is based on Steven Lee's bestselling book, *How The Koala Learnt To Hug*. Set in Australia on Christmas Day, it focuses on grumpy-girl Natascha and her poor old dad, who would dearly love a festive hug from his beloved daughter, even though she's really not interested in providing one. Not to worry, though, because Dad has the perfect cure for a bout of Christmas grumpiness - and it comes in the shape of a magical story and a cuddly koala bear! Presented by the People's Theatre Company, *A Christmas Hug* is suitable for children aged two-plus.



History of panto

“ Panto has everything theatrical - song, dance, verse, slapstick, soliloquy, audience participation, spectacle, cross-dressing and a good plot, strong on morality and romance. What more could you want for a family outing? ”

Sir Ian McKellen



The Christmas season is once again upon us - and in theatres the length and breadth of the country, that can mean only one thing: it's panto time!
But where did this much-loved British tradition originate? And did you know that London's first ever panto productions could last for up to five hours? Grab yourself a quickfire education on the subject of all things pantomime by checking out our fabulous festive file of fascinating facts...

ITALIAN ORIGINS

Nowadays panto is very much a British tradition, but did you know that it originated in Italy back in the 16th century? An early form of professional theatre - Commedia dell'Arte - brought together music, dance acrobatics and mischievous characters. Humorous stories were often performed by a mask-wearing character known as Harlequin, who was joined on stage by companions Scaramouche, Pantaloon, Pierrot and Punch.

CONQUERING THE CONTINENT

Companies showcasing Commedia dell'Arte toured Europe throughout the 17th century. By the early 18th century, similar characters began to appear on the London stage and pantomime started to establish itself as an art form. Growing in popularity throughout the 19th century, the pantos presented in London's larger theatres could last for up to five hours.

CROSS-DRESSING CAPERS

The swapping of roles - girls playing the principal boy and men taking on the part of the pantomime dame - came about in the Victorian era. One of the earliest recorded

accounts took place in 1837, when actor Lucy Vestris donned breeches in a production of Puss In Boots at the Olympic Theatre. The notion of women revealing their shape in front of an audience was very controversial at the time, but by the end of the century it had become the norm for female stars to be cast as the principal boy.

One of the most popular male performers to assume the role of the pantomime dame was Dan Leno (aka George Wild Galvin), who starred as the wicked aunt in Babes In The Wood at Drury Lane in 1888, ahead of playing the Christmas season at the theatre for the next 15 years.

ANIMAL MAGIC

Victorian pantomimes often included the use of live animals, with donkeys a favourite mode of transport for the show's clowns. Actors dressed as animals was another popular addition.

THE WOW! FACTOR

Technology features heavily in most modern-day pantomimes, but did you know that special effects have always played a part in

panto? Trick scenery and trap doors have been creating breathtaking spectacle for centuries, while mechanical contraptions have aided the illusion of flying since the 1800s.

Coloured silk, gauze and glass were often combined to achieve a fog-like effect, whilst large below-stage tanks of water were used to create fountains and waterfalls.

In 1896, hydraulic stage machinery was installed at Drury Lane Theatre, allowing the venue's special effects to become even more spectacular.

A BLOCKBUSTER SHOW

Drury Lane's festive offerings were seen as the creme de la creme of theatre productions in Victorian times, with the venue regularly spending £10,000 on a show.

Sleeping Beauty And The Beast is documented as being the theatre's most lavish presentation. Combining two much-loved fairytales, the production included a number of set changes - designed by Bruce 'Sensation' Smith - and culminated in a spectacular finale featuring a grand staircase and numerous fountains.

Panto Trivia

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Good Fairy always enters from stage right and the evil baddie from stage left
- Elton John played alongside Sir John Gielgud in Mother Goose at a benefit pantomime for the Theatre Museum London in 1984
- Christopher Biggins is regarded as the Grand Dame of All Dames, having appeared in more than 35 pantomimes since making his debut in Dick Whittington in 1965
- Superstition states that it's bad luck to speak the last lines of a pantomime finale

(often rhyming couplets) ahead of opening night

- Aladdin's Widow Twankey was named after Twankey Tea - a cheap Chinese green tea
- Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth played the principal boy in a wartime production of Aladdin at Windsor Castle. Her sister, Princess Margaret, played the Princess of China
- The traditional and ever-popular scene in which a pantomime's characters are covered in gunge or soaked in water is known in the theatrical world as the 'slosh scene'
- Sir Cliff Richard starred as Aladdin alongside Una Stubbs as Princess

Balroubadour at the London Palladium in 1964/65

- The word slapstick originates from the wooden bat used as a prop by the pantomime character Harlequin
- The earliest appearance of Snow White dates back to 1812
- The story of Dick Whittington is based on the life of Sir Richard Whittington (c. 1354-1423), the youngest son of a wealthy Gloucestershire family who, not expecting to inherit any of his father's fortune, moved to London to become a merchant
- Sir Ian McKellen played Widow Twankey in the Old Vic adaptation of Aladdin from 2004 to 2006

Pantoland

If, like us, last year's Covid-caused pantomime 'no show' left you feeling horribly bereft and sadly lacking in festive cheer, you'll be delighted to know that it's very much a case of 'business as usual' this Christmas. Slapstick comedy, adult humour, flying pies, gaudy gear, garish scenery and fervent cries of 'he's behind you!' will all be in plentiful supply at theatres across the region during the course of the next few weeks. So why not check out what's happening where in the following few pages and then bag yourself a ticket or two to Pantoland...

Aladdin

Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, until Sat 11 December; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sat 4 December - Sun 2 January; The Place, Telford, Wed 8 December - Sun 2 January; Prince Of Wales Centre, Cannock, Sat 18 - Tues 28 December

A perfect story for an evening of family entertainment finds street youth Aladdin trying against all odds to win the hand of the beautiful princess - and being helped in his endeavours by the mystical genie of the lamp...

Coronation Street's Tom Roberts, Let It Shine winner Sario Solomon and X-Factor finalist Sam Lavery star in The Place's production, while former EastEnders Mark Homer gets nasty as Abanazar at Cannock's Prince of Wales Centre. But whichever version of the story you catch this Christmas, all the usual pantomime elements - including fabulous Dames, flying pies (and in Aladdin's case, carpets!) and full-blooded calls of 'he's behind you' - are sure to be in plentiful supply.



The Place, Telford



Royal Spa Centre

Beauty And The Beast

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, until Sat 8 January; Swan Theatre, Worcester, Fri 3 December - Sun 2 January

When a young woman is captured by a hideous beast, she finds herself facing a life of isolation in his mysterious palace.

The Beast, too, is trapped - seemingly forever - inside the grotesquery of his physical appearance, the consequence of a spell cast upon him by an evil witch.

Only Beauty's ability to look beyond his ugliness and see the person within can save him...

That's pretty much the story outline of this ever-popular fairytale, which at both of the above-listed venues is being given the pantomime treatment. As usual, the Belgrade's version stars Iain Lauchlan - who's also written the show. And also as usual, he's joined for the occasion by his 'calamitous' sidekick, Craig Hollingsworth.



Dick Whittington

Albany Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 30 December - Sat 8 January

The story of a man who heads for London in search of fame and fortune is one of the most popular of all pantomimes, not least because of the top adventures in which the happy-go-lucky Dick finds himself involved. With Sarah the Cook and King Rat both putting in an appearance, and heady romance with the delightful Alice also on the cards for our ambitious young hero, Dick Whittington is a show that promises to be packed to its festive rafters with action, comedy and fun.

Wolverhampton Grand

Cinderella

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Sat 4 December - Sun 9 January; Sutton Coldfield Town Hall, Tues 7 - Fri 24 December; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 10 December - Sun 2 January; The Core, Solihull, Fri 10 December - Mon 3 January

With its comical Ugly Sisters, matchmaking fairy godmother, drop-dead-gorgeous Prince Charming, super-cute mice and fits-one-foot-only glass slipper, Cinderella can justifiably lay claim to being the most popular of all pantomimes. And there are plenty of productions of the fabulous fairytale to enjoy here in the Midlands this Christmas.

The Wolverhampton Grand's panto features AJ & Curtis Pritchard, CBeebies' Evie Pickerill and Five Star's Denise Pearson.

Meanwhile, up in Stoke, the Regent Theatre's version sees Jonathan Wilkes and Christian Patterson making a welcome return to Potteries Pantoland.

The Core, Solihull

Regent Theatre

Goldilocks And The Three Bears

Birmingham Hippodrome,
Sat 18 December - Sun 30 January

Jason Donovan makes his pantomime debut in this no-expense-spared production of Goldilocks And The Three Bears.

Jason plays the part of the Evil Ringmaster and is joined in the cast by Hippodrome 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."



Jack And The Beanstalk

Palace Theatre, Redditch, Mon 6 December - Sun 2 January

Mark Read of boyband A1 and Andrea Valls from CBeebies' Waffle The Wonder Dog star in this latest version of one of Pantoland's favourite fairytales.

Jack and his mum are hard-up and have no choice but to take their cow to market to raise some much-needed cash. However, Jack being Jack, he decides to trade her in (the cow, that is, not his mum) for a handful of magic beans, which then grow into a real ogre of a beanstalk. And speaking of ogres...



King Arthur The Panto

The Roses, Tewkesbury, until Fri 31 December

The Roses Theatre really is pulling out all the stops with its Christmas show this year, promising a production that's replete with princesses, heroes, villains, dragons, wizards, magic, music, brave knights, foolish jesters, stones and, er, scones!

Set in Medieval Tewkesbury and recounting the story of a humble baker boy who's destined for great things, King Arthur: The Panto has been co-written - along with Nick Wilkes - by BAFTA-winning Birds Of A Feather writer Maurice Gran.

Peter Pan

Lichfield Garrick, until Sun 2 January; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Wed 1 December - Mon 3 January

Fly away to Neverland with the boy who doesn't grow up, meet a real fairy, marvellous mermaids, wonderful Wendy and the down-on-their-luck lost boys. Oh, and beware the ever-so-wicked Captain Hook and a very hungry crocodile who goes tick-tock (he swallowed a clock!).

The Garrick's festive-season version of the JM Barrie classic stars panto favourite Sam Rabone, who's this year taking on the role of Mrs Smee. Sam has also directed the show. Meanwhile, in Shrewsbury, another panto legend, the indomitable Brad Fitt, will once again be getting all Damed-up in the company of his regular panto companion, Eric Smith.



Theatre Severn



Lichfield Garrick

Snow White

Walsall Arena, Fri 10 - Sun 19 December; Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Fri 10 - Fri 31 December

Everybody knows the story - the nasty old queen's less than keen on her younger and more beautiful stepdaughter, who takes refuge from her royal evilness by holing up in the deep, dark forest with a household of vertically challenged miners...

The fact that Snow White is a 24-carat classic of a fairytale means that a pantomime

version is always a surefire winner.

Expect all the usual elements, including rouged-up dames in colourful costumes, plenty of thigh-slapping and slapstick comedy, singalongs aplenty to enjoy, and even a few naughty jokes to make sure the grown-ups in the audience don't feel too left out of things.

Maureen Nolan, West End star Keith Jack and CBeebies favourite Rebecca Keatley star in the Gatehouse version of the show.

Stafford Gatehouse



Tinder- Ella

Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, Wed 1 - Sat 11 December

It's adult panto time at the Blue Orange Theatre, courtesy of a lighthearted show that presents the timeless tale of Cinderella 'like you've never seen it before!'.

Blue Orange is keen to point out that the production will 'almost certainly contain adult jokes, innuendo, silliness, strong language and slutty behaviour'. So if you're of a delicate disposition, it might be best to give the show a miss and head along to the venue's family pantomime version of Aladdin instead!

Glad to be back!

The 'C' word at the forefront of everyone's mind this time last year was undoubtedly *Covid*, so it's great to get back to normal this December and think about *Christmas* instead. And if you 'think Christmas', you pretty quickly think pantomimes too! Thankfully it's very much a case of 'business as usual' in Pantoland this festive season - which means some of our favourite Midlands panto stars are making a welcome return to the stage. And boy are they delighted to be back!...



**Christian Patterson -
Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent**

"I always look forward to panto! I end the year laughing and start the next year laughing too! This year's panto, more than ever before, can't come soon enough! I'm looking forward to seeing rows and rows of smiling faces and being on stage with our glorious cast! It's not so much 'Merry Christmas' for me, it's more like 'Merry panto season!'"



**Matt Slack -
Birmingham Hippodrome**

"The reality of being able to return to live theatre and the Hippodrome is something that I will never again take for granted. The last 18 months has left us all feeling quite numb, but to be back on that stage, looking out at an audience loving the panto once again, is going to make me feel incredible and grateful. It's what we all need!"

**Sam Rabone -
Lichfield Garrick Theatre**

"Finally we're back! It was great to be back at the Garrick, getting stuck in with the cast! We're in for a right treat! I mean, I think we've actually got a real-life pirate playing Hook, which is amazing!"



**Iain Lauchlan -
Belgrade Theatre, Coventry**

"After all we've been through, we need to regroup, re-boot and give our hearts and souls a chance to heal by taking a few hours out of our anxious lives to experience joy, laughter and companionship again. Go to a pantomime this Christmas!"



**Ian Adams -
Wolverhampton Grand Theatre**

"I'm so glad to be back in pantoland - just to be in the rehearsal room with people again, all working together to create magic! We've really missed panto in Wolverhampton, and I know the audiences have too. Cinderella is going to be so special for so many reasons, and we can't wait to perform it and welcome you all back to the Wolverhampton Grand!"



**Jonathan Wilkes -
Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent**

"Panto season is my favourite time of year! What I look forward to the most is returning to my home town of Stoke-on-Trent and knowing that everyone who comes along to see us will have a great time! We have all sorts of hilarious plans to make this panto our best one yet."



Brad Fitt - Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury

"As a nation we've all been through so much over the past couple of years, experiencing new normals such as lockdowns and living under Covid rules, so it's a wonderful feeling to be returning to some kind of normality. It was a strange experience being at home last Christmas (my first in 29 years), and I'm thrilled to be heading back to Shrewsbury for the pantomime season this year. I have a feeling my family are looking forward to me getting out of the house as well!"



The Nutcracker

**Birmingham Royal Ballet's festive favourite
will have a different look this year...**



Midlands audiences are being given an early Christmas present this year - a new Birmingham Royal Ballet adaptation of The Nutcracker.

Diane Parkes caught up with the show's designer, Dick Bird, to find out more...

Created in 1990, Sir Peter Wright's Nutcracker sets are currently undergoing a major renovation, but Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB) were determined to ensure Midlands audiences could still enjoy their festive favourite. So the show has been specially updated from Sir David Bintley and BRB's 2017 Royal Albert Hall production.

Internationally renowned designer Dick Bird created the London adaptation and is making another set of changes for Birmingham.

"The usual Nutcracker at the Hippodrome, the John Macfarlane and Sir Peter Wright production, is about the most beautiful Nutcracker I have ever seen," says Dick. "The sense of magic and beauty and transformation for a proscenium stage, where the audience sits at one end and looks through a picture frame into another world, is just exquisite.

"Our challenge for the Royal Albert Hall was to make this beautiful, magical, delicate ballet work in another way in this extraordinary bowl space, while trying to remain faithful to the sense of wonder. So for example, at the Royal Albert Hall there isn't an orchestra pit, so we had to think of where to put the orchestra. I'm the kind of person who loves seeing a band, and when it's a band of that many people I love it even more - so putting the orchestra very much on view was part of it. The orchestra is above the stage."

Dick and the team were determined that audiences would really connect with The Nutcracker story and its characters: "For me, the most beautiful element of watching Birmingham Royal Ballet's original is the way that the audience is brought into Clara's experience of everything changing at midnight - when she suddenly finds herself the same size as the mice and the rats, and all these toys she's been playing with are suddenly people she's dancing with.

"The beauty of John Macfarlane's design is that the tree kind of grows and comes in from all aspects of the stage, from above and below, so you suddenly see Clara in among the branches and you really feel her experience emotionally. The challenge we set ourselves was to try and be true to that feeling but in another venue."

The Royal Albert Hall production features a host of new elements, including giant

baubles hanging above the heads of the audience, a wall of mirrors reflecting back onto the stage and some amazing digital images created by 59 Production.

"It was a massive challenge to adapt The Nutcracker for the Albert Hall but I'm amazed at how well it works. It's a different experience but a very participative one."

With the Hippodrome and the Royal Albert Hall being such different spaces, the team have adapted the show again for Birmingham.

"It's been a huge amount of work because the last thing you want to do is say that we have this production which works in the Albert Hall, now let's just put it in the Hippodrome. That's not been the case at all. I've been working on this since January, in case Covid restrictions meant we had to have a show that would allow for backstage social distancing. We've made multiple models and designed multiple new pieces of scenery. We've looked at each set element of each moment and wondered how we can make that experience still as engaging for a proscenium audience.

"What we have done is yet again gone back to the fundamentals and asked ourselves what it is about John Macfarlane's set and design that we love. And again, it's that sense of engagement for the audience. So our first principle is to try and bring this spectacle beyond the proscenium into the auditorium.

"Like at the Albert Hall, our platform with the orchestra is on top, and it's beautiful seeing the orchestra not in the pit. We also have our mirrors, and we've built more scenery so there are further reflections going down the stage.

"And then with the projection created by 59 Productions, our aim is to reach out from the proscenium into the auditorium, so that once again that sense of the magic of being under the Christmas tree is produced around the audience as well as in front of them."

The production begins with the voice of actor Simon Callow setting the scene. The audience is then taken into Drosselmeyer's toy shop and the Stahlbaums' Christmas Eve. This transforms into a magical midnight world in which King Rat battles the Nutcracker doll and Clara is carried away to a

winter wonderland peopled with a host of colourful characters, including the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Prince.

Dick, who has worked for companies across the globe, including New York's Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House, the National Ballet of Japan and Comédie Française, is keen not to reveal all but says audiences will be in for a treat: "There will be some lovely surprises for people and some moments where we can be really spectacular but in a slightly different way from the original.

"My background is site-specific theatre, so I had none of the preconceptions of theatre spaces. So rather than you just turning up, sitting down and having it all done in front of you, instead you have things done which surprise you and make you think differently about what you're watching and how you're watching it."

Dick is keen for audiences to see the similarities but also the differences between the Birmingham Royal Ballet Nutcracker they are familiar with and this 2021 adaptation: "I would love audiences this year to say they've seen it differently. Maybe the choreography is more apparent because it's in a more open setting, or maybe the understanding of Clara's experience is different for us because we've felt it a bit more from inside.

"I really hope audiences will love it - and that it will also encourage them to go back and see the original one when it returns. They can then compare the two and their experiences of the two."



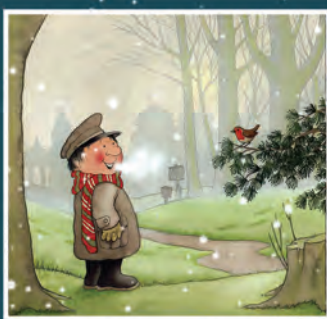
BRB's The Nutcracker shows at Birmingham Hippodrome until Sat 11 December



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Films released in December...



West Side Story

CERT tbc (156 mins)

Starring Ansel Elgort, Rachel Zelger, Ariana DeBose, David Alvarez, Mike Faist, Rita Monero Directed by Steven Spielberg

Releasing a remake of a classic movie is always a gamble, particularly one as widely revered as *West Side Story*.

The 1961 film adaptation of the 1957 stage musical is considered to be one of Hollywood's greatest-ever motion pictures, so this 2021 offering had better make sure it's wearing its very finest dancing shoes. And with no less a luminary than Steven Spielberg helming the project, there's every chance it will be doing exactly that. The legendary score by Bernstein & Sondheim features a host of unforgettable numbers, including *Somewhere*, *Tonight*, *America*, *Maria*, *Gee Officer Krupke!*, *I Feel Pretty*, *One Hand* and *Something's Coming*.

Released Fri 10 December

Boxing Day

CERT tbc

Starring Aml Ameen, Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Claire Skinner, Aja Naomi King, Tamara Lawrence, Leigh-Anne Pinnock
Directed by Aml Ameen

Where would we be without a romantic comedy for Christmas?

This new entry from writer, director and star Aml Ameen finds US-based British author Melvin heading for home to celebrate Christmas with his eccentric British-Caribbean family. And he's taking his American fiancée with him, too. But the course of true love never runs smooth - particularly when you come from a family like Melvin's...

A British cinema first - a Christmas romcom led by an all-Black cast - *Boxing Day* unashamedly borrows from Richard Curtis' movies - although Ameen has very sensibly stopped short of describing his film as a Black version of *Love Actually*.

Released Fri 3 December



Lamb

CERT 15 (107 mins)

Starring Noomi Rapace, Hilmir Snær Guðnason, Björn Hlynur Haraldsson, Ingvar Sigurdsson, Ester Bibi
Directed by Valdimar Jóhannsson



If ever there was a film to remind us that we mess with Mother Nature at our peril, *Lamb* is surely it. Disquieting in the extreme, it focuses on María and Ingvar, a childless farming couple in rural Iceland who discover that one of their sheep has given birth to a lamb. But this lamb is no ordinary lamb, and María and Ingvar decide to bring it up in a far from ordinary way...

Lamb is a sparse but absorbing horror-fantasy that comes complete with a clever twist. It certainly won't be to everybody's taste - María and Ingvar don't even speak for the first 10 minutes - but give it a few years and the movie will almost certainly have attracted a loyal cult following.

Released Fri 3 December

Spider-Man: No Way Home

CERT tbc

Starring Tom Holland, Zendaya, Benedict Cumberbatch, Marisa Tomei, Jon Favreau
Directed by Jon Watts

Having been exposed as Spider-Man at the end of 2019's *Far From Home*, teenager Peter Parker asks Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) to help restore his secret identity using magic.

But all does not go according to plan: the Multiverse splits open, and Spider-Man soon finds himself battling against some seriously sinister supervillains from alternate realities...

British actor Tom Holland dons the Spidey spandex for a sixth time to play everybody's favourite webslinging wall-crawler. He's joined in the cast by Jamie Foxx and Alfred Molina, returning as Electro and Doctor Octopus respectively. The film is the 27th entry in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Released Fri 17 December



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Films released in December...

Clifford The Big Red Dog

CERT U (96 mins)

Starring **Darby Camp, Jack Whitehall, Izaac Wang, John Cleese, Sienna Guillory, Tony Hale**
Directed by **Walt Becker**

Temporarily left in the care of her immature uncle (played by Britain's very own Jack Whitehall), badly bullied middle schooler Emily-Elizabeth Howard is introduced to a small red puppy by a man who runs an animal-rescue tent at a carnival.

By the following morning, the puppy is a staggering 10 feet tall - and the stage is well and truly set for some seriously outsized adventures...

Based on the canine character created by cartoonist Norman Bridwell, Clifford The Big Red Dog is a sweet but ultimately unremarkable movie that encourages youngsters to, er, paws fur thought on the subjects of teamwork, the class system and isolation. It isn't a mutt-see movie by any means, and you wouldn't be barking mad to miss it, but as pleasant family outings to the cinema go, it's definitely worth the three stars that most reviews have given it.

Released Fri 10 December



The Matrix Resurrections

CERT 15 (148 mins)

Starring **Keanu Reeves, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Christina Ricci, Carrie-Anne Moss, Jessica Henwick, Jonathan Groff**
Directed by **Lana Wachowski**



Why let a couple of storyline deaths get in the way of popular characters making a welcome return? That certainly seems to be the philosophy adopted by the production team behind this latest entry in the Matrix franchise, with Keanu Reeves's Neo and Carrie-Anne Moss's Trinity very much back in the saddle, despite both having met their demise at the end of The Matrix Revolutions. It's 20 years after the events of the last film, and Neo is living a seemingly ordinary life in San Francisco. But then Morpheus offers him the red pill and reopens his mind to the world of the Matrix...

Released Wed 22 December

The King's Man CERT 12a

Starring **Ralph Fiennes, Gemma Arterton, Rhys Ifans, Harris Dickson, Djimon Hounsou, Matthew Goode** Directed by **Matthew Vaughn**

As a collection of history's worst tyrants and criminal masterminds gather together to plot a war that will wipe out millions, one man and his protégé must race against time to stop them... This third instalment in the hugely popular Kingsman film series is a prequel to 2014's Kingsman: The Secret Service and 2017's Kingsman: The Golden Circle.

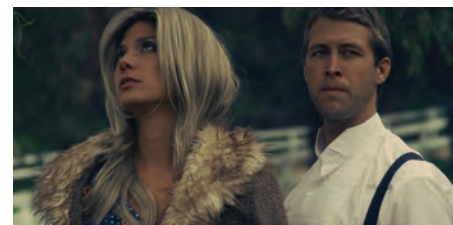
The movies are all inspired by Mark Millar and Dave Gibbons' much-loved comic book, The Secret Service.

Released Wed 22 December



Malibu Road CERT tbc (105 mins)

Starring **Jessica Jade Andres, Rachel Noll James, Benita Robledo, Ryan Caldwell, Emilia Bogdanova, Hunter Smit**
Directed by **Montgomery Markland**



When a UCLA professor and a student ingest LSD, they become two of the first Americans ever to go on a psychedelic experience. But their trip soon takes a deadly turn, leaving them facing the very real prospect of being trapped in an endless cycle of sex, drugs and murder...

Based on true events, Malibu Road examines the Central Intelligence Agency's Operation Midnight Climax initiative. The project formed part of MKUltra, a long-running programme which the CIA coordinated with the intention of finding a mind-control drug that could be weaponised against the forces of Communism.

Released Fri 31 December

Visual Arts previews from around the region



Packing A Punch: British Graphic Satire And Caricature

The Barber Institute of Fine Art, University of Birmingham, until Sun 16 January

In common with pretty much any Shakespeare comedy you care to name, this fascinating exhibition ably proves the point that humour doesn't always transcend the centuries and generations.

The display focuses on prints and drawings created in Britain during the 18th and 19th centuries, exploring the variety, confines and crossovers of caricature, satire and cartoons.



Image credit: In Wei Kiu, A Dream of Wholeness in Parts (2021) © the artist. Courtesy the artist, Chi-Wen Gallery, Taipei and Soft Opening, London. Produced by Chi-Wen Productions.

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Coventry Biennial 2021: Hyper-Possible

Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, until Sun 6 February

The third Coventry Biennial is currently taking place in seven exhibition venues across Coventry & Warwickshire. The show's aim, explains its artistic director, Ryan Hughes, is to highlight the fact that social, political and critical art in Coventry 'is, has been and always will be hyper-possible'.

Speaking about the exhibition at the Herbert, Ryan says: "The venue has always performed a vital role for the city's visual art sector, and it's a pleasure to

continue our longstanding relationship with the gallery and its team. Our exhibition in the galleries and public spaces around the building bring together artworks from national collections with newly commissioned and co-created projects that explore a range of urgent ideas. "We also hope that the Biennial will act as a way for people to reconnect with each other following the painful months of 2020 and 2021."

John Nash: The Landscape Of Love And Solace

Compton Verney, Warwickshire, until 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.



Yasmin David: Into The Light

New Art Gallery, Walsall, until Spring 2022

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

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

"Her paintings are dramatic, emotional and often turbulent," wrote her son, Julian, soon after her death, "conveying the drama in the landscape as she saw it, and perhaps resonating human dramas within them. Her preoccupation was with the huge polarities of light and dark, the sky and the land, and inner and outer states of being. "She tried to capture the molten, ever-changing quality of nature. Her paintings are forceful expressions of landscape in a constant state of flux, of becoming."



Betsy Bradley: Chasing Rainbows

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, Fri 3 December - Sun 13 February

"I see my work as an invitation to the present moment," says Midlands-based artist Betsy Bradley, who is here presenting her first major solo exhibition. "It's an escape as well as a grounding, which enables the viewer to let go." Betsy further describes her vivid, gestural works - using bright flashes of neon acrylic paint which glow on translucent

fabrics - as a life force that traces the dance between thought and action. "My practice is concerned with creating a direct experience with the viewer; I consider gesture in my painting not as subjective expression but as objective direct action on a surface, communicating spontaneity and providing an escape from thought into the present moment."



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It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...



L.O.L. Surprise! Live VIP Party

Utilita Arena, Birmingham,
Sun 26 - Tues 28 December

Mallory is getting ready for a VIP party - but she's struggling to find an outfit. What's a girl to do in such a dire circumstance but turn to the L.O.L. Surprise! characters for some much-needed style advice...

The hugely popular L.O.L. Surprise! dolls are brought to life in this brand-new immersive concert show. Incorporating holograms, music, singing and dancing, the production combines 'the vibes of a club, concert and dance party with Instagrammable sets, flawless costumes and elaborate dance moves'. The dolls have become a global phenomenon in recent years, with numerous celebrities, including Kim Kardashian, known to collect them.



Winter Funland

NEC, Birmingham,
Thurs 9 December - Sun 2 January

Officially the UK's largest indoor funfair, Winter Funland comes complete with plenty of festive-season attractions to keep visitors of all ages happy and entertained. Families and friends alike can enjoy unlimited

funfair rides, a gigantic ice rink and a festival circus - all of which are included in the ticket price. The funfair also features a festive food & drink market, mischievous elves popping up all over the place, and a not-to-be-missed opportunity to say hello to Father Christmas himself in Santa's Grotto.

Santa's Grotto Experience

National Sea Life Centre,
Birmingham, until Fri 24 December

Young festive-season visitors to the Sea Life Centre can check out over 2,000 creatures (including sharks, gentoo penguins and the UK's first and only sea otters) before entering a glittering grotto where Santa and his elves will meet & greet them (not to mention hand them a gift to take home and enjoy!). If you'd prefer your children's encounter with St Nicholas to be *seriously* socially distanced, the venue's 'virtual Santa meet & greet' option on Zoom can be experienced from the comfort of your own home.



An Enchanted Christmas

Black Country Living Museum,
Dudley, Sat 11 & Sun 12 and Sat 18
& Sun 19 December

Santa and his elves are getting ready for the big day. The presents are being wrapped, the Christmas trees are being planted and the Sugarplum Fairies are busy making treats. But mischief is afoot - the Rat King and his army are trying to ruin Christmas! Santa has called in the Nutcracker General and his friends to keep the Rat King and his pesky partners at bay - but they could really do with some extra help. Which is where your Christmas-loving youngsters could well come in...





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It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...



Christmas At The Castle

Warwick Castle, until Mon 3 January

Warwick Castle's yuletide makeover includes the welcome return of the venue's renowned 20ft-high Christmas tree.

Santa and his merry elves are on-site too, taking up residency inside the castle and sharing stories of festive cheer with the children who come to

visit them.

The venue's ever-popular colourful light trail and open-air ice rink also return to the castle grounds.

Visitors can take a well-earned break from the action in the Conservatory Tea House, where yuletide treats and Christmas afternoon tea await them...



Visit Santa! Vintage Sleigh Ride & Winter Wonderland

Coventry Transport Museum, Sat 4 - Thurs 23 December

The Vintage Sleigh Ride experience returns to Coventry Transport Museum this month. Wander through a magical winter wonderland of festive activities and snowy scenes before taking a ride on an enchanting vintage sleigh pulled by two trusty reindeer. Your next stop? Lapland. Meet Santa, tell him your Christmas wishes and collect a special gift. The Vintage Sleigh Ride & Winter Wonderland includes museum admission tickets for the day of your visit.

Christmas in Cathedral Square

Cathedral Square, Colmore Row, Birmingham, until Sun 19 December

If you're stumped for gift ideas this Christmas, Birmingham's Cathedral Square may well be the place to head for. Local businesses have set up shop to showcase their selection of products. Participating companies include Beyond Skin, Burning Barn Rum, Cielo Pottery, Funny Brummie Pictures, Glassy Silver, IKIGAI, Indian Gypsy, Let It Bee and Woody Things. Meanwhile, some of the city's finest food & drink venues - including Hookways, Loki Wine, Miss Macaroon and Pineapple Club - will be taking up residency in Christmas chalets. There's live entertainment to enjoy too, as well as a traditional helter-skelter.



Santa's Magical Woodland Grotto

Compton Verney, Warwickshire, Fri 3 - Thurs 23 December

Families are here invited to visit Santa's grotto via a magical woodland trail festooned with firefly fairy lights.

The sounds and smells of the festive season - including crackling fires and gingerbread baking - are much in evidence along the trail.

Children can also post their letters to Santa and take away a special gift to open on the big day.



Steam In Lights

Severn Valley Railway, Selected dates until Thurs 23 December

Severn Valley Railway's Steam In Lights adventure begins at Bridgnorth station, where families are treated to a live festive show, after which an illuminated train will arrive to pick them up. Jump aboard, settle down in a private compartment, and enjoy on-board narration and music as the train journeys through a selection of bright and bold light displays.



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It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...



A Victorian Christmas

Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge,
Selected dates until Mon 3 January

Celebrate Christmas in traditional fashion with the Victorian residents of Blists Hill. Wander around the town's cottages, enjoy

fireside chats with the villagers and listen to tales of how they're preparing for the big day. Don a pair of skates and take to the ice on the town's rink, or tuck into some seasonal favourites (like mulled wine and mince pies) from the town's bakery.

Christmas at Aston Hall

Aston Hall, Birmingham,
Various dates from Wed 1 December

Aston's 17th-century mansion will be decked in baubles and fairy lights as it welcomes visitors in the lead-up to Christmas.

On the 5th, 11th & 12th of December, the hall is hosting a festive handmade craft market. Costumed characters will be celebrating Christmas throughout the mansion, providing an insight into the sights and sounds of Aston Hall's festive season in years gone by. Meanwhile, Father Christmas meets and greets families at the venue on the 17th and 19th of December - so be sure your youngsters have got their Christmas wish lists sorted!



Santa Safari

West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley,
until Fri 24 December

West Midland Safari Park's Santa Safari is back! The four-mile drive-through experience provides families with the chance to check out some of the venue's wild animals. At the end of the safari, visitors can head on over to the Discovery Trail, to meet one of Santa's helpful elves. From there, it's on to the Christmas grotto, to say a big festive hello to the white-bearded one himself. Youngsters can take the opportunity to grab a picture with Santa and select a present from the elves' workshop. Mrs Claus will be on hand too, offering refreshments in her kitchen. An opportunity to sample a fully immersive virtual reality sleigh ride further adds to the festive fun.

Worcester Victorian Christmas Fayre

Worcester City Centre,
Thurs 2 - Sun 5 December

Next year celebrating its 30th anniversary, the Victorian Christmas Fayre has become one of Worcester's highlight events, with 200 stalls selling local arts & crafts, novelty gifts and a wide selection of food & drink.

Victorian characters wander the streets - providing an insight into how the festive season may have looked 150 years ago - and there's a carousel and funfair to enjoy, too. Live music, traditional carols and talented street buskers provide the event with a seasonal soundtrack.

Santa's Winter Wonderland

SnowDome, Tamworth,
until Fri 31 December

This year's all-new Santa Show sees the white-bearded one facing a dilemma, as he realises Rudolph has been taking Christmas for granted. In a bid to re-focus and educate the red-nosed reindeer, Santa takes him on a trip through time to discover where modern-day Christmas traditions came from... Suitable for all age groups, the show is just one element of the festive fun on offer at Tamworth's snowy indoor attraction this festive season.

Visitors can also explore Santa's Christmas snow trail, take a walk through an enchanted forest, enjoy a game of snowballs, hitch a ride on a sledge, meet Father Christmas' furry friends and check out the traditional children's carousel.





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It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...



Ice Skate Birmingham

Centenary Square, Birmingham,
until Sun 9 January

Two of the city's most popular Christmas attractions - Ice Skate Birmingham and the Big Wheel - are once again proving to be a big hit in Centenary Square.

While the wheel offers the opportunity to enjoy fantastic views across the city, the weather-

proofed ice rink accommodates up to 300 people per session, making it the city's largest ice rink. Younger or inexperienced skating enthusiasts can keep upright by using special penguin skating aids.

And when skaters have finished their Torvill & Dean routine, they can warm themselves up with some festive fare in the nearby Ice Lounge and double deck rooftop bar.



Enchanted Weston

Weston Park, Shifnal, Telford,
Thurs 9 - Sun 12, Thurs 16 - Thurs 23 December

Enchanted Weston is a colourful, illuminated winter walk through Temple Wood, 'bringing the

park's towering trees, landmarks and some hidden surprises into a wash of light and colour'. Visitors are welcome to enjoy something to eat and drink in the Stables Courtyard before or after their walk. Live music and marshmallow toasting around the fire pits also features.

Luminate Coombe

Coombe Abbey Country Park,
Warwickshire, until Fri 24 December

Described as 'a timeless experience to be enjoyed by all, young and old alike', Luminate Coombe takes visitors along a mile-long trail comprising 'stunning lighting elements and fabulous light play, all set to ambient music'.



Alderford Santa Experience

Alderford Lake, Whitchurch,
Shropshire,
until Thurs 23 December

Families are this Christmas being invited to embark on 'a magical boat journey' along Alderford Lake to find Santa Claus.

The boat trip will show off an impressive light display before terminating at the central island, where Buddy the Elf and his friends will be waiting to greet the new arrivals.

Gather inside a cozy tipi to hear Buddy's 'enchanted story of how their adventure began', before being guided through the magical wonderland to Santa's Grotto, where Santa himself will be waiting to hear everyone's Christmas wishes.





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Friday 11 March (7.30pm)

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Saturday 12 March (8pm)

JUKEBOX & BOBBY SOX
Sunday 13 March (2.30pm)

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Thursday 24 March (7.30pm)

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COMING UP IN 2022...		
JANUARY	Saturday 8th	Global Reggae Band
	Friday 14th	Martin Simpson
	Wednesday 19th	Jazz at The Cathedral Hotel TBA
FEBRUARY	Saturday 12th	Kyla Broxx
	Wednesday 16th	Jazz at The Cathedral Hotel Mark Lockheart
MARCH	Friday 11th	Introducing Night
	Wednesday 16th	Jazz at The Cathedral Hotel TBA
APRIL	Saturday 9th	Gordon Giltrap
	Wednesday 20th	Jazz at The Cathedral Hotel TBA
JUNE	Fri 10th - Sun 12th	BLUES & JAZZ FESTIVAL
JULY	Fri 8th - Sun 10th	FUSE FESTIVAL
OCTOBER	Fri 14th - Sun 16th	L2F - LICHFIELD FESTIVAL OF FOLK

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It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...



Coventry Glides

Coventry Cathedral, until Sun 9 January

Coventry Glides proved to be one of the highlights of last winter, with over 15,000 skaters

taking to the ice.

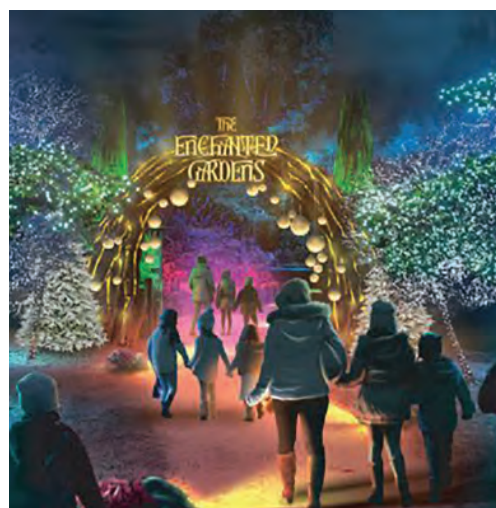
This 'magical winter wonderland experience' takes place in the historic setting of Coventry Cathedral and is open seven days a week.

Winter Glow

Three Counties Showground, Malvern, until Sun 9 January

This brand-new festive event features daily twilight experiences and night-time entertainment. Attractions include one of the region's largest real ice rinks, an illuminated light trail designed and created by local artists, and a giant 120ft observation wheel.

Families can also enjoy a special trip to see Santa on the Arctic Express land train.



The Enchanted Gardens

Webbs, Wychbold, until Sun 2 January

Christmas visitors to Webbs will find themselves immersed in a fairytale world as they make their way through a landscape of twinkling lights and lanterns en route to the snowy north pole and a meeting with Santa Claus.

With the gardens lit up in jewel-like colours and fairy lights, guests can wander through four zoned areas, each of which is themed around a classic fairytale - Thumbelina, The Gingerbread Man, Hansel & Gretel and Jack And The Beanstalk. The route is designed with families in mind and should take around 45 minutes to an hour to complete.

Festoon-lit tipi tents provide visitors with the chance to kick back and refuel.

Christmas At The Castle

Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire, Sat 4 & Sun 5 December

As well as seeing the castle decked in all its festive glory, visitors to this weekend-long event can also meet Father Christmas, see Mrs Christmas going about her festive chores, and enjoy balloon modelling and juggling with Joey the Juggler and Looby Lou. Children will also have the opportunity to write a letter to Father Christmas in the Victorian School Room and post it to the North Pole.



Himley's Magical Christmas Portal

Himley Hall, Dudley, Thurs 16 - Sun 19 December

Set in the courtyard and grounds of Himley Hall, the Magical Christmas Portal offers families the chance to spend an action-packed evening in the company of Father Christmas and the Ghost of Christmas Past.

The evening starts with a welcoming mug of hot chocolate in the Christmas marquee, after which visitors can learn all about the hall and then speak to Father Christmas as he interacts with the crowd via a giant screen.

The chance to sample festive fare at a food market, have some fun at a vintage fairground, and meet Father Christmas' helpful elves - who will be handing out gifts - further adds to this brand-new event's considerable appeal.

PTA

From Boyband A1
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From CBeebie's Waffle the Wonder Dog
ANDREA VALLS

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SIMON HOWE

Jack and the Beanstalk

Director PETER DAYSON • Choreographer PIPPA HOLLIDAY • Musical Director SAM DANDO

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Electrifying eighties New Romantic symphony
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THE WHO STORY

The world's number one tribute to The Who
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THE RAT PACK & MARILYN

Christmas-themed matinee variety show
Tuesday 14 December



ANDRÉ RIEU

'Christmas with André' cinema screening
Friday 17 December



CHRISTMAS FILMS

Festive classics on the Stourbridge big screen
Friday 17 to Monday 20 December



THE ELO SHOW

The world's greatest tribute to Jeff Lynne and ELO
Saturday 5 February



THE OPERA BOYS

'A Night at The Musicals' show
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Dudley Borough Halls

Dudley Town Hall - Stourbridge Town Hall - Halesowen Cornbow Hall

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...



Tamworth Castle Christmas Experience

Tamworth Castle, Staffordshire, Sat 11 & Sun 12 and Sat 18 & Sun 19 December

There's a brand-new Christmas experience to enjoy at Tamworth Castle this year.

The castle will be decked out ready for the festive season, with a yuletide trail winding its way through the period rooms.

Santa and his elves are setting up camp in the Great Hall, where there will also be a festive performance to enjoy. Children on the 'good' list can expect to receive a Christmas gift.



Christmas at Alton Towers

Alton Towers, Staffordshire, until Sun 2 January

The magic of Christmas returns to Alton Towers this month, with visiting families able to meet Father Christmas, enjoy favourite rides and check out two brand-new attractions...

The popular theme park is this year hosting its first-ever Lightopia Seasonal Wonderland, an immersive walk-through adventure boasting light installations, lanterns and colour transformations through the four seasons. Also new for 2021 is a Christmas market, featuring more than 60 stalls and plenty of live music to put shoppers in the festive spirit.

Magical Light Trail

Trentham Gardens, Staffordshire, Fri 26 November - Sat 9 January

This brand-new trail features 15 different displays, presenting Trentham's historic landscape in a whole new light. Surprises are promised at every corner, with a specially composed soundtrack enhancing the impact of each installation.

The festive adventure begins at a magical fairylight-illuminated bridge, which leads trail followers to the Rivers of Grass - an installation featuring thousands of lights adorning the branches of trees. Other highlights include: illuminated origami boats atop Trentham's mile-long lake; a giant tree festooned with kinetic pulsing strings; and a 'secret' three-dimensional laser garden.

A traditional Christmas market - with mince pies, mulled wine and marshmallows on the menu - provides the perfect opportunity to enjoy an en-route refuel.



Winter Wonderland

Lichfield Street, Hanley, until Sun 2 January

Returning for a fifth year, Hanley's Winter Wonderland features a real undercover ice rink, a Santa's grotto, three rollercoasters, a 60m sky swing, a selection of family entertainment, a fully licensed Bavarian bar and a range of festive cuisine. For those who're looking for *non-stop* fun, there's the option of purchasing a wristband to access unlimited skating and rides.

Follies Safari

Hawkstone Park, Weston-under-Redcastle, North Shropshire, Fri 3 - Thurs 23 December

Jump aboard Hawkstone's Land Rover and journey through the site's illuminated woodland.

Then meander through the fairy-lit caverns and tunnels until you reach the hillside grotto - the festive home of Father Christmas - where you will be greeted by one of his elves before receiving a special gift from the man himself.



A Fairytale Christmas

Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust, Dudley, Fri 3 - Sun 5, Fri 10 - Sun 12 & Fri 17 - Thurs 23 December

Little Red Riding Hood has wandered through the forest into a magical fairytale kingdom. But all is not well, as the Big Bad Wolf has decided he wants to keep all the presents for himself...

Jump on board a Christmas boat, sail deep into the illuminated tunnels and caverns, and help Little Red Riding Hood find the wolf's footprints and track down the stolen presents.

New for 2021, Santa and his elves will be back on dry land in the Christmas Workshop, waiting with a gift for every child.

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DECEMBER

THE SNOW QUEEN

Tuesday 7 December • 7.30pm • £18.00

THE MAGIC OF MOTOWN

Wednesday 8 December • 7.30pm • £27.50

QUILL

Friday 10 December • 7.30pm • £20.00

THE ROY ORBISON STORY

Saturday 11 December • 7.30pm • £24.00

ALADDIN

Selected dates from Saturday 18 December -

Tuesday 28 December • 2pm & 6.30pm • £19.00



JANUARY

McCartNEY

Friday 7 January • 7.30pm • £25.00

LITTLE RED RIDING

Friday 28 January • 7.30pm • £17.00



FEBRUARY

BEN THOMPSON AS ELVIS

Sunday 6 February • 7.30pm • £23.00

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This Christmas...

Much of the fun at this most magical time of year comes from the events and activities we enjoy in the lead-up to the big day itself: laughter and merriment at your favourite panto; the thrill of seeing your youngsters' faces light up when they visit Santa; a festive tippie with friends at a Christmas market maybe.

Below is a list of just some of the events taking place across the region in the run-up to Christmas. Check them out, decide what to attend, and then get yourself out there and make some memories!

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, until Sat 11 Dec, Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham

PETER PAN Swashbuckling adventure featuring Sam Rabone, until Sun 2 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

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

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

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

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK Starring A1's Mark Read as Jack, CBeebies' star Andrea Valls as Princess Jess, Simon Howe as Dame Trott, comedy magician Jay Rawlings as Simon Trott & Janine Pardo as the Spirit of the Beans, Mon 6 Dec - Sun 2 Jan, Palace Theatre, Redditch

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

PETER PAN Featuring Emmerdale star

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kids Shows

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

ONE SNOWY NIGHT Meet fox, badger,

hedgehog and friends in this stage adaptation of Nick Butterworth's heart-warming story, until Tues 28 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), 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

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

MISCHIEF & MYSTERY IN MOOMINVALLEY 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

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

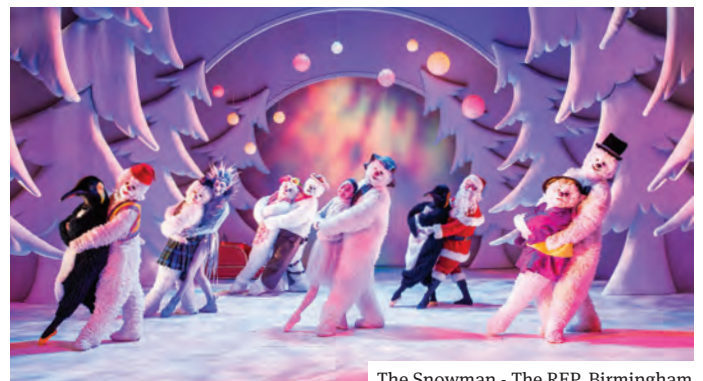
DEAR SANTA Based on Rod Campbell's much-loved children's book of the same name, this festive family favourite is perfect for younger audiences with its running time of 55 minutes, Wed 15 - Fri 24 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome

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



The Snowman - The REP, Birmingham

Something Different

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

THE MAGICIAN'S ELEPHANT New family musical adapted from Kate DiCamillo's prize-winning novel, until Sat 1 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon



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, until Sat 1 Jan, The REP, Birmingham

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

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

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

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

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

A CHRISTMAS CAROL David Bradley stars in Simon Callow's acclaimed

one-man adaptation of the classic Christmas tale, Mon 13 - Thurs 23 Dec, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

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

BARBARA NICE'S CHRISTMAS CAROL Kings Heath's most famous housewife returns by popular demand for her much-loved festive show, Fri 17 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

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

THE SNOWMAN Large-scale screening accompanied by live orchestra, Thurs 23 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

Concerts

KATE RUSBY AT CHRISTMAS Sat 4 Dec, Malvern Theatres

BIRMINGHAM BACH CHOIR: O CLAP YOUR HANDS Includes the premiere of David Bednall's Dear Bargain, alongside works by Vaughan Williams, Dvorak & Britten, Sat 4 Dec, St Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham

ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN: THE TWELVE TALES OF CHRISTMAS OOS join forces with vocal quintet Papagena to present a blend of music and words featuring excerpts from TS Eliot, Charles Dickens, CS Lewis & Dylan Thomas, Tues 7 Dec, Stratford Playhouse, Stratford-upon-Avon; Wed 8 Dec, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

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

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THE SIXTEEN Deck the Hall with boughs of holly as one of the world's most renowned choirs performs traditional Christmas classics, Wed 8 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

ARMONICO CONSORT: HANDEL'S MESSIAH Wed 8 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry; Thurs 23 Dec, Malvern Theatres

THE RAT PACK AT CHRISTMAS Featuring festive classics White Christmas, Baby It's Cold Outside and Let It Snow... Fri 10 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM CHOIR: MESSIAH Join the choir in its centenary year as it presents Handel's electrifying choral work, Fri 10 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT CONCERT Music and readings old and new reflect on the meaning of Christmas and fill you with festive cheer! Sat 11 Dec, Lichfield Cathedral

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

G4 AT CHRISTMAS Featuring festive classics When A Child Is Born, Silent Night and All I Want For Christmas... Thurs 16 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

VIENNESE CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT Performed by London Concertante and featuring works by Strauss & Brahms, Fri 17 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

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

COME AND SING AT CHRISTMAS WITH JOHN RUTTER Armonico Consort present a festive vocal workshop led by one of the greatest composers and arrangers of Christmas music, Sat 18 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

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

CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT Concert of carols and seasonal classics, staged in full 18th-century costume and in a candlelit setting. Actor Mark Williams provides readings, Sat 18 - Fri 24 Dec, Symphony Hall, 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

BIRMINGHAM BACH CHOIR: SERVICE OF NINE LESSONS & CAROLS Traditional Christmas service, Sun 19 Dec, St Albans Church, Birmingham

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

BIRMINGHAM PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA: A WINTER FESTIVAL Featuring works by Sibelius, Rimsky-Korsakov & Tchaikovsky, Sun 19 Dec, Elgar Concert Hall, University of Birmingham

CHRISTMAS CAROL SINGALONG Presented by the London Concert Orchestra. Featuring Louise Dearman as guest singer and Jonathan Cohen as presenter, Thurs 23 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

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

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

Festive Markets

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

CITY SOCIAL Food, drink & beats next to The Mailbox, until Thurs 18 Dec, Suffolk Underpass, Birmingham

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

FRANKFURT CHRISTMAS MARKET Now in its 21st year and featuring an array of festive German delights - hot

gluhwein, schnitzel and spicy sausage, until Thurs 23 Dec, Victoria 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 until Thurs 23 Dec, Alton Towers, Staffs

LEEK TWILIGHT MARKET Featuring live music, street food & Christmas gifts, Fri 3 Dec, Leek Indoor Market

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

Festive Events

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

THE ENCHANTED EXPRESS A brand new Christmas experience featuring festive story, music and visit from Santa, various dates until Sun 19

Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Kidderminster

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 until Thurs 23 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Kidderminster

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

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 until Thurs 23 Dec, Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron and Ingenuity, Ironbridge, Shropshire

CHRISTMAS GROTTO AT WEBBS Wander through a traditional Christmas grotto complete with winter scenes, surprises around every corner and the opportunity for children to meet Father Christmas in his cosy cabin, until Fri 24 Dec, Webbs, West Hagley, Nr Stourbridge

NORTH POLE ADVENTURE Journey through the Magical Portal to the



Christmas In Cathedral Square, Birmingham



WESTON PARK

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9th – 12th, 16th – 19th and 20th – 23rd

Temple Wood will be lit up to create a magical woodland walk followed by fantastic street food and drink, live music and firepits to toast marshmallows by.

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Events around the region this Christmas

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, until Fri 24 Dec, National Forest Adventure Farm, Burton-upon-Trent

SANTA HUNTS Complete with brand-new storyline for 2021, various dates until Fri 24 Dec, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

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

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

JQ CHRISTMAS WINDOW TRAIL Discover the magic of the Jewellery Quarter... until Sat 25 Dec, The Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham

THE ENCHANTED GARDENS Follow the fairytale winter light trail and spot glowing toadstools, illuminated gingerbread houses en route to the North Pole where you'll find Santa and his elves busying themselves in their workshop, until Sun 2 Jan, Riverside Gardens, Webbs, Wychbold, Worcestershire

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

LIGHTOPIA A brand-new immersive journey through the four seasons, transporting visitors to a whim-tastical land where time can be controlled, until 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 until Mon 3 Jan, Blists Hill Victorian

Town, Ironbridge, Shropshire

WINTER WONDERLAND Featuring an under-cover ice rink, Santa's Sleigh rollercoaster and other funfair rides, Santa's grotto, real reindeer and festive food & drink, until Mon 3 Jan, Stoke City Centre

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, until Mon 3 Jan, Warwick Castle

COVENTRY GLIDES Winter fun on ice - set against the wonderful backdrop of Coventry Cathedral, until Sun 9 Jan, Coventry Cathedral

ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM Family-friendly fun at Birmingham's biggest ice rink, until Sun 9 Jan, Centenary Square, Birmingham

MALVERN WINTER GLOW Four festive experiences in one - an ice rink, personalised Santa experiences, an illuminated light trail and a giant observation wheel, until Sun 9 Jan, Three Counties Showground, Malvern

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... until Sun 9 Jan, Trentham Gardens, Staffordshire

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

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

WINTER FUNLAND Festive spectacular comprising a gigantic ice-rink, a traditional circus, a full-size fairground and Santa's grotto, Thurs 9 Dec - Sun 2 Jan, NEC, Birmingham

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

TAMWORTH CASTLE CHRISTMAS EXPERIENCE Explore the castle decorated for Christmas and follow the festive trail through period rooms. Meet Santa and his elves in the Great Hall for a festive performance where gifts will be presented to younger visitors, Sat 11 - Sun 12 December, Tamworth Castle

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 21 - Thurs 23 Dec, Weston Park, Shropshire

SANTA DASH Two-mile dash, jog or walk in aid of St Richard's Hospice, Sun 12 Dec, New Road, Worcester

CAROLS IN THE SQUARE Annual concert broadcast live on Radio Shropshire, Wed 15 Dec, The Square, Shrewsbury

HIMLEY'S MAGICAL CHRISTMAS PORTAL Be transported to the magical home of Father Christmas via a large

screen whilst taking your seat in one of Himley's festive marquees. A Christmas food market, live entertainment and a vintage fairground also feature... Thurs 16 - Sun 19 Dec, Himley Hall, Dudley

FAMILY CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES

Complete the Christmas jigsaw trail by finding pieces of Santa's sleigh around the museum. Craft activities include making automotive-inspired Christmas cards for family & friends... Fri 17 - Thurs 23 Dec, British Motor Museum, Gaydon, Warwickshire



TAMWORTH CASTLE CHRISTMAS

EXPERIENCE Explore the castle decorated for Christmas and follow the festive trail through period rooms. Meet Santa and his elves in the Great Hall for a festive performance where gifts will be presented to younger visitors, Sat 18 - Sun 19 December, Tamworth Castle

DABBERS: CHRISTMAS FAMILY BRUNCH BINGO Featuring two games of 50-ball bingo in which animal riddles replace bingo lingo and animal pictures replace numbers on the bingo cards, Sun 19 Dec, Fargo Village, Coventry

CHRISTMAS FOR THE KIDS Take a walk into the woods to discover Crumpleberry's farm animals, enjoy a live theatre performance and sing carols around a grand piano. Daytime and twilight experiences available, Mon 20 - Wed 22 Dec, Crumpleberry Farm, Whitbourne, Worcester

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



A Victorian Christmas - Blists Hill Victorian Town





Merry Christmas!

from around the world...

Christmas is a time for immersing ourselves in traditions passed down to us through the generations. But as you will discover on the opposite page, not every country's festive-season traditions are the same as ours. Fancy a KFC for Christmas? The Japanese certainly do! Or how about heading to Italy, where badly behaved children receive a bag of coal instead of a present...

JAPAN

Most Japanese follow either the Shinto or Buddhist faith - neither of which recognise Christmas. However, more recently the country has become more embracing of 'western festivities', with people celebrating on Christmas Eve with parties, dancing and the giving of gifts.

One of the most popular ways to celebrate Christmas in Japan is with a KFC. Recent statistics reveal that more than 3.6 million families reported tucking into a 'Kentucky for Christmas', while dessert usually consists of sponge cake, strawberries and whipped cream.

ITALY

As in the UK, children in Italy get to open presents on 25 December. However, a second round of gift-giving usually takes place 12 days later, when La Befana - an old woman who delivers gifts to children on Epiphany Eve - pays a visit and makes a judgement about who's been naughty and who's been nice. The 'good' kids receive a gift, the not-so-good get a bag of coal!

AUSTRALIA

Christmas 'down under' falls right in the middle of summer, so barbecues and tinnies on the beach is the most common way to celebrate. That said, the Brit influence is very much in evidence too, with Aussie children taking part in nativities and carol singing. The traditional fir tree is replaced by Australia's native 'Christmas Bush'.

THE NETHERLANDS

Dutch children look to the seas rather than the skies for Santa, as they believe he travels north by boat from Spain's sunnier climes to visit them. Helping Santa is his trusty assistant, Zwarte Piet - or Sinterklass, as he's affectionately known. Children leave their

shoes for Sinterklass to fill with treats and goodies, but misbehaving youngsters are made aware that they risk being whisked away to Spain for a year (which is certainly a more attractive penalty than the Italian tradition of receiving a bag of coal, but definitely a more life-affecting one, too!).

NORWAY

Present-giving in Norway takes place on Christmas Eve - but only once children have finished their evening meal and left porridge out for Julenissen, the household spirit. Christmas celebrations begin in November, with children carol singing around local neighbourhoods whilst dressed as festive characters.

GERMANY

German tradition dictates that Christmas trees should not be lit in homes until 24 December - although other festive activities start a lot sooner. Many of the Christmas markets we enjoy here in the UK come from, or are influenced by, those traditionally enjoyed in Germany. Festive foods such as stollen, glühwein and lebkuchen - a spiced cookie - are just some of the German delights now added to British shoppers' festive food lists.

VENEZUELA

Colour, music and lights are prominent in Venezuela's festive celebrations. On Christmas morning, children and parents from around the capital, Caracas, head to church on rollerskates. Streets and roads around the city are closed to keep everyone safe.

POLAND

The Day of Saint Nicholas on 6 December is regarded as the start of the festive season in

Poland. Children who have been well behaved will receive a gift, while those whose behaviour hasn't been up to scratch receive a twig or, as in Italy, some coal.

As with Germany, 24 December (Wigilla) is the most significant date of the holiday. A Christmas Eve supper begins with the breaking of a Christmas wafer known as opłatek.

FINLAND

For many, the North Pole will always be synonymous with Father Christmas - and the Finns certainly believe he's one of their own. Age-old traditions feature heavily in the Scandinavian country's celebrations - not least among which is Christmas Peace, which is proclaimed at 12 noon on 24 December in Turku - Finland's oldest city. The tradition dates back to the 1300s.

A special sauna also forms part of the country's Christmas Eve traditions - as does the highlight for every youngster, when a knock on the door from Santa is followed by the words, "Are there any well-behaved children here?"

Christmas Day is reserved for relaxation and eating leftover food from Christmas Eve.

GREECE

Many Greeks believe in Kallikantzeri - malevolent goblins who cause mischief during the 12 days of Christmas.

Present-giving traditionally takes place on 1 January, a day of feasting known as St Basil Day. Saint Nicholas also features in Greek festive celebrations - and being the patron saint of sailors, he's represented by decorated boats, which often replace Christmas trees.

Bags of coal, KFCs, tinnies on the beach or a good old-fashioned English-style festive season... however you're celebrating Christmas 2021, we wish you a very merry Season of Goodwill!

Vrolijk Kersfeest!



Buon Natale!



Feliz Navidad!

Wesołych świąt!



Fröhliche Weihnachten!



Hyvää joulua!

Meri Kurisumasu!



God Jul!



kalá Christoúgenna

Winter outings you can Trust!

There's something special about visiting a National Trust property at Christmas. Whether it's to wander around a specially decorated interior, check out the vast grounds of an estate or follow one of the Trust's seasonal trails (Percy the Park Keeper is much in evidence this year!), there's always plenty to enjoy. Here's a taster of what's happening at National Trust properties across the region this month...



Attingham Park, near Shrewsbury

From 27 November to 3 January, the outdoors will be dressed for Christmas, with trees and decorations welcoming visitors from the front gates, through visitor reception and into the stables courtyard. The ground floor showrooms and basement in the mansion will also be decorated and full of festive cheer. At weekends - and daily in the school holidays - visitors can watch the Attingham deer herd being fed by the ranger team at 3pm in the Deer Park. There will also be a Christmas Masquerade family trail around the grounds.

All visits to Attingham during this period must be pre-booked, whether visitors are National Trust members or not.

Baddesley Clinton, Warwickshire

Enjoy the outside Christmas tree and decorations and get into the festive spirit on a stroll around Baddesley this Christmas. You can spot winter wildlife in the gardens or head out on the estate and explore one of the walking routes. Warm up in the cosy restaurant with a mug of hot chocolate in front of a roaring fire.

Packwood, Warwickshire

Winter is the perfect time to wrap up warm, throw on some wellies and head out for an invigorating walk at Packwood. Blow away the cobwebs along blustery canal paths or take a frosty Boxing Day stroll across the Warwickshire countryside. Enjoy the outside Christmas trees and decorations in the barnyard, and don't forget to indulge in a warming treat from the café too.

Biddulph Grange Garden, near Stoke-on-Trent

On selected evenings this year - and for the first time - visitors can experience part of the garden illuminated. Wrap up warm and soak up the festive atmosphere with a walk through the Italian Garden and the Pinetum, then enjoy a warming drink from the tea room. Families can also take part in Percy the Park Keeper's Winter Wander trail from 4 December.

Carding Mill Valley and the Long Mynd, Shropshire

With amazing views to be had on a variety of walks, the beautiful scenery at Long Mynd is ideal for a bracing winter walk.

The Chalet Pavilion offers the perfect pitstop for a warming drink and tasty treat.

Dudmaston, near Bridgnorth

Wrap up warm and enjoy winter walks in the countryside. The car parks at Comer Woods, Hampton Loade and the Sawmill are open daily. Families can take part in Percy the Park Keeper's Winter Wander trail in Comer Woods from 4 December. The café will also be open, serving a range of hot and cold refreshments.

Wightwick Manor and Gardens, Wolverhampton

Winter is the perfect time to see the structure of the garden. The evergreen geometrical yew hedging appears bolder and the architectural lines of the terraces and balustrades are clearer. Pick up a warm drink from the tea room and take a brisk walk across frosty lawns, past frozen pools and through crisp woodland. There will also be outdoor festive decorations to spot.

Inside, join in with a Victorian Christmas and see the manor decorated with festive trees and garlands.

A costumed reenactment takes place on 11, 12, 14, 18, 19 & 21 December, as the Mander family's servants prepare for the festivities.



Moseley Old Hall, near Wolverhampton

Wrap up warm and enjoy a gentle stroll through the walled gardens and woodland. Outdoor explorers can take part in Percy the Park Keeper's Winter Wander trail from 4 December to 3 January.

Inside the hall, visitors can see the house dressed with traditional decorations, play board games in the parlour and taste 17th-century sweet treats made in the brewhouse. During weekends throughout December, enjoy Christmas storytelling sessions with the Lord of Mischievous.

Charlecote Park, near Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire

Join Percy the Park Keeper on his Winter Wander trail in the gardens (£2 per activity pack) and discover animal-themed artworks along the way, created by local artists Ros Ingram and Rachel Harwood.

Wrap up for a refreshing stroll to spot wildlife in the parkland. Check out some of the essential improvement works taking place in the grounds, before warming up in the café with a delicious festive treat.

Upton House & Gardens, Warwickshire

Enjoy some outdoor fun with Percy the Park Keeper on a special trail around Upton's winter garden and woodland, then step inside to take in the Christmas decorations, which this year take the theme of All Four Seasons.

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For all property information, visit:
nationaltrust.org.uk

BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET

Director Carlos Acosta

The Nutcracker

20 November –
11 December

Karla Doorbar as Clara. © Richard Battye



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BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET

Director Carlos Acosta

Don Quixote

18 – 26 February



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Céline Gittens as Kitri. © Bella Kotak.

SANTA

Safari

BOOK
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WEST MIDLAND
**SAFARI
& LEISURE
PARK**

26TH NOV - 24TH DEC
WMSP.CO.UK/SANTA