

Staffordshire

ISSUE 420 JANUARY 2022

# What's On

FILM | COMEDY | THEATRE | GIGS | VISUAL ARTS | EVENTS | FOOD [staffordshirewhatson.co.uk](http://staffordshirewhatson.co.uk)



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**THE ADDAMS FAMILY**  
are heading to The Potteries!  
**Interview inside...**



**HALLE IN HANLEY...**  
Sky Ingram joins the Halle  
Orchestra for new year concert



**THERE FOR YOU...**  
Friends! The Musical Parody  
stops off in Staffordshire



**DOLLY PARTON**

*presents*

**CLAIRE SWEENEY**



**THE MUSICAL**

Music & lyrics by **DOLLY PARTON** Book by **PATRICIA RESNICK** Directed by **JEFF CALHOUN**

**TUE 22 - SAT 26 FEB**

**REGENT THEATRE**  
STOKE-ON-TRENT 

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# GAIA

BY LUKE JERRAM  
#EARTHARTWORK



© Photo: Jim Huntsman

## FREE EXHIBITION

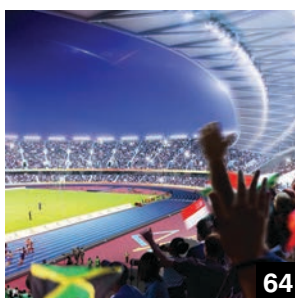
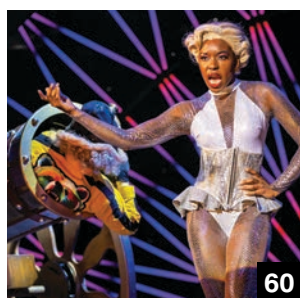
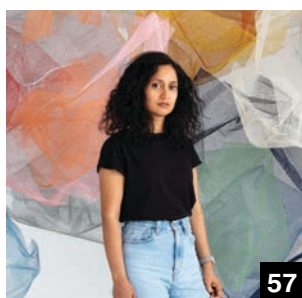
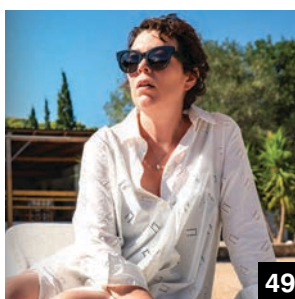
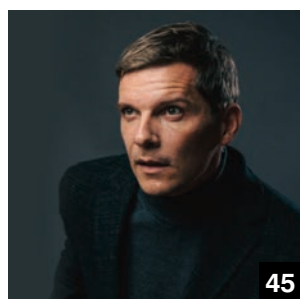
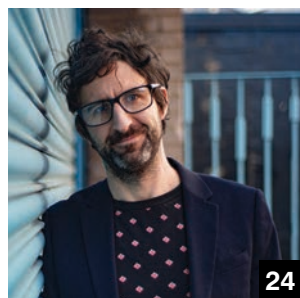
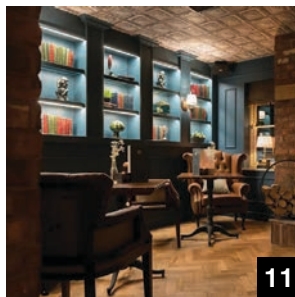
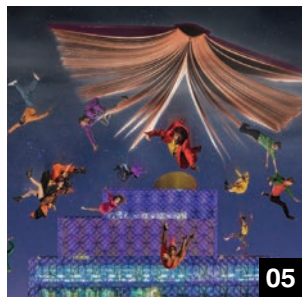
1 FEBRUARY- 28 MARCH 2022

MILLENNIUM POINT | BIRMINGHAM

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# What's On

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## One Step Beyond: Madness at The Quarry

Ever-popular ska band Madness will perform at Shrewsbury's Quarry Park this summer (Friday 15 July).

The original kings of Camden will be headlining in the town for the very first time. Commenting on the gig, the band said: "We hear there's real magic in the waters of the River Severn, and we can't wait for it to work on us and all the Madheads that come and see us at The Quarry this summer... Bring it on."

Tickets are available at [myticket.co.uk](http://myticket.co.uk)

## Wolverhampton's literary festival back in February

Wolverhampton Literature Festival returns for a sixth year next month (4 - 6 February).

The line-up for the 2022 festival, which aims to champion and showcase the creative voices of Wolverhampton and the West Midlands, includes comedian Phil Wang (pictured), New York Times bestselling author Abi Daré, and acting deputy editor of Harper's Bazaar, Helena Lee.

A poetry slam, an event coordinated by Punjabi Women Writing Group, numerous workshops and a range of events for children also feature.

For more information and to book tickets, visit [wolvesliteraturefestival.co.uk](http://wolvesliteraturefestival.co.uk)



## Pop culture show set to debut in Birmingham

A new pop-culture show debuts in Birmingham in the spring.

Launching at the NEC on 26 & 27 March, MegaCon 'submerges attendees in the world of modern pop culture and brings it to the next level'.

The show is aimed at pop-culture fans, comic-book lovers, streamers, gamers, movie fanatics and the cosplay community.

MegaCon has been created by Malo Events, whose other shows include MCM Comic Con and Social In The City.

For more information and to book tickets, visit [megaconlive.com](http://megaconlive.com)

## International artists return to Shrewsbury Folk Fest

Music legend Judy Collins will perform at this year's Shrewsbury Folk Festival.

Judy will be joined at the four-day event (26 - 29 August) by a host of other international performers, including Carlos Núñez, Blackie And The Rodeo Kings, Black Umfolosi, Moonlight Benjamin, Stephen Fearing & The Sentimentals, Colin Linden and Tom Wilson. Grammy-nominated all-women string band Della Mae will also be making their first visit to Shrewsbury.

Tickets for the festival, which will take place at the West Midland Showground, are now on sale at [shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk](http://shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk)

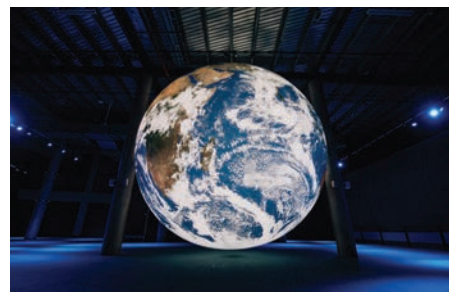
## Treasure Island - the swashbuckling comedy!

Multi-award-winning physical comedy company Le Navet Bete are heading to Lichfield Garrick this spring with their smash-hit version of Treasure Island. Presented in association with Barbican Theatre, the swashbuckling comedy stops off at the venue on Friday 18 & Saturday 19 March. For more information and to book tickets, visit [lichfieldgarrick.com](http://lichfieldgarrick.com)



## Gaia to shine bright at city centre destination

Birmingham's Millennium Point will next month unveil a major new art installation celebrating 'the wonder of planet Earth'. Gaia, a large-scale touring artwork by UK artist Luke Jerram, has been created from detailed NASA imagery of the Earth's surface and measures seven metres in diameter. It will be on display at the venue from 1 February to 28 March.



## Noel Gallagher's band joins Forest Live line-up

Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds will perform in Staffordshire's Cannock Chase Forest on Sunday 12 June as part of Forest Live 2022.

The 11-piece band will present a concert comprising tracks from Noel's songbook, which now spans four decades. Presented by Forestry England, Forest Live is a major outdoor live-music series that aims to 'introduce' forests to new audiences around the country. For more information, visit [forestryengland.uk/music](http://forestryengland.uk/music)





## Enjoy a Winter Holiday at Shropshire theatre

Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn is to stage a world premiere of a family story written 90 years ago.

Winter Holiday, which is one of a series of books written by Arthur Ransome that includes the better known Swallows And Amazons, sees a group of youngsters taking advantage of a lake freezing over to enjoy an exciting sledge race to 'the North Pole'.

The show is being produced by local theatre makers Love Lee Premiere Productions and will feature a cast of adults playing the youngsters. It shows at Theatre Severn from 16 to 19 February.



## Akram Khan reimagines Jungle Book in dance

Award-winning dancer and choreographer Akram Khan will this spring present a brand-new dance work based on Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book.

Akram has reimagined the journey of Mowgli through the eyes of a refugee who is caught in a world 'devastated by the impact of climate change'.

The production shows at Birmingham Hippodrome on Friday 29 & Saturday 30 April. For further information and to book tickets, visit [birminghamhippodrome.com](http://birminghamhippodrome.com)



## Motionhouse to launch Birmingham 2022 Festival

Internationally renowned dance-circus company Motionhouse will open the Birmingham 2022 Festival with a large-scale performance event titled Wondrous Stories.

The Leamington Spa company's artistic director and co-founder, Kevin Finnan, has created the piece, which is 'packed full of visual magic and spectacular aerial moments'. Kevin is joined by a team of artistic collaborators, including Birmingham-based choreographers Sonia Sabri and Jamaal Burkmar.

Featuring a cast of over 300 performers,

Wondrous Stories has been co-produced by Motionhouse and two other West Midlands-based organisations: Outdoor Places Unusual Spaces (OPUS) and JA Productions. It will be performed in Centenary Square from 17 to 20 March.

The Birmingham 2022 Festival is a six-month celebration shining a global spotlight on creativity in the West Midlands. The event has been inspired by the city's hosting of the Commonwealth Games.

## Big Bang Fair back in Brum

The Big Bang Fair will return to Birmingham's NEC in the summer (Wednesday 22 to Friday 24 June).

The largest celebration of science, technology, engineering and maths for young people in the UK, the show will feature scores of hands-on activities to inspire visitors to discover and explore future career options. For more information, visit [thebigbang.org.uk](http://thebigbang.org.uk)



## Flo & Joan: funny sisters on tour

Multi-award-winning comedy musical duo Flo & Joan - aka, sisters Nicola and Rosie Dempsey - are this spring heading out on their biggest-ever tour, stopping off at four Midlands venues along the way: Birmingham Town Hall (8 March), Stafford Gatehouse (9 March), Stourbridge Town Hall (25 May) and Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn (17 July). For more information and to purchase tickets, visit [floandjoan.com](http://floandjoan.com)



## Bookings now open for West Midland Safari Park's new lodges

West Midland Safari Park is now taking bookings for its new luxury accommodation. Eight two-storey lodges will be available to enjoy from April. Some of the lodges will allow guests to come eye-to-eye with the venue's giraffes, whilst others will offer panoramic views of the white rhinos. To book, visit [safari-lodges.co.uk](http://safari-lodges.co.uk). Prices start from £490 per night based on two guests.



## Steps to headline at Trentham Live

Chart-topping popsters Steps have been announced as the third and final headline act for this year's Trentham Live event. Best known for hit singles such as Tragedy and Stomp, the iconic pop collective will perform at Trentham Gardens on Friday 2 September. The event's other headliners are Olly Murs and Craig David. To purchase tickets, visit [ticketmaster.co.uk/trentham-live](http://ticketmaster.co.uk/trentham-live)



## Shropshire hotel voted one of the country's best

Goldstone Hall Country House Hotel, near Market Drayton in Shropshire, has been selected as one of the best hotels in the British Isles. The venue received an AA Red Star Inspector's Choice Award after demonstrating 'excellent levels of quality throughout, as well as outstanding levels of hospitality and service'. Our warmest congratulations go to Goldstone owner John Cushing and his dedicated team.



## Love is in the (open) air as Shakespeare returns

Stafford Castle's annual Shakespeare production will return this summer with a new version of Romeo And Juliet. The show will mark the 30th anniversary of open-air productions at the castle, with performances taking place between 24 June and 9 July. Commenting on the news, Stafford Gatehouse manager Tim Ford said: "Romeo

And Juliet is always incredibly popular, and we're already in talks with some high-profile actors to be part of an incredible cast. "It would be great to see young people in the audience because it's a story that resonates through the ages and is all about two teenagers in love." For more information and to book tickets, visit [staffordgatehousetheatre.co.uk](http://staffordgatehousetheatre.co.uk)

## Summer laughter fest returns to Shrewsbury

Tickets are now on sale for Shrewsbury International Comedy Festival's flagship Gala Show at the town's Theatre Severn this summer. The show takes place on Sunday 17 July and rounds off the 2022 edition of the festival (which starts on Thursday the 14th). This year's event will feature, among others, Britain's Got Talent 2020 finalist Steve Royle, Midlands comedian Gary Delaney (pictured) and musical comedy sisters Flo & Joan. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit [theatresevern.co.uk](http://theatresevern.co.uk)



## Stoke creatives Appetite awarded special Arts Council England status

Appetite, the New Vic Theatre-led Creative People & Places programme for Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, has been awarded Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status. An Arts Council grant of up to £736,111 will enable Appetite to combine its work for Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, creating a single programme which will run until October 2025

## The Cure to bring new UK tour to Midlands venue

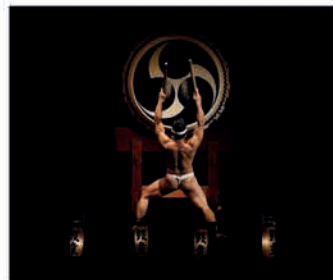
The Cure have announced a 44-show tour for 2022 - including a pre-Christmas stop-off in the Midlands. The long-established rock band, who were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2019, will visit Utilita Arena in Birmingham on Wednesday 7 December. For further information and to book tickets, visit [bookingsdirect.com](http://bookingsdirect.com)



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



**Queen Extravaganza**  
Tue 18 Jan  
Symphony Hall



**Kodo One Earth Tour 2022: Tsuzumi**  
Sun 13 Feb  
Symphony Hall

**John Bishop: Right Here Right Now**  
Fri 21 Jan  
Symphony Hall



**Van der Graaf Generator**  
Mon 21 Feb  
Town Hall



**Two Pints Podcast - Live! with Will Mellor & Ralf Little**  
Sun 30 Jan  
Town Hall



**King King**  
Tue 22 Feb  
Town Hall

**Fireman Sam**  
Sun 6 Feb  
Town Hall



**Wilko Johnson plus special guest John Otway**  
Fri 25 Feb  
Town Hall



**Ross Noble - Humournoid**  
Sun 6 Feb  
Symphony Hall



**Tommy Emmanuel plus special guest Jerry Douglas**  
Fri 4 Mar  
Town Hall

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





# Making 'em up!

Enid Blyton's children's stories are providing the inspiration for a 'riotous' improvised show created for an adult audience...





**Described as utterly unique and spontaneous, Bumper Blyton The Improvised Adventure puts an adult spin on stories penned by one of the 20th century's most famous children's authors, Enid Blyton. Made up on the hoof and with no two shows the same, Bumper Blyton is garnering rave reviews wherever it lands. So we thought we'd check in with The Make 'Em Ups - the team behind this fun-filled parody - to find out more...**

**Tell us about The Make 'Em Ups...**

We're a little theatre company obsessed with making up funny stories on stage. At the moment we're having lots of fun creating our own version of an Enid Blyton story.

**In what ways do Enid's stories lend themselves to improvisation?**

The stories themselves are quite playful and contain archetypal characters that lend themselves perfectly to improvising a narrative. You often find in her stories that the children have a special interest or skill which proves useful in solving a mystery or conquering a school bully, or the adults are depicted as either potty or utterly useless, which makes for rich parody and is an awful lot of fun to play with on stage!

**Talk us through some of the characters we might encounter in one of your shows...**

Twisted versions of your favourites growing up. We're creating a 'new' novel live on stage, so don't expect to see Darrel Rivers, George Kirrin or Timmy, but in terms of the classic archetypes: shrinking violets who wouldn't say boo to a goose? Check! Naive adventurers who keep falling down wells or getting trapped in a cave? Check! Snot-nosed poshos who look down on anyone not in the same class as them? Check! We've got 'em all!

**What's been the funniest suggestion from a member of the audience?**

We ask our audiences to draw or write a nostalgic memory on mini chalkboards, so it's always hilarious to see what people have managed to doodle before the show. Aside from the usual depictions of family holidays, our audience seem to like supplying us with a few subversive innuendos. One person's nostalgic memory was 'playing with my Dinky'. We learned that this was a type of toy car *after* the show!

**And the most absurd suggestion you've ever been given?**

They're *all* a ridiculous and somewhat parochial mish-mash, which I entirely blame on the audience who come up with them! Some of our favourite recent titles have been: Model Railway Mysteries With Added Bears

In Loch Lomond; Uncle Boris' Bunga Bunga Party; and Pals Moist Adventure On Some Bloody Island. I also remember The (In)famous Five-Fingered Discount, which was a particularly fun 'play on words' from an audience member - though bearing in mind Enid Blyton had titles like The Mystery Of The Missing Cat - a thrilling read, no doubt! - I don't think our titles are too preposterous!

**If you had to put together a job spec for your line of work, what skills would be essential and desirable?**

A love of story and a playful nature. And despite how it seems, you really don't have to stress yourself out about being funny or clever to perform improv comedy. It's all about listening really carefully and responding instinctively - tapping into what makes all of us naturally funny and interesting.

**Is there a fellow improv act/troupe which has inspired The Make 'Em Ups more than any other?**

My co-director, Amy, is a founder of the BBC Radio Four and West End hit, *Austentatious*, and we share members with *Showstopper The Improvised Musical*. Those shows are both trailblazers in terms of introducing narrative-style improv comedy to the country and inspiring other groups to create their own long-form formats. I also think there's a huge appetite for something that's nostalgic but a bit knowingly satirical.

**Given that it boasts lashings of innuendo, would it be reasonable to assume Bumper Blyton is not a show for the faint-hearted?**

It's certainly not your granny's Enid Blyton - but again, I blame anything that's more blue than Noddy's hat entirely on the audience and their input!

**Why do you think improv shows such as yours are becoming more popular here in the UK?**

Improv is really having its moment largely thanks to some groups having their shows championed in the West End, which means a more mainstream audience is able to

experience the joys that an improvised performance can offer. Audiences feel included, as if they're part of the action, and each show is a one-off, so there's an excitement that comes with that. It also means that you can return again and again to see an entirely unique comedy performance. Improv has been a mainstay of US comedy for decades now, with some of the world's most popular characters starting life in improv skits, like the Ghostbusters or Anchorman. Entertainment seems to be more globalised now, for better or worse, but a benefit is that people have a wider understanding of what improv looks like than a hazy memory of *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* nearly 30 years ago.

**Which other literary works do you think might be suitable for future shows?**

It would be fantastic to play in the endlessly imaginative worlds of Roald Dahl, and there's something inherently funny to me about trying to turn John Le Carré's *Tinker Tailor* world into an improv show. It feels like a no-brainer to try a play on Phillip Pullman's novels, perhaps called *Whose Dark Materials Is It Anyway?* We're currently working on an all-ages show based on children's Saturday morning TV and shows like *Crackerjack* and *Blue Peter*.

**Finally, what do you think Ms Blyton would make of your use of her work?**

Oh, I imagine she would hate us! We're a bunch of soft, southern, lefty liberal comedians! - although she did write over 700 titles in her life, so I doubt she'd notice a few more. I think she resented the idea that there was ever any intended innuendo in her books, but we think there's enough Dick and Fanny for everyone to share!

.....

**Bumper Blyton shows at The Place, Telford, Fri 28 January; Meole Brace Peace Memorial Hall, Shrewsbury, Sat 12 February; Chapel Lawn Village Hall, Clun, South Shropshire, Sat 12 March; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sun 27 March**



# WORLD CLASS ENTERTAINMENT



THE REVOLUTIONARY BALLROOM  
SHOW – BACK WITH A BANG...  
**KEVIN CLIFTON'S  
BURN THE FLOOR**

SUN 16 JAN  
REGENT THEATRE



LIVE ORCHESTRA AND BREATHTAKING CHOREOGRAPHY...  
**MOSCOW CITY BALLET'S  
SWAN LAKE**

MON 17 & TUE 18 JAN  
REGENT THEATRE



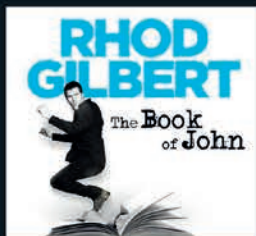
ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR  
CLASSICAL BALLETS...  
**MOSCOW CITY BALLET'S  
THE NUTCRACKER**

WED 19 JAN  
REGENT THEATRE



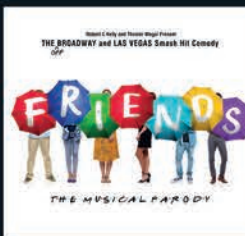
A VIBRANT FIVE NIGHT  
DANCE FESTIVAL...  
**022 DANCE:  
CELEBRATION**

SAT 22 – SAT 29 JAN  
REGENT THEATRE



THE MULTI AWARD-WINNING  
WELSH COMEDIAN IS BACK...  
**RHOD GILBERT**

SUN 30 JAN  
REGENT THEATRE



YOU'LL LAUGH, YOU'LL CRY,  
YOU'LL UNAGI!...  
**FRIENDS! THE  
MUSICAL PARODY**

SAT 5 FEB  
REGENT THEATRE



WORKING ITS WAY BACK  
TO STOKE-ON-TRENT...  
**JERSEY BOYS**

TUE 8 – SAT 19 FEB  
REGENT THEATRE



TUMBLE OUTTA BED AND  
STUMBLE TO DOLLY PARTON'S  
RIP-ROARING MUSICAL...  
**9 TO 5**

TUE 22 – SAT 26 FEB  
REGENT THEATRE



EXQUISITE SETS, THE AWARD-  
WINNING OPERA RETURNS...  
**ELLEN KENT'S  
MADAMA BUTTERFLY**

SUN 27 FEB  
REGENT THEATRE



HE'S BACK AND FUNNIER  
THAN EVER!  
**JASON MANFORD**

THU 3 MAR  
REGENT THEATRE

**THE CLASSIC ROCK SHOW**  
SAT 8 JAN **VH**

**YOU WIN AGAIN – CELEBRATING THE MUSIC  
OF THE BEE GEES**  
FRI 14 JAN **VH**

**SUPERSLAM WRESTLING**  
FRI 28 JAN **VH**

**BOWIE EXPERIENCE**  
SAT 29 JAN **VH**

**THE STRANGLERS**  
MON 31 JAN **VH**

**JACK DEE: OFF THE TELLY**  
THU 3 FEB **VH**

**LUTHER: LUTHER VANDROSS CELEBRATION**  
SAT 5 FEB **VH**

**BARRY STEELE AND FRIENDS:  
THE ROY ORBISON STORY**  
FRI 11 FEB **VH**



**REGENT THEATRE  
VICTORIA HALL**  
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## REVIEW: The Inkwell

### Lichfield venue offers a contemporary twist on the classic country pub

After reopening its doors to the public in November following a full-scale refurbishment and major overhaul of its food & drink menu, the newly re-launched Inkwell pub in Lichfield - formerly known as The Saxon Penny - comes with an impressive six-figure investment attached. But don't let the lofty price tag put you off - when it comes to friendly service, a down-to-earth atmosphere and affordable quality, this contemporary twist on the classic 'country pub' ticks all the necessary boxes.

General Managers Sally & Richard Hammond really have left no stone unturned in reimagining this much-favoured Lichfield local for today's street-savvy punter.

The renovation alone is worthy of an interior-design award. Once-muted beige walls and generic oak finishings have been replaced by statement log-burning stove, brightly coloured accents of peacock blue and burnt orange and a stylish line in signature light fixtures. I particularly love the bijoux booth seating, which comes complete with beautiful plant-lined bookshelves, marmalade velvet upholstery and dark-wood finish - effortlessly cosy but at

the same time contemporary.

The menu, too, is perfectly chosen for its clientele, whether catering for the extended family out for a Sunday lunch, the casual evening drinker/diner or those celebrating a special occasion with friends and loved ones.

A brief glance at The Inkwell's food offer reveals plenty of tried-and-tested pub-grub favourites, from Whitby scampi through to the classic 'royale chicken tikka masala'. Coupled with this is an appetising choice of seasonal specials. These include a selection of homemade kebabs served with oven-baked garlic flatbreads, freshly made crayfish linguine served with Italian hard cheese, and the signature Aberdeen Angus beefburger, featuring glazed, slow-cooked pulled beef, streaky bacon and Monterey Jack cheese!

Added to this is an extensive menu of British and Irish 28-day-aged beef steaks, signature pies and an impressive line in sharing platters, including a vegetarian-friendly mezze board priced at £14.25. For the meat eaters amongst you, there's a 'meat in the middle' sharer (£13.75), complete with sausage rolls, mini honey & mustard chorizo, Korean-style chicken wings, pork

crackling and - that ultimate pub-grub staple - HP sauce!

Opting for a glass of the Chenin Sauvignon to start, it was the crayfish & lobster risotto starter (£7.75) that instantly caught my attention. Served in a rich and creamy risotto sauce and cooked with fresh crayfish tails and lobster meat, this small-but-perfectly-portioned dish was a real treat for the senses. Warming, rich and infused with the flavours of the sea, every mouthful was a sheer delight and a promising sign of things to come.

My partner's choice of duck, truffle & red onion marmalade terrine (£6.25) was equally delicious, extremely well executed and beautifully presented on the plate. The sharpness of the chilli, coriander & mint dressing provided ideal cut-through for the rich, earthy flavours of the terrine, whilst the tangy tomato & red pepper chutney gave the dish a welcome burst of freshness. The bread, too, was toasted perfectly and went down a treat with the homemade butter (served warm, of course) and pea-shoot salad. All in all, a refreshingly creative start to the meal!

Now, some might say that the true test of an English country pub is its ability to execute the classics - and they don't come much more classic than the solid, dependable 8oz sirloin steak, served with chunky chips, roasted vine tomatoes and a grilled, flat mushroom on the side. Priced at a not unreasonable £14 and also available as a 10oz ribeye at £16.25, the high quality of the meat was evident from the first bite. Served medium (exactly as requested) and delicately marbled with a thin layer of fat, the meat was beautifully tender as well as moist. The addition of a portion of 'smoky bacon butter' on the top (not so good for my waistline but certainly good for

my soul) infused the meat with a chargrilled aroma of wood-smoke that carried through with each and every bite.

Somewhat less successful was my partner's main-course choice of smoky beef & pancetta lasagne (£10), a personal recommendation of our friendly waitress and served with a dressed side salad and garlic ciabatta. Despite its unique flavour (a delicious mixture of smoky-yet-sweet pancetta, rich tomato & herb sauce and hearty cheddar cheese), the execution of the dish was sadly wanting. This was a shame, as, by taste alone, the recipe had such great promise! An unlucky misfire, no doubt, given the quality of what was otherwise on offer.

And whilst our stomachs couldn't quite stretch to another course this time around, for the dessert lover in your life, I strongly recommend The Inkwell's choice of 'pudding tasting boards'. Served large (£10.75 for six) or small (£7.75), they come with a choice of espresso martini tiramisu (v) strawberry clotted cream cheesecake, cinnamon swirl bread & butter pudding (v) lemon panna cotta (v) Eton mess (v) and orange & lemon sponge cake (v). After all, why have one when you can try them all?

With a signature cocktail selection as standard, The Inkwell's future looks promising indeed, and I, for one, wish Sally and Richard every success with the next chapter of their journey. *Katherine Ewing*

Food:	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Service:	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Ambience:	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Overall value	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
<b>OVERALL</b>	■ ■ ■ ■ ■

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## REVIEW: Bird & Beer Fried chicken lovers, rejoice!

Shrewsbury has been crying out for a speciality chicken restaurant for some time.

Dough And Oil has perfected the town's pizza offering, House Of Yum has got Thai sewn up, Umai serves exemplary Japanese cuisine and Casa Naranjo offers tapas that rivals dishes I've enjoyed in Spain.

My partner and I used to have to travel to Birmingham for a decent wing, but now - thanks to Tap And Can owners Andy Hooper and Rachael Jones, alongside Head Chef Tom Cooke - we don't have to. In fact, our journey to the Town of Flowers' newest venue, Bird & Beer, is approximately three minutes from door to door!

The wonderful Tap And Can is our local, just a stone's throw away from its new sister venue - Shrewsbury Railway Station - and more importantly, our house. As the name suggests, it boasts 14 rotating beer lines and 100-plus cans and bottles. It's an absolute beer haven, packed to the rafters with friendly people,

adorable dogs and (of course) great beer.

The reputation Tom and Rachael have built for themselves in just two short years is admirable, particularly considering the fact that they've been closed for a good chunk of that time due to the pandemic.

Taking all of the above into account, you can imagine our delight when they told us about their new venture.

My partner and I entered Bird & Beer on a wet Monday evening to Fleetwood Mac's Big Love, which earned the venue a tick from me even before we reached our table.

The decor is well thought out and boasts a red & black interior, contemporary lighting and some personal touches - Bird & Beer-branded cushions and artwork, as well as a neon light in the window. It's comfortable too, with a chilled atmosphere to match - a necessity when your carnivorous side strikes and you're pulling apart chicken

wings, licking hot sauce off your fingers, or in my case dropping nacho cheese sauce down my jeans.

The menu is simple. Choose from three or five wings or strips, then select your sauce. Options include Naked, BBQ Saucery, SY Thai, Buffalo and Cluckin' Hot. There are sharing platters for four or six people - which include all or a mix of the above - a children's menu, halloumi strips for veggies, and vegan tenders. There's also a choice of fries. Burgers will be introduced to the menu at a later date.

We opted for three strips in SY Thai and three in BBQ Saucery, as well as three wings in Buffalo and three in Cluckin' Hot, so as to try all the available sauces. They arrived on a platter accompanied by a blue cheese dip (which comes with the buffalo wings/strips) and a pot of slaw each. We chose the nacho cheese loaded fries and Tuk Tuk fries to accompany the chicken.

First up, the SY Thai strips. They were huge! And as was the case with all four dishes, the chicken itself was succulent and cooked perfectly. The coating was thick, crispy and seasoned nicely, while the SY Thai sauce, made from soy, honey and sriracha, was everything it should be - sweet and sticky with a subtle kick. We were impressed from the word go.

We know that the chicken is good - sourced locally from Shropshire farms, the wings are marinated in buttermilk for 24 hours, tossed in house flour and fried - but what about the rest of the sauces (all of which are homemade)?

The sweet and fruity Magic Rock Saucery IPA is used in BBQ Saucery, alongside fresh garlic and smokey spices. Smothered generously all over those monster strips and topped with crispy bacon and onions, this is in no way just a bog-standard BBQ sauce.

The Cluckin' Hot sauce, meanwhile, is made from fresh garlic, ginger and scotch bonnet chillies topped with a generous amount of shredded jalapeño, chillies and ground chilli flakes. Certainly hot enough to make you sweat (my partner more so than me!), it may or may not blow your head off... Try for yourself to see.

An American classic, the buffalo wings accompanied by the beautifully flavoured blue cheese dip were delicious. Alongside the SY Thai strips, they were the highlight of the evening. The fries were tasty, too!

That's the Bird covered - now for the Beer. On the taps are Paulaner - Munchner Hell (a 4.9% lager) and two session IPAs: Magic Rock - Saucery and Lervig - House Party. In the fridge is a range of craft beers, sours and stouts on rotation, and for non-beer drinkers a selection of wines, spirits, ciders, fizz and softies.

Bird & Beer's prices are more than reasonable, making it a great choice for families, friends, students and just about anyone who likes fried chicken or the restaurant's vegetarian and vegan options.

I have no doubt that Andy, Rach and the team will make a great success of Bird & Beer. It's a fantastic and much-needed addition to the town, and a venue, alongside its big sister, that I'll be spending a lot of time in. Fried chicken lovers, rejoice!

*Lauren Foster*

Food:	■■■■■
Service:	■■■■■
Ambience:	■■■■■
Overall value	■■■■■
<b>OVERALL</b>	■■■■■

**Bird & Beer**  
Chronicle House  
6 Castle Foregate  
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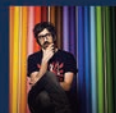
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29 January, 8pm  
**Mark Watson:  
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Tickets: £20



11 - 13 April,  
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Tickets: £14



12 February, 7.30pm  
**Daliso Chaponda:  
Apocalypse  
Not Now**  
Tickets: £15



30 April, 8pm  
**Elvis: The  
Songbook**  
Tickets: £10



19 February, 7.30pm  
**Gary Delaney:  
Gary In Punderland**  
at Burton Town Hall  
Tickets: £20



16 May, 7.30pm  
**Sam Sweeney  
Band**  
Tickets: £18



25 March, 7pm  
**LDN Wrestling**  
Tickets: £15



21 May, 7.30pm  
**Dom Joly:  
Holiday Snaps**  
at Burton Town Hall  
Tickets: £20



8 April, 7.30pm  
**Through the Decades  
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22 May, 7.30pm  
**The Fairport  
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Tickets: £27



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<b>APRIL</b>	Saturday 9th Wednesday 20th	Gordon Giltrap Jazz at The Cathedral Hotel TBA
<b>MAY</b>	Saturday 30th Friday 11th Saturday 30th Friday 27th	Rosie Tee (Sandfields Pumping Station) Jazz at The Cathedral Hotel TBA Karen Pfeiffer & Paul Walker (Sandfields Pumping Station) Introducing Night (The Hub at St Mary's)
<b>JUNE</b>	Fri 10th - Sun 12th	BLUES & JAZZ FESTIVAL
<b>JULY</b>	Fri 8th - Sun 10th	FUSE FESTIVAL
<b>OCTOBER</b>	Fri 14th - Sun 16th	L2F - LICHFIELD FESTIVAL OF FOLK

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**www.lichfieldarts.org.uk 01543 262223**





## The Halle In Hanley

Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 7 January

One of the UK's top symphonic ensembles, the Manchester-based Halle are admired around the globe for their extensive orchestral repertoire.

This Victoria Hall concert sees them paying homage to Austria's famous dynasty of composers, the Strauss family, as well as presenting works by Lehar, Stoltz and

Gershwin.

Performed under the conductorship of Stephen Bell and featuring soprano Sky Ingram (pictured), the concert includes Die Fledermaus: Czardas, Tritsch-Tratsch Polka, On The Beautiful Blue Danube: Waltz, and The Gypsy Baron Entrance March.



## African Sanctus featuring Ex Cathedra & CBSO

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Sun 16 January

Birmingham's highly rated early music ensemble Ex Cathedra here teams up with the city's Keneish Dance and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's community choir, SO Vocal, to present the late David Fanshawe's choral colossus, African Sanctus.

Bringing together the Latin Mass with live recordings of traditional African music, the composition is this year celebrating its 50th anniversary. It has been performed more than 1,000 times worldwide since premiering in London in summer 1972.

## Fretwork

St Alkmund's Church, Shrewsbury, Fri 14 January

The music of Henry Purcell and Matthew Locke features in this new-year offering from the viol-playing Fretwork.

Hailed for their original programming and sheer brilliance, the ensemble explore the core repertoire of great English consort music. They also champion contemporary compositions for viols, commissioning in excess of 40 new works since forming way back in 1985.



## Russell Watson

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Fri 14 January

It's more than 20 years since Russell Watson released debut offering *The Voice*, an album which topped the classical charts in both the UK and the US, catapulting him to stardom.

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

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



## New Year Viennese Strauss Gala

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Sun 16 January

The British Philharmonic Concert Orchestra kickstart 2022 in style with a show that recalls the glories of Johann Strauss, Franz Lehar and Viennese operetta.

Featured works include Strauss' *By The Beautiful Blue Danube*, *The Thunder And Lightning Polka* and the masterful *Die Fledermaus*. Highlights from Lehar's *Merry Widow* also feature, along with a wealth of operetta favourites from, among other works, *The Student Prince*, *The New Moon*, *The Gypsy Baron* and *The White Horse Inn*.





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**TJ Higgs:**  
**Grief Is Love**  
Friday 04 March  
7.30pm



**The Original**  
**Peaky Blinders Gang**  
Saturday 26 March  
7pm



**Geoff Norcott:**  
**I Blame the Parents**  
Thursday 31 March  
7.30pm



**Dom Joly's**  
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Saturday 29 January • 7.30pm •  
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### FEBRUARY

#### BEN THOMPSON AS ELVIS

Sunday 6 February • 7.30pm • £23.00



#### THE LEGENDS OF AMERICAN COUNTRY

Thursday 10 February • 7.30pm • £21.50



#### THE OPERA BOYS

Friday 11 February • 7.30pm • £20.00



#### ROUND THE HORNE

Tuesday 15 February • 7.30pm •  
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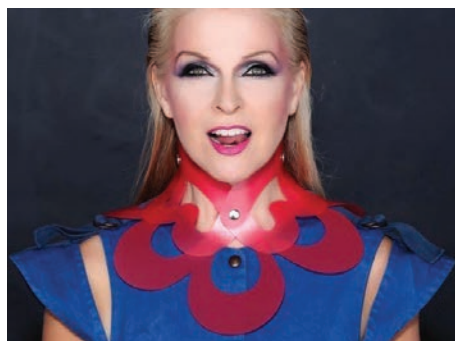
Live music from across the region...

## Toyah

The Robin, Bilston, Sun 16 January; Festival Drayton Centre, Market Drayton, North Shropshire, Sat 22 January

In a career spanning more than four decades, Birmingham-born musician and actress Toyah Willcox has had eight top-40 singles, released over 20 albums, written two books, appeared in more than 40 stage plays and 10 feature films, and voiced and presented numerous television shows.

With biggest hits including *It's A Mystery*, *Thunder in The Mountains* and *I Want To Be Free*, Toyah here performs close to home with her band. Support comes from Verity White.



## Ronan Keating

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Thurs 27 January

With 12 studio albums behind him, it's fair to say that Ronan Keating long ago stopped being thought of only in terms of Boyzone. He's currently one year short of celebrating three glorious decades in the music business, during which time (and among many other stand-out achievements) he's dueted with Elton John, sung for the Pope and recorded with Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens). Ronan stops off in Birmingham this month in support of his album, *Twenty Twenty*.



## Ben Walker & Kirsty Merryn

Henry Tudor House, Shrewsbury, Fri 28 January

BBC Folk Award winner Ben Walker joins forces with highly acclaimed singer and pianist Kirsty Merryn to create a fresh take on a tradition ripe for rediscovery. "We were talking about how it sometimes feels like we're more and more disconnected from the land we live on, the food we eat, the people around us," explains Ben. "We both wanted to explore how people have

sung about their relationship with the seasons, with work, and with each other." Although Ben and Kirsty are very much rooted in traditional music, they nevertheless bring with them eclectic influences from across the musical spectrum, including classical, jazz and electronica. "The songs remind us that all things pass," continues Ben, in talking about the duo's Shrewsbury show, "and that green things grow, the sun rises and sets, and the seasons change."

## Martin Simpson

Lichfield Guildhall, Fri 14 January

The most nominated musician in the history of the BBC Radio Two Folk Awards, critically acclaimed singer and virtuoso guitarist Martin Simpson embraces genres ranging from blues to folk. His Lichfield gig sees him playing a selection of his own compositions alongside a number of well-chosen interpretations.

## Big Country

The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury, Fri 14 January

Originally formed in Scotland in 1981 by Stuart Adamson and Bruce Watson, Big Country broke worldwide following the release of their now-classic debut album, *The Crossing*. Singles *Fields Of Fire*, *Chance* and *In A Big Country* sold over two million copies and drove the album to three prestigious Grammy nominations. Forty years later, and with multiple line-up changes along the way, the band continue to entertain fans around the world.

## Martyn Joseph

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Fri 28 January

Dubbed the 'Welsh Springsteen', Martyn Joseph is a mesmerising performer who boasts the rare ability to speak to the soul with his expressive and poignant lyrics. With a career spanning 30 years, 32 albums, over half a million record sales and thousands of live gigs, Joseph is a unique talent whose passion for his trade always guarantees his army of dedicated fans an exceptional evening of musicmaking.





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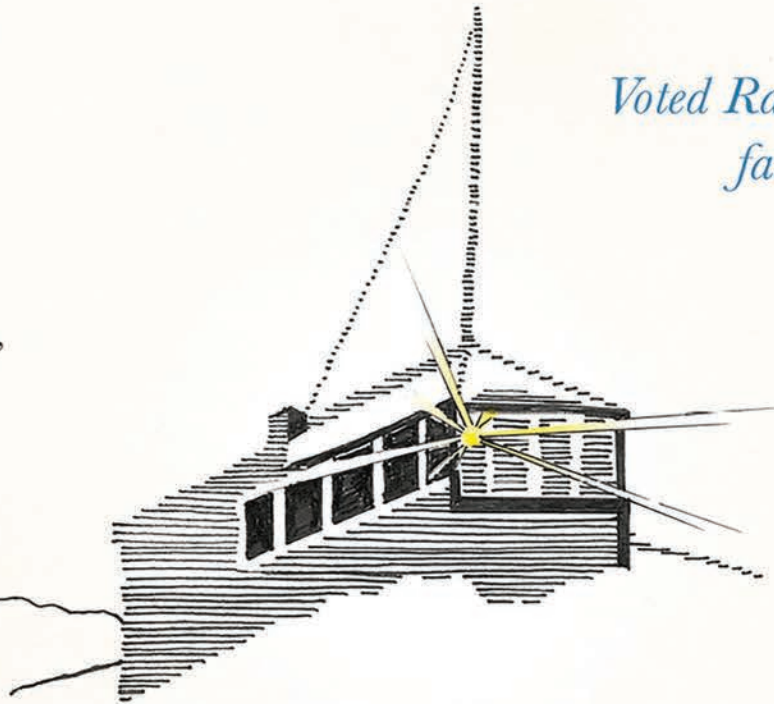
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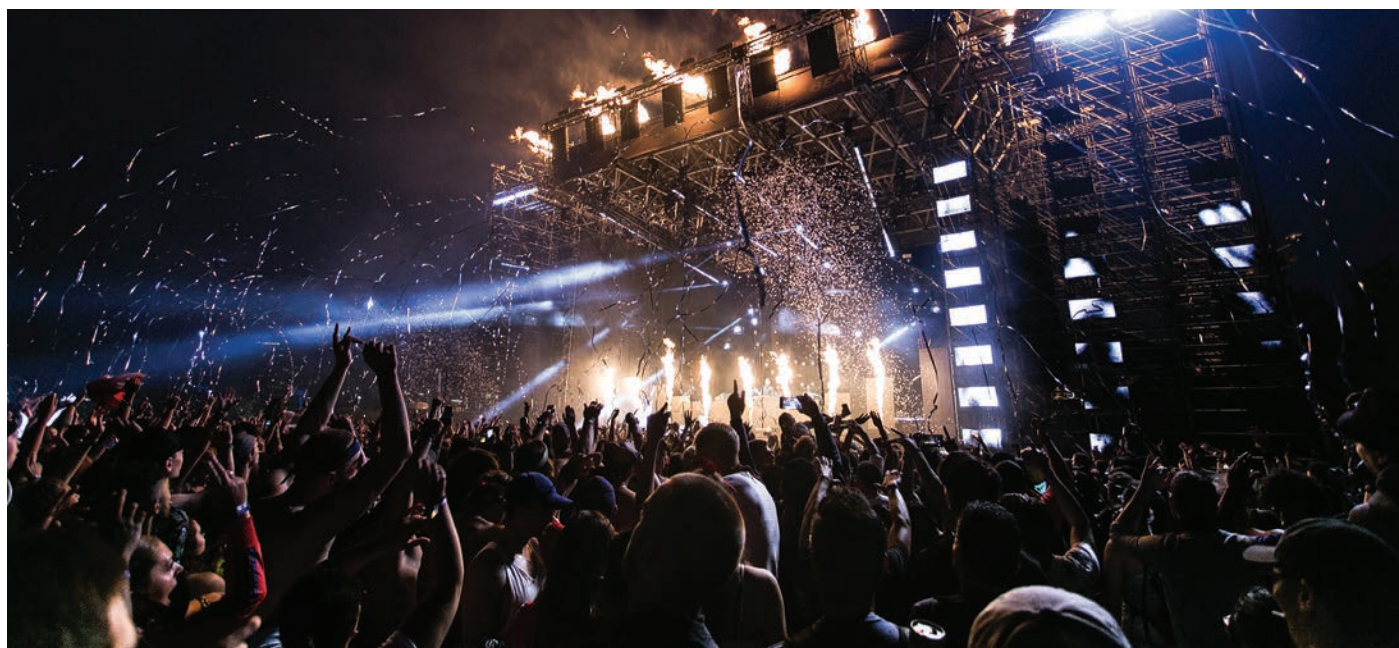
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## Festivals to look forward to in 2022



When it comes to music, regardless of your preference - be it jazz, indie, folk, classical, world or pop - you're sure to find a festival in the Midlands - and beyond, to suit your taste. So let's make 2022 a year to remember for all the right reasons... Get your diary out asap and get booking!

### FEBRUARY

**HAMMERFEST 13** Line-up includes Venom Inc, Raging Speedhorn, Blaze Bayley, Conan, Sat 12 - Sun 13 February, O2 Academy, Birmingham [hammerfest.co.uk](http://hammerfest.co.uk)

### APRIL

**NANTWICH JAZZ, BLUES & MUSIC FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Big Country, FM, Demon, Sari Schorr, King King, Rebecca Downes and Tony Christie, Thurs 14 - Mon 18 April, various venues in Nantwich, Cheshire [nantwichjazz.com](http://nantwichjazz.com)

**WONDERLAND 2.5 RELAUNCHED** Line-up includes Filta, Rooted & Booted, SKA45s, The Dualers, The Neville Staple Band, Marquis Drive, The Blue Print Blues Brothers, Jay Francis (George Michael tribute), Erasured, Aretha Franklin Tribute, The Jam'd & Totally Tina, Fri 15 - Mon 18 April, Chillington Hall, Brewood, Wolverhampton [dubscollective.com](http://dubscollective.com)

**CHELTHENHAM JAZZ FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc. Wed 27 April - Mon 2 May, Montpellier Gardens, Cheltenham [cheltenhamfestivals.com/jazz](http://cheltenhamfestivals.com/jazz)

**UPTON UPON SEVERN FOLK FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc. Fri 29 April - Mon 2 May, various venues, Upton upon Severn,

Worcestershire [uptonfolk.org](http://uptonfolk.org)

**SWINGAMAJIG** Line-up tbc, Sat 30 April, Birmingham Botanical Gardens [swingamajig.co.uk](http://swingamajig.co.uk)

**LIVERPOOL SOUND CITY** Line-up includes Self Esteem, The Lathums, Alfie Templeman, Sat 30 April - Sun 1 May, Baltic Triangle and Cains Brewery, Liverpool [soundcity.uk.com](http://soundcity.uk.com)

### MAY

**FOCUS WALES** Line-up tbc, Thurs 5 - Sat 7 May, various venues in Wrexham, Wales [focuswales.com](http://focuswales.com)

**THE ACOUSTIC FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN** Line-up tbc, Fri 20 - Sun 22 May, Uttoxeter Racecourse. [acousticfestival.co.uk](http://acousticfestival.co.uk)

**BEARDED THEORY SPRING GATHERING** Line-up includes Placebo, Patti Smith, The Flaming Lips, The Hives, Frank Turner & The Sleeping Souls, Amy MacDonald & The Mission, Thurs 26 - Sun 29 May, Catton Hall, South Derbyshire. [beardedtheory.co.uk](http://beardedtheory.co.uk)

**LECHLADE MUSIC FESTIVAL** Line-up includes The Boomtown Rats & Alexandra Burke, Fri 27 - Sun 29 May, Riverside Park, Lechlade, Gloucestershire. [lechladefestival.co.uk](http://lechladefestival.co.uk)

**GLASTONBUDGET** Line-up includes

Blurb, The Bootleg Beatles, Alternative Pet Shop Boys, Mercury, Love Distraction, Oasis, One Step Behind & Stereotonics. Thurs 2 - Sat 4 June, Turnpost Farm, Leicestershire [glastonbudget.org](http://glastonbudget.org)

**STAFFS FEST** Line-up tbc, Fri 27 - Sun 29 May, Lower Drayton Farm, Penkridge, Staffs [staffsfest.co.uk](http://staffsfest.co.uk)

**CHESTER FOLK FESTIVAL** Line-up includes False Lights, Melrose Quartet & The Trials Of Cato, Fri 27 - Sun 29 May, Kelsall Village, Cheshire. [chesterfolk.org.uk](http://chesterfolk.org.uk)

**BBC RADIO 1'S BIG WEEKEND** Line-up tbc, Fri 27 - Mon 29 May, War Memorial Park, Coventry. [bbc.co.uk/events/ebpr8g](http://bbc.co.uk/events/ebpr8g)

**NEIGHBOURHOOD WEEKENDER** Line-up includes Courteeners, DMA's, Becky Hill, The Lathums & The Fratellis. Sat 28 - Sun 29 May, Victoria Park, Warrington [nbhdweekender.com](http://nbhdweekender.com)

**CREATION DAY FESTIVAL** Line-up includes IDLES, Happy Mondays, Echo & The Bunnymen & Friendly Fires. Sat 28 - Sun 29 May, West Park, Wolverhampton. [creationdayfestival.com](http://creationdayfestival.com)

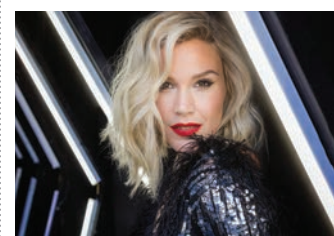
**DOT TO DOT FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc. Sun 29 May, various venues in Nottingham. [dottodotfestival.co.uk](http://dottodotfestival.co.uk)

### JUNE

**BREAKING BANDS** Line-up includes Neck, Collateral, Diamond Black, Dendera, Midnite City, Wed 1 - Mon 6 June, Stoke Prior Sports & Country Club, Bromsgrove [breakingbandsfestival.com](http://breakingbandsfestival.com)

**ROCK AND BOWL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 2 - Sat 4 June, Picnic Area, Market Drayton, North Shropshire [rockandbowlfestival.com](http://rockandbowlfestival.com)

**MELLO** Line-up includes Joss Stone (pictured), Odyssey, Swingout Sister, Craig Charles & Trevor Nelson, Thurs 2 - Sun 5 June, Seven End Country Estate, Hanley Castle, Worcestershire. [mellofestival.co.uk](http://mellofestival.co.uk)



**HOWTHELIGHTGETSIN** The world's largest philosophy and music festival. Line-up tbc, Thurs 2 - Sun 5 June, Hay on Wye, Hereford [howthelightgetsin.org](http://howthelightgetsin.org)



## Festivals to look forward to in 2022

**WYCHWOOD MUSIC FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Deacon Blue, Peter Hook & The Light, The South, Dreadzone, Craig Charles Funk & Soul Club, Fri 3 - Sun 5 June, Cheltenham Racecourse. [wychwoodfestival.com](http://wychwoodfestival.com)

**GOTTWOOD FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 9 - Sun 12 June, Carreglwyd Estate, Anglesey [gottwood.co.uk](http://gottwood.co.uk)

**DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Kiss, Iron Maiden, Biffy Clyro, A Day To Remember, Deftones & Shinedown, Fri 10 - Sun 12 June, Donington Park, Derby [downloadfestival.co.uk](http://downloadfestival.co.uk)

**LICHFIELD BLUES & JAZZ FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 10 - Sun 12 June, various locations, Lichfield-[lichfieldarts.org.uk](http://lichfieldarts.org.uk)

**PARKLIFE FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Sat 11 - Sun 12 June, Heaton Park, Manchester [parklife.co.uk](http://parklife.co.uk)

**NOCTURNE LIVE AT BLENHEIM PALACE** Line-up includes Simply Red & David Gray, Wed 15 - Sun 19 June, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire [nocturnelive.com](http://nocturnelive.com)

**CAMBRIDGE ROCK FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Focus, Cats In Space, Dare, Strawbs & Tygers Of Pan Tang, Thurs 16 - Sun 19 June, East of England Showground, Peterborough [cambridgerockfestival.co.uk](http://cambridgerockfestival.co.uk)

**ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Lewis Capaldi, Lionel Richie, Kasabian, Pete Tong, Muse & Rudimental, Thurs 16 - Sun 19 June, Seaclose Park, Isle of Wight [isleofwightfestival.com](http://isleofwightfestival.com)

**SONIC ROCK SOLSTICE 2022** Line-up includes Zubzub, Krankschaft & Nik Turner's Trance Dimensionals. Thurs 16 - Mon 20 June, Stoke Prior Sports and Country Club, Worcester [sonicrocksolstice.com](http://sonicrocksolstice.com)

**BEARDY FOLK FESTIVAL** Line-up includes The Jamestown Brothers,

Edward II, The Young'uns & The Magic Arc, Thurs 16 - Sun 19 June, Hopton Court, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire. [beardyyfolkfestival.co.uk](http://beardyyfolkfestival.co.uk)

**GLASTONBURY** Line-up includes Billie Eilish & Diana Ross, Wed 22 - Sun 26 June, Worthy Farm, Shepton Mallet [glastonburyfestivals.co.uk](http://glastonburyfestivals.co.uk)

**UPTON JAZZ FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Sat 25 - Sun 26 June, various venues in Upton-upon-Severn, Worcestershire [uptonjazz.co.uk](http://uptonjazz.co.uk)

**SOUNDS OF THE CITY** Line-up includes Lewis Capaldi, Foals, James & Crowded House, Tues 28 June - Wed 6 July, Castlefield Bowl, Manchester [visitmanchester.com](http://visitmanchester.com)

**EL DORADO FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 30 June - Sun 3 July, Eastnor Castle, Ledbury [eldoradofestival.com](http://eldoradofestival.com)

**BACK 2 FESTIVAL** Line-up includes UB40, Steps, Cascada & Aqua, Thurs 30 June - Sun 3 July, Catton Park, Derbyshire

## JULY

**TIMBER FESTIVAL** Line-up includes The Turbans, Josienne Clarke, Simon Armitage & Max Porter with The Rushes, Fri 1 - Sun 3 July, Feanedock, The National Forest [timberfestival.org.uk](http://timberfestival.org.uk)

**CAMPERJAM** Line-up includes Massaoke, The Elton John Experience, Artful Dodger & Amazing Blues Brothers, Fri 1 - Sun 3 July, Weston Park, Shropshire [camperjam.com](http://camperjam.com)

**FORBIDDEN FOREST** Line-up includes Adam Beyer, Ben Stirling, Gok Wan & Basement Jaxx (DJ Set), Sat 2 - Sun 3 July, venue tbc [forbidden-forest.co.uk](http://forbidden-forest.co.uk)

**THE ROCK AND BIKE FEST** Line-up includes Anti Nowhere League, Fleetwood Bac & The Animals & Friends, Thurs 7 - Sat 9 July, Carnfield Hall, Derbyshire [rockandbikefest.co.uk](http://rockandbikefest.co.uk)

**2000TREES FESTIVAL** Line-up includes IDLES, Thrice, Jimmy Eat World & The Amazons, Thurs 7 - Sat 9 July, Upcote Farm, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire [twothousandtreesfestival.co.uk](http://twothousandtreesfestival.co.uk)

**BROMSGROVE FOLK FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 7 - Sun 10 July, various venues across Bromsgrove [bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk](http://bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk)

**NOISILY FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 7 - Sun 10 July, Coney Woods at Noseley Hall, Leicestershire [noisilyfestival.com](http://noisilyfestival.com)

**NAPTON MUSIC FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Artificial Monkeys & Counterfeit Quo, Fri 8 - Sat 9 July, Napton Village Hall Grounds, Napton On The Hill, Warwickshire [naptonfestival.co.uk](http://naptonfestival.co.uk)

**CORNBURY MUSIC FESTIVAL** Line-up includes James Blunt, Bryan Adams & Ronan Keating, Fri 8 - Sun 10 July, The Great Tew Park, Cheltenham [cornburyfestival.com](http://cornburyfestival.com)

**THE MOSTLY JAZZ FUNK AND SOUL FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 8 - Sun 10 July, Moseley Park, Birmingham [mostlyjazz.co.uk](http://mostlyjazz.co.uk)

**FUSE FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 8 - Sun 10 July, Beacon Park, Lichfield, Staffordshire [fuselichfield.org.uk](http://fuselichfield.org.uk)

**ALSO FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 8 - Sun 10 July, Park Farm, Warwickshire. [also-festival.com](http://also-festival.com)

**GATE TO SOUTHWELL** Line-up includes Dervish, Peat & Diesel, Ian Siegal, While & Matthews, Thurs 14 - Sun 17 July, Kirklington, Southwell,

Nottinghamshire [gtsf.uk](http://gtsf.uk)

**THE BEAT-HERDER FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 14 - Sun 17 July, Dockber Farm, Clitheroe, Lancashire [beatherder.co.uk](http://beatherder.co.uk)

**UPTON BLUES FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Elles Bailey, The Swaps, Trafficker XL, The Folly Brothers, Hamilton Loomis & Mumbo Jumbo, Fri 15 - Sun 17 July, various venues around Upton upon Severn, Worcestershire [uptonbluesfestival.com](http://uptonbluesfestival.com)

**THE BIRMINGHAM, SOLIHULL & WESTSIDE FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 15 - Sun 24 July, venues tbc, Birmingham [birminghamjazzfestival.com](http://birminghamjazzfestival.com)

**LET'S ROCK SHREWSBURY** Line-up includes Billy Ocean, Wet Wet Wet, Nick Heyward, Tony Hadley & Kid Creole, Sat 16 July, The Quarry, Shrewsbury [letsrockshrewsbury.com](http://letsrockshrewsbury.com)

**NOZSTOCK** Line-up includes Sister Sledge, Bill Bailey, Andy C FT Tonn Piper & Gentleman's Dub Club, Thurs 21 - Sun 24 July, Rowden Paddocks, Bromyard, Herefordshire [nozstock.com](http://nozstock.com)

**LATITUDE FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 21 - Sun 24 July, Henham Park, Suffolk [latitudefestival.com](http://latitudefestival.com)

**WARWICK FOLK FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Seth Lakeman, Show Of Hands & The Young'uns, Thurs 21 - Sun 24 July, Castle Park, Warwick [warwickfolkfestival.co.uk](http://warwickfolkfestival.co.uk)

**WOMAD FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 21 - Sun 24 July, Charlton Park, Wiltshire [womad.co.uk](http://womad.co.uk)

**TRUCK FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Bombay Bicycle Club, Sam Fender & Kasabian, Fri 22 - Sun 24 July, Hill Farm, Stevenon, Oxfordshire [truckfestival.com](http://truckfestival.com)

**CARFEST NORTH** Line-up includes





Richard Ashcroft, Mcfly, Steps & Nile Rodgers & Chic, Fri 22 - Sun 24 July, Bolesworth Castle, Chester [carfest.org](http://carfest.org)

**CAMP BESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 28 - Sun 31 July, Lulworth Castle, Dorset [campfestival.net](http://campfestival.net)

**Y NOT FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Stereophonics, Courteeners, Blossoms & Manic Street Preachers, Thurs 28 - Sun 31 July, Aston Hill Farm, Pike Hall, Derbyshire [ynotfestival.com](http://ynotfestival.com)

**MADE BIRMINGHAM** Line-up tbc, Sat 30 July, Perry Park, Birmingham [made-festival.co.uk](http://made-festival.co.uk)

## AUGUST

**WILDERNESS FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 4 - Sun 7 Aug, Cornbury Park, Oxfordshire [wildernessfestival.com](http://wildernessfestival.com)

**ROCK THE PARK WREXHAM** Line-up includes Scooter, Darren Styles, Hi-On Maiden & Simulation Muse, Fri 5 - Sun 7 Aug, Borras Hall Lane, Wrexham [rockthepark.co.uk](http://rockthepark.co.uk)

**WE ARE FSTVL** Line-up includes Andy C, Armand Van Helden & Apollonia, Fri 5 - Sun 7 Aug, Damyns Hall Aerodrome, Essex [wearefstvl.com](http://wearefstvl.com)

**BOARDMASTERS** Line-up includes George Ezra, Disclosure, Kings Of Leon, Bastille & IDLES, Wed 10 - Sun 14 Aug, Watergate Bay, Newquay, Cornwall [boardmasters.com](http://boardmasters.com)

**BOOMTOWN** Line-up tbc, Thurs 11 - Sun 14 Aug, Matterley Estate, Vinton, Hampshire [boomtownfair.co.uk](http://boomtownfair.co.uk)

**110 ABOVE FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 11 - Sun 14 Aug, Gopsall Hall Farm, Leicestershire [110above.com](http://110above.com)

**BLOODSTOCK OPEN AIR** Line-up includes Behemoth, Mercyful Fate,

Lamb Of God & Dimmu Borgir, Thurs 11 - Sun 14 Aug, Catton Hall, Derbyshire [bloodstock.uk.com](http://bloodstock.uk.com)

**LAKEFEST** Line-up tbc, Thurs 11 - Sun 14 Aug, Eastnor Castle, Herefordshire [lakefest.co.uk](http://lakefest.co.uk)

**BAREFOOT FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 12 - Mon 15 August, Prestwold Hall, Leicestershire [barefootfestival.com](http://barefootfestival.com)

**FARMER PHIL'S FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 14 - Sun 16 Aug, Near Gatten Farm, Ratlinghope, Shropshire [farmerphilsfestival.com](http://farmerphilsfestival.com)

**GREEN MAN FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Michael Kiwanuka, Thurs 18 - Sun 21 Aug, near Crickhowell, South Wales [greenman.net](http://greenman.net)

**CAMP BESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Thurs 18 - Sun 21 August, Weston Park, Staffordshire [shropshire.campbestival.net](http://shropshire.campbestival.net)

**THE MOIRA FURNACE FOLK FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Steve Tilton & Hugh Bradley, Granny's Attic & Robin Laing, Fri 19 - Sun 21 Aug, Moira Furnace Museum and Monument Site, Leicestershire [moirafurnacefolkfestival.co.uk](http://moirafurnacefolkfestival.co.uk)

**THE JUST SO FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 19 - Sun 21 Aug, Rode Hall Parkland, Cheshire [justsofestival.org.uk](http://justsofestival.org.uk)

**OLD BUSH BLUES FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Tom Waters, Dan Burnett & Jerry Joblanski, Fri 19 - Sun 21 Aug, The Old Bush, Callow End, Worcester [oldbushblues.co.uk](http://oldbushblues.co.uk)

**ALL POINTS EAST FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Gorillaz, Disclosure & The Chemical Brothers, Fri 19 - Sun 28 Aug, Victoria Park, East London



**allpointseastfestival.com**

**LOST VILLAGE** Line-up includes Bombay Bicycle Club, Caribou, Four Tet & Arlo Parks, Fri 26 - Sun 28 Aug, The Village, near Newark, Lincolnshire [lostvillagefestival.com](http://lostvillagefestival.com)

**THE BIG FEASTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 26 - Sun 28 Aug, Kingham, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire [thebigfeastival.co.uk](http://thebigfeastival.co.uk)

**BEERMAGEDDON FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 26 - Sun 28 Aug, Stoke Prior Sports & Country Club, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire [beermageddon.co.uk](http://beermageddon.co.uk)

**VICTORIOUS FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 26 - Sun 28 Aug, Southsea Seaground, Portsmouth [victoriousfestival.co.uk](http://victoriousfestival.co.uk)

**CREAMFIELDS** Line-up tbc, Fri 26 - Sun 28 Aug, Daresbury, Halton, Cheshire [creamfields.com](http://creamfields.com)

**SHAMBALA** Line-up tbc, Fri 26 - Sun 28 Aug, a secret location in Northampton [shambalafestival.org](http://shambalafestival.org)

**CAMPER CALLING** Line-up includes James, Shed Seven, The Dualers! & The Pigeon Detectives, Fri 26 - Sun 28 Aug, Ragley Hall, Warwickshire [campercalling.com](http://campercalling.com)

**READING FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Arctic Monkeys, Rage Against The Machine & Megan Thee Stallion, Fri 26 - Sun 28 Aug, Richfield Avenue, Reading [readingfestival.com](http://readingfestival.com)

**LEEDS FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Run The Jewels, Dave & Wolf Alice, Fri 26 - Sun 28 Aug, Bramham Park, Leeds [leedsfestival.com](http://leedsfestival.com)

**SUNSHINE FESTIVAL** Line-up includes The Human League, Squeeze, Level 42, Fri 26 - Mon 29 Aug, Fish Meadow, Upton upon Severn, Worcestershire [uptonfestival.co.uk](http://uptonfestival.co.uk)

**SHREWSBURY FOLK FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Judy Collins, Show of Hands, Blackie And The Rodeo Kings, Carlos Núñez, Black Umfolosi & Della Mae, Fri 26 - Mon 29 Aug, Greenhous West Mid Showground, Shrewsbury [shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk](http://shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk)

## SEPTEMBER

**MOSELEY FOLK FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Supergrass, Seasick Steve (pictured) & The Weather Station, Fri 2 - Sun 4 Sept, Moseley Park, Birmingham [moseleyfolk.co.uk](http://moseleyfolk.co.uk)

**SUNDOWN FESTIVAL** Line-up tbc, Fri 2 - Sun 4 Sept, Norfolk Showground, Norwich [sundownfestival.co.uk](http://sundownfestival.co.uk)

**OFF THE TRACKS** Line-up tbc, Fri 2 - Sun 4 Sept, Castle Donington [offthetracks.co.uk](http://offthetracks.co.uk)

**BROMYARD FOLK FESTIVAL** Line-up includes Edward II, Breabach, Kinnaris Quintet, The Breath, The John Martyn Project & Calan, Thurs 8 - Sun 11 Sept, Bromyard, Herefordshire [bromyardfolkfestival.co.uk](http://bromyardfolkfestival.co.uk)

**ONBOARD THE CRAFT** Line-up includes Syteria, Evil Blizzard, Mr Strange & Scotch Corner, Thurs 18 - Mon 11 Sept, Stoke Prior Sports and Country Club, Worcester [sonicrocksolstice.com](http://sonicrocksolstice.com)

**BIRMINGHAM PRIDE** Line-up includes Steps, Sat 24 - Sun 25 September, Birmingham Gay Village [bhampride.com](http://bhampride.com)

## OCTOBER

**L2F THE LICHFIELD FESTIVAL OF FOLK** Line-up tbc, Fri 14 - Sat 15 Oct, various venues, Lichfield [lichfieldarts.org.uk](http://lichfieldarts.org.uk)

Judy Collins at Shrewsbury Folk Festival 26 - 29 August



Steps at Birmingham Pride 24 - 25 September





# BACK TO LIVE

**After the devastation caused by the Covid pandemic, Steve Adams looks forward - with fingers crossed - to the region's live music scene getting back to normal in 2022**

When Oasis tribute act Noasis got snowed in at a hilltop pub in the Yorkshire Dales recently, Liam Gallagher probably wasn't the only one to be envious. "I'm actually jealous I'm always trying to get a lock inn [sic]" he tweeted. Fans, artists and venues starved of live music during the Covid pandemic no doubt also looked on with a hint of envy at the enforced three-day festival, during which the band - promptly nicknamed 'Snowasis' - played acoustic sets to their captive audience.

Those punters were literally held captive, of course, in stark contrast to music lovers being shut out of gigs during the Covid-enforced closure of live venues, which lasted over a year and decimated the industry. Restrictions were lifted last summer, but that came too late for most of the UK's festivals, as well as many tours, with dates shelved in 2020 and 2021 being put back to 2022.

All of which makes the coming year such a significant one - and while the impact of the Omicron variant of Covid undoubtedly casts a

shadow, there's still cause for optimism, according to Lyle Bignon, founder of industry body the Birmingham Music Coalition: "As things stand now, although the spectre of Covid-19 still hangs over the UK music industry - in particular the live sector - morale and growth appear to be picking up. Grassroots music venues are still playing financial and artistic catch-up. However, there is a sense that collectively we may have weathered the worst."

The past 20 months has seen live music stop and then cautiously restart with a variety of limitations and obstacles in place - not least a drop-off in shows and attendances due to the understandable wariness of many concert-goers. But the period has also seen the industry get creative in terms of finding ways to survive.

"There are now a number of different models that artists and venues can adopt," explains Lyle, "and a number of funding streams have cushioned the triple threat of lockdown,

reduced fans and touring acts, at least compared to pre-pandemic levels. Given the incoming threat of new variants, and the subsequent restrictions on nighttime economies in neighbouring countries, music professionals and NTE workers are understandably concerned about what the coming months might bring.

"But we are a resilient lot, backed by a number of active and impactful industry bodies such as UK Music and the Night Time Industries Association. The opening of new venues in Birmingham and the Midlands, such as Forum Birmingham and Albert Schloss, gives an indication of the long-term faith which operators have in the markets here."

Here's hoping that their faith is rewarded, and that 2022 is the year in which music, and our local music scene particularly, really gets 'back to live'.





## GIGS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN 2022

The coming year should hopefully be a good one for live music in the region, and a number of major stars and new acts have already announced dates for the coming months. Here's our selection of the highlights.

### THE BIG ONE

The region's undoubted 'event' gig of the year is Radio One's Big Weekend, which takes place from 27 to 29 May and is set to see more than 70,000 fans descend on Coventry's Memorial Park. No names have been confirmed so far, but previous editions have been headlined by the likes of Coldplay, Ed Sheeran and Billie Eilish, so it's safe to say we can expect some very major players.

### OTHER BIG ONES

Speaking of big names, local stadium gigs so far announced see the Foo Fighters play Villa Park (27 June), with The Killers (28 May) and Rammstein (26 June) both rocking up at Coventry Building Society Arena. Warwick Castle is the venue for outdoor shows by Olly Murs (16 July), Michael Bublé (13 July) and the recently reformed Tears For Fears (15 July). Cannock Chase hosts Jess Glynne (9 June), Rag'n'Bone Man (10 June), Keane (11 June) and Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds (12 June). Other star attractions coming our way this year include Billie Eilish, Stormzy, Dua Lipa, Royal Blood, Sam Fender and Foals (all at the Utilita Arena).

## (STILL) ALIVE & KICKING

The Mad World (ahem) of nostalgia tours continues unabated in 2022, with a range of acts heading out on greatest hits and anniversary treks. These include 40th birthday celebrations for Simple Minds (Resorts World Arena) and Echo & The Bunnymen (O2 Academy), and 30th anniversaries for De La Soul (O2 Institute) and Soul II Soul (O2 Institute and Coventry Empire).

Resorts World Arena will also host greatest hits shows from the likes of Simply Red, James Blunt and - before they split - Little Mix, while dry ice, rather than dry eyes, will be the order of the day when Whitesnake take a final bow at the Utilita Arena, in a triple bill with Foreigner and Europe.

Other notable 'blast from the past' acts playing our region this year include A-Ha, Crowded House, Queen, Bryan Adams (all Utilita Arena), Pet Shop Boys (Resorts World Arena), The Stranglers, Counting Crows (O2 Academy), Suzanne Vega, 10cc, Joe Jackson, Status Quo, Adam Ant (all Symphony Hall), The Alarm, The Buzzcocks (both O2 Institute), John Otway, Ian McNabb, Glenn Tilbrook, The Christians and T'Pau (all Robin, Bilston).

### LYLE'S PICKS

• AP Dhillon and Gurinder Gill, global Punjabi music sensations, bring their hip-hop and trap-inspired sound to Forum Birmingham on 17 & 23 February

• Los Bitchos, a kitsch Cumbria meets Art Rock four-piece out of London, visit the Hare & Hounds in Kings Heath, Birmingham, on 24 February

• Dave, off the back of his insightful and powerful number one UK rap album, comes to Utilita Arena on 27 February

• Mungo's Hifi, Scottish dub soundsystem voyagers, play at The Mill in Digbeth, Birmingham, on 18 March

### STEVE'S PICKS

• Lloyd Cole is still pushing the envelope on recent electronica-fuelled material but expect to hear plenty of '80s classics at Leamington Assembly on 7 February

• Talvin Singh, long-term leading light on the Indian fusion and Asian Underground scenes, performs an intimate show at Coventry's newly reopened Drapers' Hall on 26 February

• The War On Drugs - Adam Granduciel's meandering shoegaze-meets-Springsteen collective bring their laidback grooves to the O2 Academy on 11 April

• Sea Power - these Cumbrian alt rockers might no longer be nominally 'British', but the shortened name has coincided with some of their best material, which they'll perform at the O2 Institute on 13 April







## Mark Watson

Bilston Town Hall, Sat 22 January; Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton-upon-Trent, Sat 29 January

Well established on the UK comedy circuit, Mark Watson was born in Bristol to Welsh parents. He initially delivered his act with a Welsh accent, claiming he felt more comfortable talking in a voice that he didn't quite recognise as his own. "Comedy is a time-consuming element of

my life," he admits, "but then while I'm out touring and on stage, there are people at home doing far less glamorous things. There have certainly been times when I've been very happy to say, 'Of course I'd like to stay and help out with that plumbing crisis, but the Midlands awaits!'"

## Siobhan Phillips

Bilston Town Hall, Thurs 20 January

Described as the love child of Peter Kay and Victoria Wood, Siobhan Phillips presents a stand-up routine that's heavily constructed around her own experiences, included among which are becoming a first-time mum at the age of 40 and dealing with the trauma of a tantrum-throwing toddler. Gaining the attention of the wider public as the only female finalist on Britain's Got Talent 2019, she's since developed an army of dedicated fans, who simply can't get enough of her witty observations on life and her hugely amusing self-penned songs. She visits Bilston with her touring show, Live And Unhinged.



## Alfie Moore

Sutton Coldfield Town Hall, Sat 22 January; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sat 30 April



Staunch Sheffield socialist Alfie Moore is a master raconteur and a very funny man. He also used to be a police officer. Indeed, back in the days when he was still both a comedian *and* a cop, his website advised that if you wanted to see Alfie 'live', your options were either to catch him at one of his gigs or drive to Scunthorpe and park on a double yellow line. With his gag-bag including "I'm in a same-sex marriage... the sex is always the same", he stops off in Sutton Coldfield this month with his new touring show, Fair Cop Unleashed.

## John Bishop

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Fri 21 January; Utilita Arena, Birmingham, Fri 1 - Sat 2 April

Evidently a fella who likes to fly by the seat of his pants, John Bishop left the comfort of a lucrative marketing job to work full time on his comedy act.

It was certainly a brave decision to make, but one that has since been fully justified - the 55-year-old Liverpoolian is nowadays one of the UK's best known and most highly regarded funnymen.

Nowadays a regular face on TV - he's currently assisting Dr Who, of course - his jokes include, "Being an England supporter is like being the over-optimistic parents of the fat kid on sports day," and "Edinburgh is the only place you can be sunburned and get trench foot on the same day."

John stops off in Birmingham with Right Here, Right Now, his eighth stand-up show.



## Andy Parsons

The Glee Club, Birmingham, Wed 19 January

With complimentary reviews (sort of) including such observations as 'what he lacks in hair, he more than makes up for in originality', Andy Parsons is a sharp and topical comedian who's well known from TV shows such as BBC's Mock The Week and Live At The Apollo.

Jokes include: "If you've been affected by any of the issues raised in tonight's episode of EastEnders, they must have been acting better than they usually do."



## Patrick Monahan

Just The Tonic Comedy Club, Birmingham, Sat 29 January

Half Iranian, half Irish stand-up comic Patrick Monahan is no slouch when it comes to bringing up the subject of his own ethnicity on stage. And why would he be... his material includes a quality joke about having to spend the whole of his holiday in customs, and he's not afraid to use it! "I guess I like to think that maybe I'm breaking down stereotypes," explains Patrick, who's eager to make it clear that his comedy isn't just political. "I think it's important to look for positive stuff in life. Focusing on the bad stuff all the time would mean that the only people who'd come to my shows would be the ones who thought the end of the world was nigh!" Patrick shares the bill with Alfie Brown, Chris Washington and Lou Conran.

## Omid Djalili

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sat 22 January

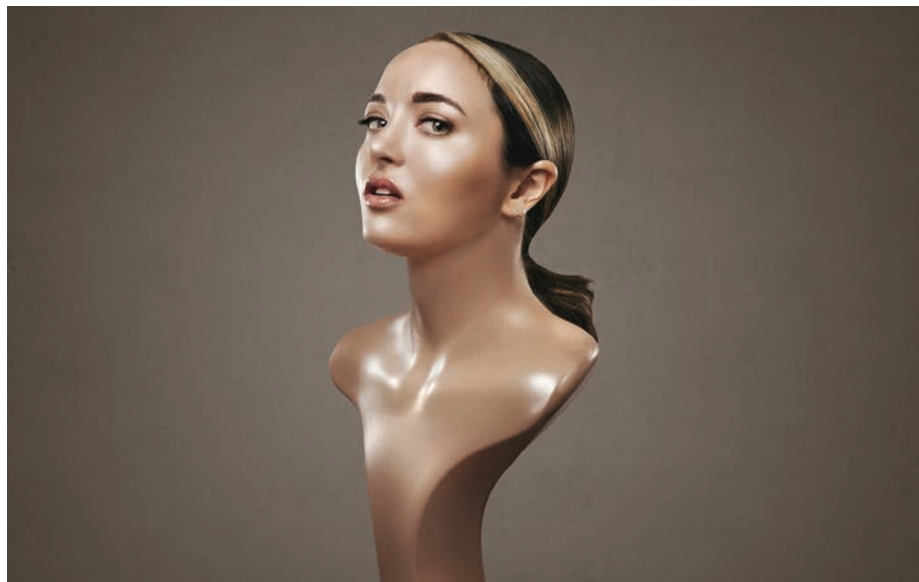
"My new touring show, The Good Times, is about the reinvention, the rebirth and the recalibration of my stand-up comedy for the new normal," explains award-winning



funnyman and Edinburgh Festival favourite Omid Djalili. "Hopefully it'll be a joyous explosion of comedy that splatters an excited audience like Jackson Pollock when he's had too much to drink."

A fella who's been referred to as 'the thinking person's Iranian comedian', Omid is probably one of the most subversive comics currently doing the rounds on the UK comedy circuit.

"I've been breaking away from the Middle Eastern pigeonhole that you people (journalists) have unfairly put me in. I'm a citizen of the world, and I will not be defined by cultural stereotypes. I have a specific viewpoint, which many call 'Djalili-esque', and I think my material reflects that now. Would you like a carpet? Visit my website. I also sell fried chicken, mayonnaise, motorcycle insurance and viagra, very fine price."



## Fern Brady

Henry Tudor House, Shrewsbury, Wed 26 January; Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton, Fri 11 February; The Glee Club, Birmingham, Wed 16 February; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Sat 19 February

Feminism and existential despair are among the subjects which Fern Brady contemplates during her stand-up shows. Along the way she deploys her acerbic wit to recount highly personal stories about her mental-health issues, her sexuality and even her interest in

amateur pornography.

Original, challenging and - most importantly of all, of course - extremely funny, she stops off in Shrewsbury this month with her latest touring show, Autistic Bikini Queen.

## Rhod Gilbert

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Sat 29 January; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Sun 30 January; Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Sat 9 April; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Tues 26 April

Welsh funnyman Rhod Gilbert has acquired a huge and still-growing following thanks to a high-energy brand of grumpiness that marks him out as one of the top comedians of his generation.

With several sell-out UK tours to his name, he's this month returning to the Midlands with his latest stand-up show, The Book Of John.

Rhod's best-loved gags include: "In the Bible, God made it rain for 40 days and 40 nights. That's a pretty good summer for Wales. That's a hosepipe ban waiting to happen." And "A spa hotel? It's like a normal hotel, only in reception there's a picture of a pebble."



## Carl Hutchinson

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Thurs 13 January

Observational comedian Carl Hutchinson makes a welcome return with a show that covers all manner of common-or-garden topics.

Prior to becoming a full-time stand-up, Carl earned his corn in education, teaching maths. "There are certainly some comparisons to be made between the two professions," says the popular Geordie funnyman, "but the definite advantage with comedy is that if you have a bad gig, you can rest assured that you don't have to see the same audience the next day at 10am!"







# What a cracker!

Sir Matthew Bourne's Nutcracker! turns 30...



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## Audiences have been enjoying Sir Matthew Bourne's iconic versions of classic ballets for 30 years now. In 2022 he is revisiting *Nutcracker!*, the show that launched his stellar career as a choreographer. What's On recently caught up with him to find out more...

Choreographer Sir Matthew Bourne has become world-renowned for his reinventions of classical ballets, including *Swan Lake*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*. And it was a commission to create a new version of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* 30 years ago which was his first foray into the field of re-working popular shows.

Now celebrating its 30th anniversary, Matthew Bourne's *Nutcracker!* returns to Birmingham Hippodrome this February - and Matthew says he has a great deal to thank the show for.

"*Nutcracker!* was a commission from Opera North," he recalls. "They wanted to recreate the double bill in which *Nutcracker* was originally premiered with a Tchaikovsky opera called *Iolanta*. This was to celebrate the centenary of that double bill. They thought there were a lot of classical versions of the ballet already around, so they wanted something a bit different.

"I've done so many versions of classical ballets since, but at that time I was running a very small contemporary dance company - six dancers, and I was one of the dancers. So a large-scale *Nutcracker* wouldn't be the sort of thing you would think to do.

"The commission came out of the blue, and I quickly thought, 'What a wonderful idea'. I was able to expand the company and work with a full orchestra. It was an amazing experience."

The double bill premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in 1992 and marked a milestone in Matthew's career.

"I don't think we would be here now if it wasn't for that *Nutcracker*. *Swan Lake* followed about three years later as a direct result of that, so I owe so much to it."

*Nutcracker!* went on to play London's Sadler's Wells Theatre for the following two Christmas seasons and toured the UK, including Birmingham, in 2003. Matthew made some tweaks for that tour and has returned to it again for the latest production.

"For me, any opportunity to take another look at a piece and re-work it is very welcome. This is the first time since then that we've had a chance to look at the entire

production again, so we've redesigned it to make it all fresh. I didn't quite expect how far we would go - the whole thing has taken several big notches up. It was always spectacular, but it's even more so now.

"People who've seen it before will recognise the places it goes to and the costumes and choreography. No big ideas have changed, but they've all been re-thought and looked at again."

Designer Anthony Ward and lighting designer Howard Harrison have both returned to the production, working with Matthew to incorporate some new elements.

"We have new technology now - we use projection in the show in a subtle way. In the last few years, I've found with other productions that small elements of projection can really add to the show.

"It felt like we were doing a new show when we were in tech at the beginning of the tour. It was an exciting time for me. It didn't feel like just a revival. We have a new box of tricks to play with!

"You don't want to play with a show for no reason, you want to feel you're improving it. And also theatre changes and the possibility of what you can do changes, and I love to embrace those developments."

For Matthew, re-working a classic story gives audiences an opportunity to see the work afresh, finding new and possibly more contemporary or relevant meanings.

"When you take on board a piece which is much-loved by so many people, you have to walk a tightrope between doing something different - so that it's exciting and has surprises in it - and taking care not to make it so different that it's not the piece you've advertised.

"So you take the elements people know and you do them in a different way. We have the snow scene and the growing Christmas tree and the land of sweets, but you think, 'What can we do with these to make it fresh?' That's my approach really."

In Matthew Bourne's *Nutcracker!*, the grand Christmas party in the original ballet is replaced with a dour orphanage where even

the children's presents are taken away from them. The adventure then moves into the Land of Snow before reaching Sweetieland, where a host of new characters come alive.

"One of the things we felt quite strongly when we made the piece originally is that the Christmas party which begins the original version looks like the Christmas of quite a privileged family with a big gathering, a big, lush Christmas tree and lots of presents.

"It already feels like you're in a fantasy land for most of the audience, so the idea that this piece then takes you to another world doesn't quite fit. But to start in a grim orphanage, which is monochrome, with a very sad, low-key Christmas, seemed like a great idea because you are then taking the audience on a real journey.

"When you take the audience to the Land of Snow, it has a sense of escape and freedom, and Sweetieland is a glorious, fantastical world that really juxtaposes the world that you've come from. I think for the audience that works much better."

Matthew is looking forward to returning to Birmingham after last touring to the city in 2019 with *Swan Lake*.

"The Hippodrome is one of the best and the most beautiful theatres in the country, but also, when you feel wanted somewhere, you have a real affection for it. It's always packed out for us in Birmingham, and when you feel you've got that kind of following and trust from an audience, it's something special."

He also feels *Nutcracker!* is the perfect show to be touring now: "The funny thing about this piece is that because Christmas is quite low-key in the production, we can tour it through to April, as it works on other levels.

"Audiences are making the decision to come back to live theatre. For audiences to be greeted by such a warm show that really is uplifting and genuinely exciting feels like us playing our part in a wider picture."

.....

**Matthew Bourne's *Nutcracker!* shows at Birmingham Hippodrome from Tues 8 to Sat 12 February.**





## Bat Out Of Hell

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 4 - Sat 15 January; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Tues 26 - Sat 30 April

A jukebox musical set in a dystopian future and positively awash with greatest hits from an impressive back-catalogue, *Bat Out Of Hell* is not to be confused with Queen blockbuster *We Will Rock You*, which can be pretty much summed up in exactly the same way.

Premiered in 2017, the Jim Steinman/Meat Loaf extravaganza is heavy on rock music and light on plot - which is yet another thing it has in

common with *We Will Rock You*.

The story, such as it is, unfolds in a Manhattan of the future - one which has been turned into a desolate wasteland and is lorded over by a ruthless dictator named Falco. The evil tyrant is determined to rebuild the city and will stop at nothing to get his way. But a group of kids whose DNA is permanently frozen - meaning they will be 18 years of age forever - are equally determined to thwart his dastardly plans... Featured hits include *I'd Do Anything For Love (But I Won't Do That)*, *Paradise By The Dashboard Light*, *Two Out Of Three Ain't Bad*, *Dead Ringer For Love* and, of course, *Bat Out Of Hell*.

## Strictly Sherlock

Albany Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 13 January

Following on from *The Singular Exploits Of Sherlock Holmes*, this one-man homage to the world's greatest fictional detective features three of Holmes' most memorable cases - *The Sussex Vampire*, *The Creeping Man* and *The Devil's Foot*.

The production is presented by highly rated Midlands company *Don't Go Into The Cellar*, who describe themselves as the UK's 'finest practitioners of theatrical Victoriana in a macabre vein'.



## Animal Farm

The REP, Birmingham, Sat 22 January - Sat 5 February; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Tues 12 - Sat 16 April; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 17 - Sat 21 May

George Orwell's legendary *Animal Farm* is no simple tale of talking beasts. The story of how the animals of Manor Farm overthrow their human master is actually a satire on the Russian Revolution and Josef Stalin, touching on subjects including propaganda, show trials and the abuse of the worker. This 90-minute adaptation of the classic 1945 novel is presented by the Children's Theatre Partnership in association with Birmingham Rep.



## Dirty Dusting

Stafford Gatehouse, Wed 12 January; The Place, Telford, Tues 18 January; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Fri 21 January

When overzealous office manager Dave decides to put his cleaners, Gladys, Elsie and Olive, out to pasture, the three women wonder how they're ever going to make ends meet. Until, that is, they have the brilliant idea of setting up *The Telephone Belles* - 'a dirty sex chatline that really cleans up!' *Coronation Street*'s Vicky Entwistle and 'Allo 'Allo!'s Vicki Michelle (pictured), star.







Until 30 Jan



Thu 27 Jan



Fri 4 Feb



Sat 5 Feb



Sat 5 Feb



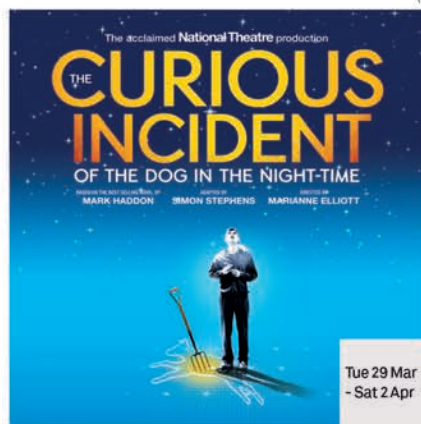
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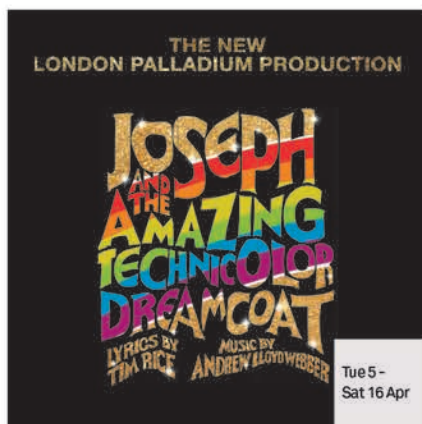
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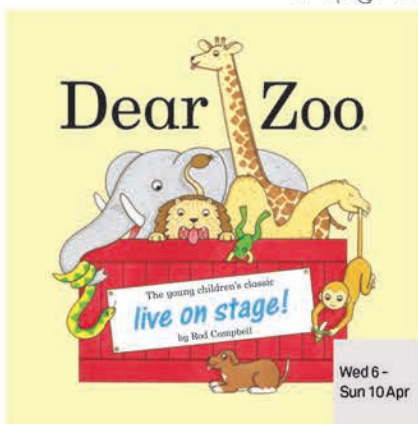
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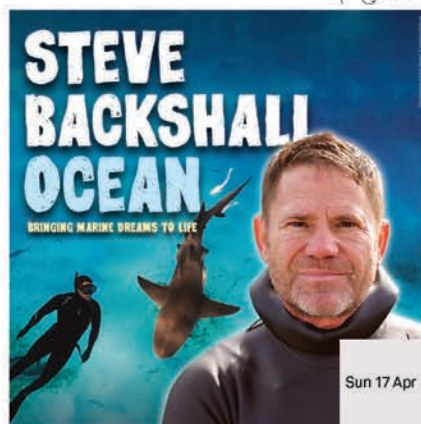
Tue 29 Mar  
- Sat 2 Apr



Tue 5 -  
Sat 16 Apr



Wed 6 -  
Sun 10 Apr



Sun 17 Apr





## Here's What She Said To Me

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry,  
Thurs 27 - Sat 29 January

Music, drama and poetry combine in this well-reviewed offering from Arcola Theatre, a company that majors in presenting commissioned original productions, rare gems of world drama and bold new versions of classic theatre works.

Following the story of a woman, her daughter and granddaughter - from Nigeria in the 1960s to present-day Leeds - Mojisola Elufowaju's production of Oladipo Agboluaje's play grapples with heavyweight issues around the subjects of migration and identity. Between them, the show's three hugely talented actors present no fewer than 35 characters.

## Bring It On

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Wed 26 - Sat 29 January; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 10 - Sat 14 May

If you're expecting a straightforward stage version of the cult movie of the same title, think again - the story has been significantly rewritten.

In the film, a cheerleading squad scrambles to compete at the national championships after discovering that their ex-captain had pinched their best routines from an inner-city school...

In the stage version, cheer captain Campbell Davis has to transfer from her posh school to a rougher one. Once there, she determines to get one-up on her former cheerleading buddies by persuading a hip-hop crew to help

her win the national competition. The stage-show story hasn't met with universal approval, facing from some quarters a charge of misappropriation - privileged white girl Campbell utilises cool Black culture for her own selfish purposes. But look beyond the ethical concerns and you'll find a big-hearted and high-energy production - one that boasts the kind of uptempo music and explosive choreography that's likely to see you leaving the theatre with a spring in your step. The show was written by Tony Award winners Lin-Manuel Miranda, Jeff Whitty, Tom Kitt and lyricist Amanda Green. Miranda later went on to achieve monumental success with blockbuster Broadway and West End hit, *Hamilton*.



## Saving Britney

Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham,  
Thurs 13 - Sat 15 January; Lichfield Garrick,  
Fri 18 February

Presented, as it is, in the near-immediate aftermath of the Britney Spears conservatorship controversy, this one-woman show feels like a suddenly more relevant work of theatre than might otherwise have been the case.

On the face of it, it's a homage to the noughties' pop princess, but scratch beneath the surface and you'll find that it's actually a vehicle for telling the story of her devoted British super-fan, Jean...

Britney's music is the soundtrack to Jean's unfolding life, accompanying her through the trials and tribulations of her parents' divorce, her sexual awakening, various relationships and her mother's death...

The production lands in the Midlands on the back of plenty of positive feedback.





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## Theatre previews from around the region



### Chicago

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 24 - Sat 29 January; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 14 - Sat 19 March

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

Kander & Ebb's legendary musical is based on real-life events in the Roaring '20s and centres on the character of Roxie Hart, a nightclub singer who shoots her lover. Together with her cell-block rival - double murderess Velma Kelly - Roxie battles to stay off Death Row. She is ably assisted in her fight by smooth-talking lawyer Billy Flynn...

Faye Brooks, Sinitta and Darren Day star.

### Friends! The Musical Parody

Malvern Theatres, Fri 28 January; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Sat 5 February; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 8 February; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Sun 6 March; Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Sat 12 March; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Wed 23 March; Swan Theatre, Worcester, Wed 6 April; The Place, Telford, Thurs 7 April; Prince of Wales, Cannock, Sun 10 April

Friends may have finished 18 years ago, but the now-legendary TV show continues to draw an audience whenever and wherever it's repeated. So there's little wonder that somebody somewhere decided a stage version would be a good idea.

Lovingly lampooning the hit sitcom, the production is a good-hearted romp through the series' most memorable moments - but with the addition of some high-energy song & dance routines just for good measure.



### The Lovely Bones

Crescent Theatre, Birmingham, Sat 29 January - Sat 5 February

This poignant human drama concerns a murdered girl who watches from heaven as her family attempts to cope with their devastating loss... Alice Sebold's bestselling coming-of-age novel has been adapted for the stage by award-winning playwright Bryony Lavery.

### School Of Rock

The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 31 January - Sat 5 February

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

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

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

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



### The Play What I Wrote

The Rep, Birmingham, until Sat 1 January; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 24 - Sat 29 January; Malvern Theatres, Mon 14 - Sat 19 February

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 helming 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!"

**Read our review at [whatsonlive.co.uk](http://whatsonlive.co.uk)**



### Groan Ups

Malvern Theatres, Mon 31 January - Sat 5 February; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Mon 28 February - Sat 5 March

"We wanted to see if we could do a show where we kept the audience laughing all the way through but which also put character at the centre of the production," explains Mischief Theatre's Henry Lewis in talking about Groan Ups, a brand-new comedy about growing up. "We thought it would be fun to explore five people at different stages of their lives and tell a story that was funny but also moving."

"Essentially this is a show that asks questions like, do we choose who we become? Is the story of our lives already written? Do we ever really grow up?"

"We try to provide some answers by following an unruly classroom of six-year-olds on their journey through anarchic high-school teenage years to the challenges of adulthood. This is a lesson not to be skipped!"



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## Circus Of Horrors

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 20 January;  
Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 11 March;  
Brierley Hill Civic Hall, Sun 13 March

An off-kilter affair that bears more resemblance to a freak show than any modern definition of a circus, the one-time Britain's Got Talent finalists here present a world beyond political correctness and taste. With the performers dressed in a manner reminiscent of *The Rocky Horror Show*, there's no denying the skill of those participating - or indeed the ensemble's sheer 'wow' factor. This latest offering - a celebration of 25 glorious years spent strutting their splendidly grotesque stuff - contains strong language and some nudity.

## Spontaneous Potter

The Glee Club, Birmingham, Mon 17 January



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

## Two Pints Live!

The Glee Club, Birmingham, Fri 21 January;  
Walsall Arena & Arts Centre, Sat 22 January;  
Birmingham Town Hall, Sun 30 January

Given that the sitcom in which they starred together - *Two Pints Of Lager And A Packet Of Crisps* - lasted for nine series and 80 episodes, Will Mellor and Ralf Little must've been fairly confident that a podcast team-up would swiftly find its audience. And so it did.

*Two Pints* - as it's titled - has been so successful that the boys have decided to take it out on the road. Each show will be

unscripted - with the audience invited to share their stories, too.

'I'm just excited to get out, meet people and be in the same room as them again,' says Will, whose more recent CV includes *Line Of Duty* and *Coronation Street*. 'The last two years has been hard, so we're going to get people into the venue and have a load of fun and a few pints. I'm buzzing!'



## Pottervision

Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham, Wed 19 January;  
The Place, Telford, Fri 25 February



Pottervision has been described as a wig-changing, wizard-impersonating, audience-immersing Ford Anglia ride through all the ridiculousness of the first Harry Potter film. The premise is a simple enough one: four performers intend to recreate *The Philosopher's Stone*. But when two of them drop out on the day - and take all the props and costumes with them - it's left to remaining pair Tom and Lukas to get the job done, complete with DIY props and charity shop costumes.

## James Phelan: The Greatest Magician

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Sat 15 January

In a presentation which was directed by his uncle, the late Paul Daniels, James Phelan baffles, befuddles and basically bemuses with feats of sorcery that seem certain to draw gasps of astonishment from awestruck audiences. iPhones transported from the auditorium into blocks of ice, and mindbending undertakings that make people forget their own names, are just two of the terrific tricks set to leave onlookers decidedly dumbfounded.

'In style, my magic is closer to my uncle's early stuff,' reveals peerless prestidigitator James, who's best known for hosting *Trickster: Live* - the BBC's first weekly radio magic show since the 1950s. 'It's cheeky, twinkle-in-the-eye, disruptive sort of stuff. I guess I'm a bit of a prankster!' Not surprisingly, James' interest in magic was inspired by his famous uncle: 'I learned by watching and emulating what Paul did on TV, but I've been really careful not to do his stuff in my own show, or to accidentally say his lines. I really need to avoid saying, 'You'll like it' and then accidentally adding, 'Not a lot!''





## Spring Highlights



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**



18/2 **The Neil Diamond Story**

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

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

8/3 **Malcolm Stent in the Afternoon**

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**

29/3 **Jimmy Buckley**

30/3 **Herman's Hermits**

1/4 **The Kil Kennys**

7/4 **A Black Country Night Out**



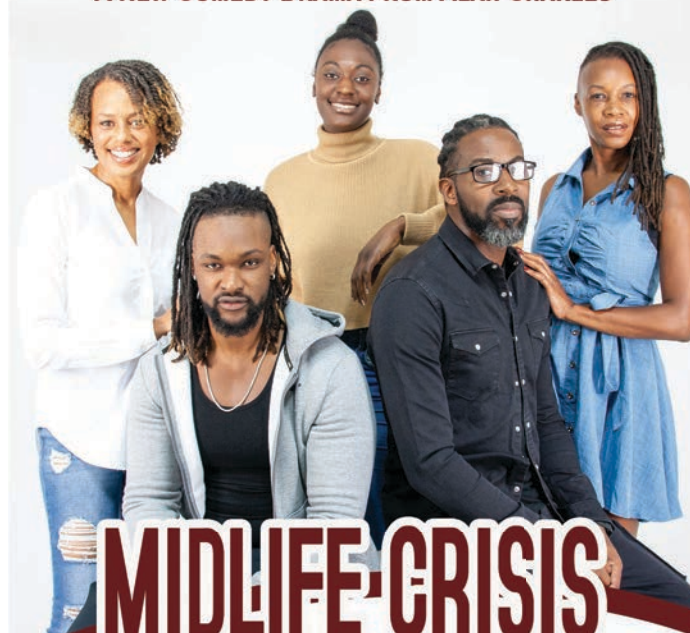
16/4 **Exciting Science - Educational show**

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Theatre for younger audiences...



## Stick Man Live On Stage

Birmingham Town Hall, 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'... And 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 Snowman

The Rep, Birmingham, Thurs 6 - Sun 9 January

Making a welcome return to The Rep in its now traditional New Year slot, Raymond Briggs' The Snowman is best known, of course, for Howard Blake's classic song, Walking In The Air. When a young boy's snowman comes to life

on Christmas Eve, the two set off on a nighttime quest for excitement. On their travels they meet reindeer, dancing penguins and some of the Snowman's many and varied friends. The adventure's not without its anxieties, however, with the evil Jack Frost eager to get his icy mits on the pair of unlikely chums...

## Little Big Dance: Club Origami

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Sun 30 January

This gentle and interactive show from Japanese choreographer and dance therapist Takeshi Matsumoto invites families to immerse themselves in a world of paper and play.

Produced as part of the Little Big Dance project - a pioneering national initiative aimed at creating new dance work for the under-fives - Club Origami presents 40 minutes of thoroughly absorbing paper-based entertainment. In the process, the show encourages family audiences to create, imagine and explore whole new ways of thinking, playing and moving. A 10-minute stay & play session follows the show.





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# Also in January...

More theatre productions taking place across the region this month...

## PANTOMIME

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

**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, until Sun 2 Jan, Malvern Theatres

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

**ALADDIN** Starring JP McCue as Dame Dolly and Sean Dodds as Aladdin, until Sun 2 Jan, Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa

**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, until Sun 2 Jan, Palace Theatre, Redditch

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

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

**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... until Mon 3 Jan, The Core Theatre, Solihull

**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

**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, until Sun 9 Jan,

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

### GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BEARS

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

### SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

Presented by the Tamworth Pantomime Company, Fri 7 - Sun 16 Jan, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

### JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

Amateur staging presented by Birmingham Youth Theatre, Thurs 13 - Sat 15 Jan, The Old Rep, Birmingham

**CINDERELLA** Presented by Stourbridge Panto Company, Sat 22 - Sat 29 Jan, Stourbridge Town Hall

## THEATRE

**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

**JERSEY BOYS** Smash-hit musical telling the story of Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons, until Sat 1 Jan, The Alexandra, 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



The Dresser - Malvern Theatres

**CALENDAR GIRLS THE MUSICAL** The Mellow Dramatics present an amateur staging of Tim Firth & Gary Barlow's award-winning musical, Tues 11 - Sat 15 Jan, Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton-upon-Trent

**BEN HART: WONDER** Expect mind-blowing and exciting magic from the man described by David Walliams as 'the living embodiment of magic', Wed 12 Jan, New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme

**THE DRESSER** Matthew Kelly and Julian Clary star in Ronald Harwood's evocative portrait of backstage life, Tues 18 - Sat 22 Jan, Malvern Theatres

**TAKING STEPS** Insightful drama following the lives of three young care workers and the people they support, Thurs 20 - Fri 21 Jan, Birmingham Hippodrome

**SEND IN THE CLOWNS** Celebration of the songs of legendary theatre composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim, Fri 21 - Sat 22 Jan, Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

**THE RED LION** A 'haunting and humorous' play about semi-pro football, Sat 22 - Sat 29 January, The Crescent, Birmingham

**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 the run, Mon 24 - Sat 29 Jan, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury

**ONE NIGHT IN DUBLIN** Celebrating the music & songs of Ireland, Tues 25 - Wed 26 Jan, The Core, Solihull

**SAME TIME, NEXT YEAR** A bittersweet and nostalgic portrait of two likeable protagonists who find themselves in the most unusual of long-term relationships, Wed 26 - Sat 29 Jan, Malvern Theatres

**THE HAUNTING OF BLAINE MANOR** Joe O'Byrne's award-winning psychological thriller, Fri 28 Jan, Stafford Gatehouse Theatre

**THE GIFT** An outrageous play about imperialism, cross-racial adoption, cultural appropriation - and tea, Sat 29 Jan - Sat 5 Feb, Criterion Theatre, Coventry

**HI-DE-HI** Based on the popular '80s TV show and presented by local theatre company Harlequinade, Mon 31 Jan - Wed 2 Feb, The Core, Solihull

**THE DEEP BLUE SEA** Terence Rattigan's tragic love story, Mon 31 Jan - Sat 5 Feb, Talisman Theatre & Arts Centre, Kenilworth

## YOUNGER AUDIENCES

**THE RED TREE** Red Earth Theatre present a livestreamed production described as a 'joyful, funny and warm play about tricky feelings and how to manage them' Suitable for children aged seven-plus, Sun 29 Jan, Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton

**CIRCUS SPECTACULAR!** Featuring international circus acts, 'amazing magic and lots of laughs', Sun 30 Jan, The Place, Telford



# FRIGHTFULLY FUNNY!

**They're kooky and they know it -  
The Addams Family return to the Midlands...**





**Based on the iconic 1960s TV show, The Addams Family The Musical Comedy this month returns to the Midlands to entertain audiences with its quirky dark humour and impressive musical score. What's On recently caught up with Cameron Blakely, who plays Gomez, to get his take on the show...**

If you're up for an evening in the company of a kooky collection of freaks, weirdos and goofballs, then The Addams Family is the show for you!

The all-grown-up-now princess of darkness, Wednesday Addams, has fallen in love with a sweet young man from a respectable family. Wednesday's dad, Gomez, knows about the romance, but mom Morticia remains blissfully unaware of the situation. And that's very much the way it needs to stay, at least until the dinner at which the two families will finally meet.

Needless to say, not everything goes according to plan...

**What's in store for audiences who come to see The Addams Family, Cameron?**

A lot of quirkiness, a lot of laughs and a lot of miscommunication. In a way it's like a dark farce. And I think everyone needs a bit of escapism at the moment. Whether it's any form of the arts, be it theatre or music, it's lovely to be able to forget what everyone's been going through and just have a great time.

**What are you most looking forward to about being back on stage?**

Just the thrill of doing what you're trained to do, your main vocation, and to connect with a crowd again - knowing that you're hopefully making people happy and making them laugh. It's also going to be great seeing other parts of the country because we've all sort of been in enforced prison mode for such a long time.

**Gomez is such an iconic character. How do you put your own stamp on him?**

I was always a great fan of Raoul Julia, who played Gomez in the movies. I wanted to make him quite Spanish, as he was in the films, and to make him like a matinee idol

romantic type rather than too silly. I loved the original TV series very much, but I wanted to make it fresh and not to be hindered but inspired by Raoul's Gomez, whilst also trying not to copy him. It's such a great role because it has everything. And the way the composer has written the score, it's different for each character, so Gomez gets all the sort of Latin music - very melodramatic and romantic with a Spanish feel to it.

**Do you have anything in common with him?**

I do secretly quite like growing a moustache in a retro 1970s way. I got quite attached to it when I first did the show in 2017 and didn't get rid of it for about a year afterwards. With Gomez's romanticism, I'm quite similar to him in that sense, as am I when it comes to his passion.

**Tell us a bit about your costume for the show...**

I mostly get to wear the iconic pinstripe suit with a bowtie, occasionally smoking a cigar, and I have nice black & white spats. Then, in Act Two around the dinner table, I'm in a beautifully loud and garish smoking jacket with a cravat.

**The show is full of great musical numbers. Do you have a favourite to perform?**

There's one called Happy/Sad, which is a lovely reflective song that Gomez sings to his daughter about being in love and how much she's grown over the years. It always makes me think of my own little girl, my daughter Noelle. I always think of her when I sing that song. When I first did the show in 2017, I remember I got this big lump in my throat and really struggled not to cry. I thought: 'Oh dear, I need to get control of this. It's terribly un-British of me!'

**Can you recall when you first encountered The Addams Family?**

I think it was the first movie, starring Raoul Julia and Anjelica Huston. I'd grown up knowing about The Addams Family, but I was more the age group of The Munsters.

**The Addams Family began life as a cartoon in the 1930s, became a TV show in the 1960s, a film franchise in the 1990s and a musical in the noughties. Why do you think it has endured for so long?**

People inherently like Halloween and the macabre, plus there's this mishmash of very odd characters in the same family. There's also the darkness and the fun the Addams Family have around graveyards and moonlight. I think viewers are fascinated by the juxtaposition of light and darkness and how it's completely flipped. It's just fascinating, and there's so much dark humour you can get out of that.

**Now you're heading back on tour again, what's the one thing you couldn't be on the road without?**

Because I have to stay in shape for the tango number, it would have to be my resistance bands. I know that sounds awfully virtuous, but this last year I've mainly just been sitting down and driving. There's a five-minute tango at the end of the show, so I've started training and running again - which my body hated at first, but once all the blisters have settled down, I'll be fine. Taking the resistance bands on tour with me means I can keep fit and trim.

**The Addams Family shows at The Alexandra, Birmingham, from Tues 18 to Sat 22 January and Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, from Tues 29 March to Sat 2 April**





## Kevin Clifton: Burn The Floor

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Sun 16 January; Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Sat 22 January; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 21 February

“Burn The Floor is the show that ignited a spark in me and changed me forever as a performer,” says Kevin Clifton, who stars in the hit production when it stops off in the Midlands this month. “Through Broadway, West End and touring all over the world, this show has ripped apart the rule book, revolutionised our genre and inspired and shaped me as the dancer I am today.. In 2022, I’m delighted to say that I’m coming ‘home’ to Burn The Floor.”

And Midlands theatre-goers will no doubt be equally delighted that Kevin’s making a return. The former *Strictly* star’s most recent appearance in the show attracted five-star reviews like moths to a flame - and there’s every reason to suppose the production that returns to the region this month will burn just as brightly.

One word of warning, though... If you like your ballroom and Latin dance to come complete with a storyline, Burn The Floor will disappoint you in that regard. If, on the other hand, high energy, extravagant style, explosions of colour and sheer unadulterated displays of breathtaking talent are the name of your dance game, fasten your seatbelt and enjoy the ride.

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## Anton & Erin: Showtime

**Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Sat 29 January; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Sat 5 March; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Sun 6 March**

Celebrity dancing duo Anton du Beke and Erin Boag return to the Midlands this month to present another high-energy show blending smart choreography with sparkly costumes and memorable tunes. Rescheduled from last January, Showtime features dance routines inspired by an array of classic performers, including Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, Charlie Chaplin, Shirley Bassey, Tom Jones and Liza Minnelli.

Anton And Erin are joined for the show by a 23-piece orchestra and a talented West End dance ensemble.



## Strictly Come Dancing Live

**Utilita Arena, Birmingham, Thurs 20 - Sun 23 January**

The glitz and glamour of BBC One's Strictly Come Dancing hits the road again this month. Hosted by Janette Manrara and with tour judges Shirley Ballas, Craig Revel Horwood and Bruno Tonioli in tow, the live version sees the show's popular dancers putting their celebrity partners through their paces with a host of new routines.

"Strictly Live is going to be bigger than ever," says professional dancer Janette, who performed on the show from 2013 to 2020. "It will feature lots of glitter, lots of sparkles, lots of excitement and lots of incredible dance routines! And you never know... you might just see me taking to the dancefloor myself! I can't wait - I've really missed it!"



## Moscow City Ballet: Swan Lake

**Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Mon 3 January; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Mon 17 - Tues 18 January**

The highly regarded Moscow City Ballet here presents its signature-piece production of a timeless favourite, set to Tchaikovsky's mesmerising score.

Swan Lake tells the story of Odette, a beautiful princess who, caught under the spell of the evil Von Rothbart, must spend the daytime hours as a swan, returning to human form only when night falls...

A sumptuous visual feast, the production offers a spectacle which is ideal for the first-time trier as well as the more seasoned ballet-goer.



## Come What May

**Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 27 January; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Thurs 17 February; Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Sat 12 March; Palace Theatre, Redditch, Thurs 24 March**

Strictly Come Dancing professional Robin Windsor heads out on tour in an 'all-singing, all-dancing' celebration of movie musicals. Although particular tribute is paid to Moulin Rouge - with featured songs from the film including Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend, Roxanne and Lady Marmalade - the show also boasts numbers from Rocketman, The Greatest Showman, A Star Is Born and Burlesque.



# Community Spirit 2022



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# Kills and thrills!

What better way for theatre-goers to kickstart the new year than by treating themselves to a nailbiting murder-mystery or a brain-scrambling whodunit? There are certainly plenty of theatrical thrillers visiting the Midlands over the next few months. Check out the selection below, then bag yourself a ticket or two...

## The Da Vinci Code

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Tues 22 - Sat 26 February; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 8 - Sat 12 March; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 6 - Sat 11 June; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 21 - Sat 25 June

Dan Brown's bestselling novel - written in 2003 and made into a blockbuster movie starring Tom Hanks in 2006 - sees cryptologists Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu grappling with a series of baffling codes found alongside the body of the brutally murdered curator of the Louvre... "I'm thrilled that The Da Vinci Code has been adapted for the stage," says Dan. "The team making the production have been faithful to the book, but have also brought something new for the audience. This is a gripping, fast-paced stage thriller and a thoroughly entertaining show." One-time EastEnders Nigel Harman stars.



## Dead Lies

Lichfield Garrick, Tues 24 - Sun 29 May

Bestselling crime writer Hilary Bonner's fast-moving thriller focuses on the character of politician Peter George, a man admired by the British people for his determination to restore trust in a political system badly damaged by an era of sleaze and spin. But Peter has a shocking secret in his past - one that threatens to derail him during a fiercely fought election campaign... Expect an evening of terrific twists and turns, right to the very last scene.

## Revenge

The Core, Solihull, Thurs 24 March

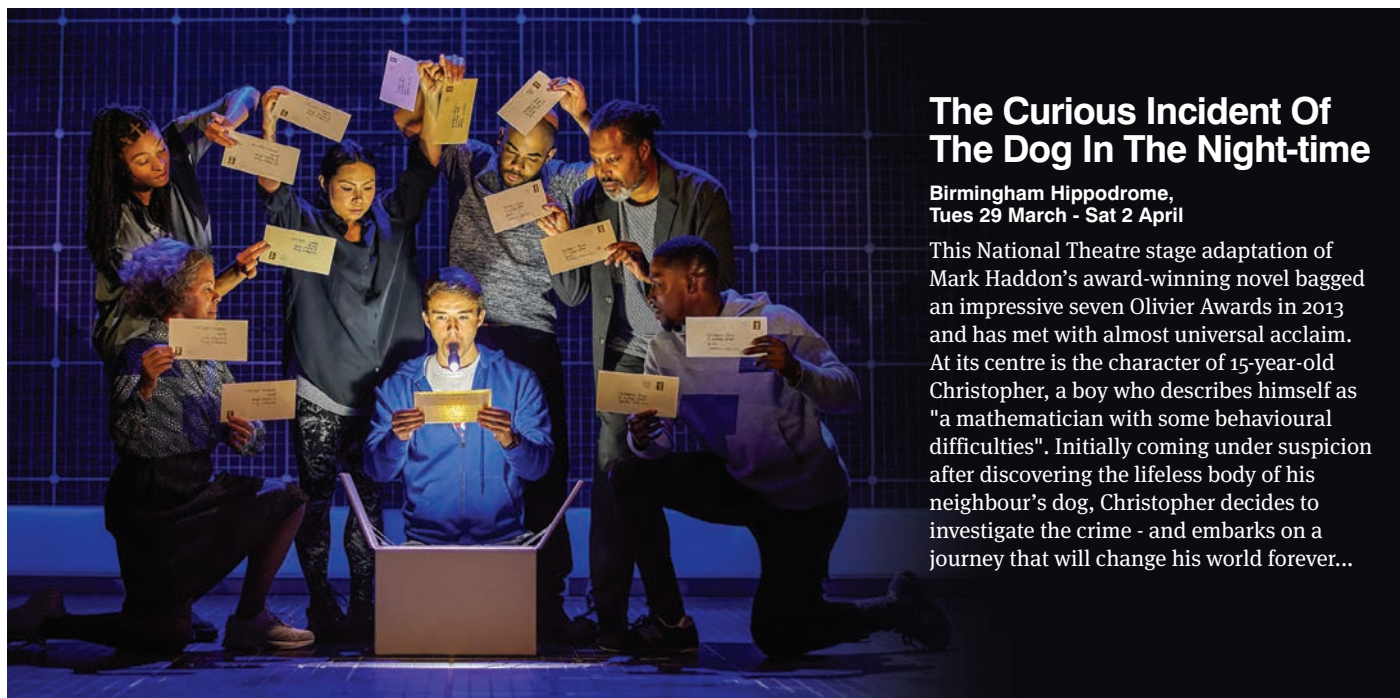
An MP with a charmed life, a journalist with an axe to grind, and a dead body that brings the two protagonists into close and incendiary contact with one another... Robert Hawdon's Revenge is here presented by Crime And Comedy Theatre and directed by Louise Jameson. Louise's acting CV features high-profile shows including Tenko and Dr Who, but she's perhaps best remembered from Bergerac, in which she played the titular character's long-suffering girlfriend, Susan Young.

## Cluedo

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Mon 14 - Sat 19 March; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 11 - Sat 16 April; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 2 - Sat 7 May; Malvern Theatres, Mon 20 - Sat 25 June; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Mon 11 - Sat 16 July

This new stage play is based on the classic detective board game of the same name and the hit 1985 movie, Clue. Featuring all of the game's famous characters - Miss Scarlett, Professor Plum, Mrs Peacock, Reverend Green, Mrs White and Colonel Mustard - the show is being helmed by Mark Bell, director of the award-winning The Play That Goes Wrong and A Comedy About A Bank Robbery.





## The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-time

Birmingham Hippodrome,  
Tues 29 March - Sat 2 April

This National Theatre stage adaptation of Mark Haddon's award-winning novel bagged an impressive seven Olivier Awards in 2013 and has met with almost universal acclaim. At its centre is the character of 15-year-old Christopher, a boy who describes himself as "a mathematician with some behavioural difficulties". Initially coming under suspicion after discovering the lifeless body of his neighbour's dog, Christopher decides to investigate the crime - and embarks on a journey that will change his world forever...

## Fatal Attraction

The Alexandra, Birmingham,  
Tues 1 - Sat 5 March

James Dearden, who wrote the screenplay for the famous 1987 movie of the same name, penned this stage adaptation back in 2014. For those who've never seen the film version starring Michael Douglas and Glenn Close, the story revolves around married New York attorney Dan Gallagher, who meets charming editor Alex Forrest on a night out in the city and ends up sleeping with her. For Dan, it's a one-night stand; for Alex, it means so very much more - as Dan is soon to find out... Coronation Street favourite Kym Marsh takes the iconic role of bunny boiler Alex.



## Where Is Mrs Christie?

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Fri 20 May



In 1926, bestselling whodunit writer Agatha Christie was at the centre of a mystery of her very own. Her crashed car was discovered in Surrey, with Agatha nowhere to be found. It was 11 long and baffling days before the legendary author resurfaced, eventually popping up at a luxury hotel half the country away in Harrogate...

Actor Liz Grand here presents a one-woman show speculating about what happened to the Queen of Crime during the period she was missing.

Liz previously 'went it alone' on stage in *The Second Best Bed*, a tell-all tale in which she played Shakespeare's widow, Ann Hathaway, on the night of the bard's funeral.

## Looking Good Dead

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Mon 7 - Sat 12 February;  
The Alexandra, Birmingham, Mon 21 - Sat 26 February

Bestselling crime writer Peter James has scored major successes on stage as well as in print, with adaptations of his books having played to appreciative audiences at venues across the UK.

This latest offering features Detective Superintendent Roy Grace, the Brighton-based policeman who's headed up murder investigations in a number of James' most popular novels.

On this occasion, Grace is called in when a man who finds a USB memory stick on a train inadvertently becomes a witness to a vicious murder...

EastEnders stalwart Adam Woodyatt (Ian Beale in the BBC soap) takes top billing. He's joined by his former Albert Square co-star, Laurie Brett (who played Ian's wife, Jane, in the show).





## Watson: The Final Problem

Lichfield Garrick, Sat 5 March

"Dr John Watson is often overlooked but is more than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's alter ego," observes Bert Coules. Bert, the BBC's head writer on *The Further Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes*, has collaborated with Smokescreen Productions on this brand-new play. "Deeply affected by the effects of war in Afghanistan and appalled by dishonesty and falsehood, Watson is a remarkably contemporary character to bring to life on stage," continues Bert.

The *Final Problem* sees Brittas Empire star and Smokescreen founder Tim Marriott reenacting the last Sherlock Holmes adventure from the perspective of unsung hero Watson.

The show has been positively received on its current tour, with Marriott widely praised for his portrayal of Holmes' faithful companion.



## Crimes, Camera, Action

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Sat 19 March

An element of *Crimes, Camera, Action*'s storyline will almost inevitably remind people of the recent fatal wounding on the set of Alec Baldwin movie *Rust* - but that's definitely where comparisons with real life will come to a grinding halt.

Very much majoring in comedy rather than tragedy, the award-winning *New Old Friends* here present a madcap mystery set in Golden Age Hollywood.

When a screen starlet is stabbed as a result of an on-set prop mix-up, it falls to Humphrey Bogart-style private eye Stan Shakespeare to bring order to the chaos.

But Stan has definitely got his work cut out...

## The Strange Case Of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde

Lichfield Garrick, Wed 23 - Thurs 24 March

Dr Jekyll is not himself! Robert Louis Stevenson's gothic novella is a dark, twisted tale of love, redemption and the seductive power of evil. A bonafide literary classic, it tells the story of a brilliant but obsessive scientist whose sadistic alter-ego wreaks havoc and mayhem on the fog-shrouded streets of old London town...

## Catch Me If You Can

Malvern Theatres, Mon 21 - Sat 26 March



Audience members of a certain vintage will be wowed by the presence of Patrick Duffy in this clever adaptation of French writer Robert Thomas' *Trap For A Lonely Man*.

Duffy's heyday was the late 1970s and early 1980s, when he starred as Bobby Ewing in the hit television series *Dallas*.

And he's not the only Hollywood actor gracing the Malvern stage in *Catch Me If You Can*. *Homeland* and *Happy Days* star Linda Purl - Patrick's real-life partner - is also putting in a shift.

A mystery thriller set in the remote Catskill mountains, the play sees Inspector Levine called to a house to investigate the disappearance of the recently married Elizabeth Corban. Then, out of the blue, a woman arrives at the house claiming to be the missing newly-wed. But there's the distinct possibility that not everything is exactly as it seems... One-time *Coronation Street* bad boy Gray O'Brien co-stars.

## The Hound Of The Baskervilles

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry,  
Tues 8 - Sat 12 February

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is one of literature's most enduring characters, *The Hound Of The Baskervilles* his most famous story. Yet no matter how many actors don the deerstalker and solve the mystery of the monstrous moorland beast, the story remains a popular choice for both stage and screen adaptation. On this particular occasion it's the award-winning Original Theatre Company who are taking the audience on a journey to the lonely wasteland of the desolate moors...

Oh, and once there, the ensemble will then proceed to give Holmes' most celebrated adventure a splendidly farcical overhaul! Chuckle muscles at the ready, folks...





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## Films released in January...

### The Lost Daughter CERT 15 (121 mins)

Starring **Olivia Colman, Dakota Johnson, Peter Sarsgaard, Jessie Buckley, Paul Mescal, Olive Jackson-Cohen**  
Directed by **Maggie Gyllenhaal**

In making her directorial debut, Maggie Gyllenhaal not only takes full control of her source material - Elena Ferrante's 2006 novel of the same title - but also provides an impressive stage for Olivia Colman to do what she does best: effortlessly capture and resolutely retain the viewer's attention. Colman plays languages professor Leda Caruso, a middle-aged, seemingly warm but on occasions evidently snappy and unhappy woman, who's on a working holiday in Greece. While there, she encounters a volatile young mother with a doll-fixated infant daughter. She becomes both consumed and unnerved by the pair, their compelling relationship triggering memories for her of the traumatic experiences of early motherhood (the younger Leda, struggling to raise her kids, is played in flashback by an impressive Jessie Buckley)... The Lost Daughter is a story which touches base with plenty of author Ferrante's favourite subjects, not least among which are misogyny and the impact of crippling female guilt. But while the film offers plenty for viewers to contemplate, there's no denying that the main attraction is Colman's utterly splendid performance in the lead role. A second Oscar for the one-time Peep Show supporting cast member is a distinct possibility.

Streaming on Netflix from Fri 31 December



### Licorice Pizza CERT tbc (133 mins)

Starring **Bradley Cooper, Maya Rudolph, Skylar Gisonzo, Sean Penn, Alana Haim, Emma Dumont** Directed by **Paul Thomas Anderson**



Licorice Pizza has been named the best movie of 2021 by the National Board of Review. And quite right, too. A coming-of-age movie that offers so very much more than a *typical* coming-of-age movie, it tells the story of a 15-year-old child actor and his interaction with a woman who's old enough to be his big sister. It also presents a slice of early-1970s life that will call to mind all manner of other steeped-in-nostalgia movies, from Tarantino's Once Upon A Time In Hollywood (set a handful of years earlier, of course) to director Anderson's very own Boogie Nights. Cameos by, among others, Bradley Cooper and Sean Penn further recommend a film that's quite simply not to be missed.

Released Sat 1 January

### The 355 CERT tbc

Starring **Jessica Chastain, Sebastian Stan, Penélope Cruz, Diane Kruger, Lupita Nyong'o, Bingbing Fan** Directed by **Simon Kinberg**

Jessica Chastain heads up a cast of formidable female stars in this globetrotting espionage thriller that's being described as a mix of Ocean's Eleven and The Bourne Identity.

When a top-secret weapon falls into mercenary hands, wild card CIA agent Mason 'Mace' Brown heads out on a lethal, breakneck mission to retrieve it. She's joined in the endeavour by rival badass German agent Marie, former MI6 ally and cutting-edge computer specialist Khadijah, and skilled Colombian psychologist Graciela.

Released Fri 7 January



### Scream CERT tbc (114 mins)

Starring **Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, David Arquette, Marley Shelton, Melissa Barrera, Jenna Ortega, Dylan Minnette** Directed by **Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett**



Twenty-five years after a series of brutal murders shocked the quiet town of Woodsboro, a new killer dons the Ghostface mask and begins targeting a group of teenagers...

The fifth instalment in the long-running slasher-pic series, Scream is being billed as a relaunch of the franchise - despite being a direct sequel to 2011's Scream 4.

Released Fri 14 January



## Films released in January...



### Nightmare Alley

CERT tbc (150 mins)

Starring **Bradley Cooper, Cate Blanchett, Willem Dafoe, Rooney Mara, Paul Anderson, Toni Collette** Directed by **Guillermo del Toro**

Guillermo del Toro's 1940s' New York-set neo-noir psychological thriller focuses on the character of Stanton Carlisle, an ambitious, charismatic but down-on-his-luck travelling carnival employee with a talent for manipulating people. After endearing

himself to a clairvoyant and her has-been mentalist husband, Carlisle determines to change his fortunes by swindling the elite and wealthy. But in hooking up with psychiatrist Dr Lilithe Ritter (Cate Blanchett), he finds himself forming an alliance with a woman who is even more dangerous than he is...

Based on the 1946 novel of the same name by William Lindsay Gresha.

**Released Fri 21 January**



### Belfast

CERT 12a (98 mins)

Starring **Jamie Dornan, Caitriona Balfe, Ciarán Hinds, Judi Dench, Colin Morgan, Lara McDonnell** Directed by **Kenneth Branagh**

With Kenneth Branagh at the helm, Van Morrison contributing the soundtrack and Judi Dench bringing her trademark quality to proceedings, Belfast has got plenty going for it - even before you check out the four- and

five-star reviews.

Branagh's love letter to his own past, filmed in black-and-white, features Jamie Dornan as a carpenter in debt to the taxman and - with the Troubles kicking off - in need of a brand-new start away from his suddenly war-torn home city.

Newcomer Jude Hill hits the ground running as Dornan's young son, Buddy.

**Released Fri 21 January**

### Cyrano

CERT tbc (124 mins)

Starring **Peter Dinklage, Haley Bennett, Ben Mendelsohn, Kevin Harrison Jr, Bashir Salahuddin, David Monteath** Directed by **Joe Wright**

Cyrano de Bergerac, the timeless tale of a heartbreaking love triangle, is once again reimagined for the big screen, this time with the award-winning Joe Wright (Darkest Hour, Atonement) in the director's chair.

A man ahead of his time, Cyrano is no stranger to causing a stir, whether with ferocious wordplay at a verbal joust or with brilliant swordplay in a duel. But he's convinced that his appearance renders him unworthy of the love of the luminous Roxanne - so much so, in fact, that he has yet to declare his feelings for her. And to add to his frustration, Roxanne has fallen in love at first sight with the splendidly impressive Christian...

**Released Fri 14 January**



### Memoria

CERT tbc (136 mins)

Starring **Tilda Swinton, Elkin Díaz, Jeanne Balibar, Juan Pablo Urrego, Daniel Giménez Cacho, Agnes Brekke** Directed by **Apichatpong Weerasethakul**

This well-reviewed Cannes Film Festival entry sees Tilda Swinton playing Jessica, a woman who, while visiting her sister in Bogota, finds herself repeatedly hearing a dull thudding sound, one which it soon becomes apparent only *she* is experiencing. The noise continues to plague her as she wanders the streets of the city, eventually enlisting the help of sound engineer Hernan to try and solve the mystery. But when she attempts to visit Hernan again, she finds that nobody has heard of him or knows who he is... Masterful Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul's latest offering is his first film to feature a major movie star.

**Released Fri 14 January**







FAMILY FAVOURITE

## Sing 2 CERT U (112 mins)

With the voices of **Matthew McConaughey**, **Taron Egerton**, **Tori Kelly**, **Reese Witherspoon**, **Nick Kroll**, **Scarlett Johansson**  
Directed by **Garth Jennings**

This new chapter in Illumination's animated franchise finds ever-optimistic koala bear Buster Moon and his all-star cast of performers preparing to launch their most dazzling stage extravaganza yet. There's just one problem: they first have to

persuade the world's most reclusive rock star, Clay Calloway (played by Bono, making his animated-film debut) to join them...

Sing 2 has met with a lukewarm response from the critics, with frenetic pace, lack of character development and near-to-zero storyline all being cited as reasons to look elsewhere for a high-quality animated movie with which to kickstart 2022.

**Released Fri 28 January**

## Operation Mincemeat CERT tbc

Starring **Colin Firth**, **Matthew Macfadyen**, **Kelly Macdonald**, **Penelope Wilton**, **Johnny Flynn**, **Jason Isaacs** Directed by **John Madden**



In 1943, determined to break Hitler's grip on occupied Europe, the Allies plan an all-out assault on Sicily. But they face an impossible challenge - how to protect a massive invasion force from potential massacre. It falls to two remarkable intelligence officers, Ewen Montagu (Firth) and Charles Cholmondeley (Macfadyen), to dream up the most inspired and improbable disinformation strategy of the war, one which is centred on the most unlikely of secret agents - a dead man... Based on the bestselling book by Ben MacIntyre, Operation Mincemeat tells the extraordinary and true story of the most successful wartime deception ever attempted - one that changed the course of the Second World War.

**Released Fri 14 January**

## Morbius CERT tbc

Starring **Jared Leto**, **Michael Keaton**, **Adria Arjona**, **Jared Harris**, **Matt Smith**, **Tyrese Gibson** Directed by **Daniel Espinosa**

Enigmatic Marvel Comics legend and anti-hero Michael Morbius is dangerously ill - and determined to ensure that others don't suffer the same fate. Struggling against the ravages of a rare blood disorder, Dr Morbius takes a desperate gamble, one which initially appears to have paid off. But then he begins to experience new urges, compulsions that may well see the darkness within him unleashed on an unsuspecting world...

Produced by Columbia Pictures in association with Marvel, this is the latest film in Sony's Spider-Man Universe.

**Released Fri 28 January**



## The Black Phone

CERT tbc (102 mins)

Starring **Ethan Hawke**, **Jeremy Davies**, **James Ransone**, **Madeleine McGraw**, **Mason Thames**, **Kellan Rhude** Directed by **Scott Derrickson**

Abducted by a sadistic killer and trapped in a soundproof basement, 13-year-old Finney Shaw is in a lot of trouble. But then a disconnected phone on the wall begins to ring, and Finney discovers that he can hear the voices of the killer's previous victims. What's more, they're all determined to ensure that what happened to them doesn't happen to Finney...

Adapted from a short story, The Black Phone was director Scott Derrickson's go-to project when creative differences saw him walking away from Marvel Studios' second Doctor Strange movie.

**Released Fri 28 January**



## A Journal For Jordan

CERT tbc (131 mins)

Starring **Michael B Jordan**, **Tamara Tunie**, **Robert Wisdom**, **Chanté Adams**, **Susan Pourfar**, **Vanessa Aspillaga**  
Directed by **Denzel Washington**

Denzel Washington directs Michael B Jordan in a film based on the true story of First Sergeant Charles Monroe King, a soldier deployed to Iraq who begins to keep a journal of love and advice for his infant son. Back at home, senior New York Times editor Dana Canedy (Chanté Adams) revisits the story of her unlikely, life-altering relationship with King and his enduring devotion both to her and their child... A sweeping account of a once-in-a-lifetime love, the film is being promoted as a powerful reminder of the importance of family.

**Released Fri 21 January**





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## FEBRUARY

### Death On The Nile

Starring **Kenneth Branagh**, Gal Gadot, Armie Hammer, Annette Bening, Rose Leslie, Letitia Wright

Kenneth Branagh returns as detective Hercule Poirot following the surprise success of 2017's *Murder On The Orient Express*, which Branagh also directed.



### Uncharted

Starring **Tom Holland**, Mark Wahlberg, Antonio Banderas, Sophia Taylor Ali, Tati Gabrielle

This Indiana Jones-style action-adventure film, based on the popular video game series of the same name, has been floating around in development for more than a decade. Tom Holland stars as the central hero, Nathan Drake.



## MARCH

### The Batman

Starring **Robert Pattinson**, Jeffrey Wright, Zoe Kravitz, Paul Dano, John Turturro, Peter Sarsgaard, Andy Serkis, Colin Farrell

Planet Of The Apes director Matt Reeves tackles what looks to be an even darker take on Batman. Robert Pattinson pulls on the cape and cowl as the Dark Knight for the very first time, with Colin Farrell and Paul Dano also debuting as the Penguin and the Riddler respectively.



## JUNE

### Lightyear

With the voice of **Chris Evans**

The Toy Story franchise may have come to an end, but that doesn't mean Pixar is quite done with the lead characters. Chris Evans lends his voice to the 'real' Buzz Lightyear - the astronaut who was the inspiration for the action figure voiced by Tim Allen - in a prequel that explores how Buzz became so famous that they turned him into a toy.



### Untitled Elvis Biopic

Starring **Austin Butler**, Tom Hanks, Olivia DeJonge, Gary Clark Jr, Kelvin Harrison Jr

Baz Luhrmann directs this slice-of-life biopic about the relationship between a young Elvis Presley and his manager, Colonel Tom Parker - played by Tom Hanks.

## JULY

### Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets Of Dumbledore

Starring **Eddie Redmayne**, Jude Law, Katherine Waterston, Ezra Miller, Mads Mikkelsen, Dan Fogler, Alison Sudol



Eddie Redmayne returns as Newt Scamander in the third chapter of this magical Harry Potter prequel series, taking place decades before Harry enrolls at Hogwarts. The story picks up after the events of *The Crimes Of Grindelwald*, as Newt and his compatriots continue to pursue the evil wizard (now played by Mads Mikkelsen) in the lead-up to World War Two.

## SEPTEMBER

### Mission: Impossible 7

Starring **Tom Cruise**, Rebecca Ferguson, Cary Elwes, Vanessa Kirby, Hayley Atwell, Simon Pegg



Tom Cruise returns for the seventh installment in the franchise. Christopher McQuarrie is also back, for a third time, as writer and director. Some of the movie's scenes were filmed here in the Midlands, with Birmingham's Grand Central being transformed into Abu Dhabi airport.

## NOVEMBER

### Black Panther: Wakanda Forever

Starring **Letitia Wright**, Danai Gurira, Lupita Nyong'o, Angela Bassett, Winston Duke, Martin Freeman

After the passing of lead actor Chadwick Boseman, Marvel made the decision to continue with the second installment of *Black Panther*, but Boseman has not been recast. The story instead focuses on King T'Challa's sister, Shuri, played by Letitia Wright. Quite how T'Challa's absence will be addressed is, at the time of writing, a mystery.

## DECEMBER

### Avatar 2

Starring **Sam Worthington**, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver, Kate Winslet, Vin Diesel, Michelle Yeoh, Giovanni Ribisi, Stephen Lang

This sequel movie arrives some 13 years after the release of the first *Avatar* film. Sam Worthington's Jake Sully and Zoe Saldana's Neytiri now have a family on Pandora - but when old enemies return, they're forced to evacuate and find a new home. Kate Winslet, Michelle Yeoh and Edie Falco are among the new additions to the cast.







Main image: Simeon Barclay, *As a Precursor to Folly*, 2021. © Simeon Barclay. Installation view, British Art Show 9, 2023-22, Aberdeen Art Gallery. A Hayward Gallery Touring exhibition organised in collaboration with galleries across the cities of Aberdeen, Wolverhampton, Manchester and Plymouth. Photo © Mike Davidson.



# British Art Show 9

The prestigious contemporary art exhibition, coming to the Midlands for the first time, shines the spotlight on Wolverhampton's rich cultural history...

Widely recognised as 'the most important recurrent exhibition of contemporary art produced in the UK', British Art Show (BAS9) this month makes its much-anticipated Midlands debut when it opens at two Wolverhampton venues - Wolverhampton Art Gallery and University of Wolverhampton School of Art.

The Hayward Gallery Touring exhibition visits the city after showing at Aberdeen Art Gallery and prior to stop-offs in Manchester and Plymouth.

Taking place every five years, the exhibition presents a panoramic view of contemporary art in the UK. Focusing on work made since 2015, *British Art Show 9* reflects a time when politics of identity and concerns of social, racial and environmental justice have pervaded public consciousness.

Each of the exhibitions - across the four cities - features a different programme of work by local artists, with each show responding to distinctive local contexts. In Wolverhampton, 34 selected artists will respond to three main themes: Healing, Care & Reparative History;

Tactics for Togetherness; and Imagining New Futures.

The city's rich and varied community provides the narrative, with artists exploring identities based around class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. The artists also investigate the way in which Wolverhampton's cultural history has been shaped by the post-war arrival of Commonwealth migrants who went on to live and work in the city.

Permanent collections housed at Wolverhampton Art Gallery will also feature as part of BAS9, including works linked to the British Black Arts movement and the venue's notable collection of art relating to The Troubles outside Northern Ireland.

Speaking about the show's Wolverhampton stop-off, BAS9 curators Hammad Nasar and Irene Aristizábal said: "the second iteration of the *British Art Show 9*, in Wolverhampton, focuses on an intersectional approach to living with difference. Our approach foregrounds the contemporary resonance of the Black Lives Matter protests with the

historic context of Enoch Powell's infamous and divisive 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968, made during his tenure as Wolverhampton South West's Conservative MP.

"We see BAS9's presentation in critical dialogue with Wolverhampton's cultural history. This is reflected in concrete form through a 'capsule' exhibition of a selection of works from Wolverhampton Art Gallery's permanent collection, presented as part of BAS9."

In addition to the offering across the two sites, BAS9 also includes a programme of artist films and a dedicated website to enable artists to share work online.

A programme of associated events and activities for all ages will also be available, both for people visiting the exhibition in person and for those wishing to explore via the internet.

**British Art Show 9 shows at Wolverhampton Art Gallery and University of Wolverhampton School of Art from Saturday 22 January until Sunday 10 April**  
More info at: [britishartshow9.co.uk](http://britishartshow9.co.uk)

## BAS9 HIGHLIGHTS

### **Hurvin Anderson:** *Barbershop Series*

Including a new painting, *Dixie Peach* (2020). Born in Birmingham to Jamaican parents, Anderson's vibrant paintings explore his relationship to both cultures and the tensions that arise through his duality.

### **Helen Cammock:** *Changing Room and*

*Changing Room II* The Staffordshire-born artist reflects on her late father (an art teacher, magistrate and amateur ceramicist) and his experiences of living in Wolverhampton in the 1960s and '70s.

**Mark Essen** Mark has created a pilot programme for an 'art school of otherness' within the setting of Wolverhampton School of Art, working with students from the

Thomas Telford School to create and furnish a workshop space.

### **Hardeep Pandhal:** *Ensorcelled English*

(2020–21) A new video work which expands Hardeep's interest in dark enchantment through a fantasy of a cursed art school, while dissecting the racist and sexist structures on which art education is too often founded.

**Mandy El-Sayegh** Incorporating personal memorabilia and layers of accumulated ephemera, this immersive installation includes walls covered in newspapers, latex and mixed-media floor tiles and sculptural specimen tables.

**Oona Doherty:** *Hope Hunt & The Ascension into Lazarus* (2015-ongoing) Oona's work was created after learning that Northern Ireland had the highest rate of young male suicides in Europe. Hope Hunt... has been performed in youth detention centres and prisons as well as theatres. It will be configured as a street performance in Wolverhampton as part of BAS9.

**Heta Patel:** *Trinity* (2021) An ambitious new film created with dance, martial arts and sign language collaborators.

**GAIKA:** *ZEMEL* (2021) The experimental rapper, producer, writer, visual and performance artist has drawn on his Caribbean heritage and sound-system culture to produce a shrine to his murdered uncle and other Windrush-generation deportees.





## Miss Clara And The Celebrity Beast In Art

The Barber Institute, Birmingham, until Sun 27 February

The latest in the Barber's ongoing series of masterpiece-in-focus displays revolves around an 18th-century rhinoceros known as Miss Clara.

Brought to mainland Europe in 1741 - and the first rhino to be sighted there since 1579 - Clara was presented to kings, queens, courtiers and commoners at destinations across the continent.

She died in London in 1758.

This fascinating exhibition is built around a small bronze sculpture of Miss Clara (one of the most popular art works in the Barber's collection) and also features a selection of other pieces in bronze and marble.

The display examines the emergence of menageries and zoos, as well as considering the capturing of animals such as Clara within the context of colonialism and empire.



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Image: John Ruskin, Study of Dunes: The First Scarlet on the Cliffs, 1868  
© Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

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## Rana Begum: Dappled Light

Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, Thurs 13 January - Sun 13 March

“My work is a little like life,” says Bangladesh-born artist Rana Begum. “You don’t have full control over the balance of chaos and calm, and the art I produce reflects this. It has a dual experience - its strong colour and form gives it a loud aspect, but if it’s a good piece it can also provide a moment of calmness and a reflective experience.” Elected as a Royal Academician last year,

Rana is known for her geometric abstraction and uses her vibrant paintings, sculptures and installations to explore the perception of light and colour. This latest exhibition features a series of new, large-scale works which respond specifically to the Mead Gallery’s architecture, investigating the shifting perceptual effects of light as it interacts with her work and the gallery space.

## Turner Prize 2021

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

Part of Coventry’s ongoing UK City of Culture celebrations, the Turner Prize exhibition continues to show at the Herbert until the middle of the month. The show marks the first time a Turner Prize jury has selected a shortlist consisting entirely of artist collectives. The exhibition is showcasing pieces by the five nominees, all of whom work closely and continuously with communities across the UK to inspire social change through art. The winner of the 2021 competition is Array Collective, who took the prize for producing hopeful and dynamic artwork which addresses urgent social and political issues affecting Northern Ireland. Admission to the Turner Prize is free. Tickets can be booked by visiting [coventry2021.co.uk](http://coventry2021.co.uk)



## Atmosphere

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, until Sun 27 February

On the eve of its 90th birthday, and with its stated aim being ‘to show the best in art that the county can produce’, the Society of Staffordshire Artists is still going strong - as this new exhibition of work by its current members ably illustrates. The display brings together a collection of uniquely personal and subjective interpretations of mood, emotion and effects. The artworks have been produced by both amateur and professional artists.

## Skyscape

Worcester City Art Gallery, Sat 29 January - Sat 26 March

An exhibition exploring the sky and its representations in art, Skyscape features works by, among others, Rembrandt, Albrecht Durer, Samuel Palmer, John Ruskin and Paul Nash. The exhibition has been inspired by a famous statement made by Constable: ‘It will be difficult to name a class of landscape in which the sky is not the key note, the standard of scale and the chief organ of sentiment’.



## Keith Piper: Jet-Black Futures

The New Art Gallery, Walsall, Fri 14 January - Sun 24 April

Raised in Birmingham and having studied in Coventry and Nottingham, it can justifiably be said that Keith Piper is an artist ‘made in the Midlands’. So it’s fitting indeed that his latest major solo exhibition is going on display at one of the region’s most popular and well-respected galleries.

Exploring ‘issues of “race”, speculative futurism and technology in the age of anxiety’, Jet-Black Futures is an ongoing project encompassing a number of existing and proposed works. The New Art Gallery presentation includes the brand-new Search Of Four Horses. An epic four-screen video installation, the piece is based around an exploration of the story of The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The work also seeks to investigate contemporary hopes, fears and anxieties for the future.

Keith’s 1991 installation, Surveillance: Tagging The Other - a work acquired for the gallery last year - also features in the show.







Image credit: Wei Wei, A Dream of Wokkiness in Paris, 2018, is the artist. Courtesy of the artist. Cui Wei Gallery, Taipei and Soft Opening, London. Produced by CH Wei Productions.

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*Grace Ndiritu, Black Beauty: For A Shamanic  
Cinema, Moving Image, 2020.*  
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## Events previews from around the region



## Autosport International

NEC, Birmingham,  
Thurs 13 - Sun 16 January

As Europe's largest motorsport show, Autosport International is a must-attend

event both for motorsport fans and industry professionals. From Karting to Formula 1, visitors can check out racecar displays and catch up with a host of motorsport stars. Show attractions include: the UK's largest

indoor racing track, the Live Action Arena, in which thrill-seekers can enjoy live racing and stunt drivers; the F1 Racing Display, where fans can see modern F1 cars; and the Autosport Stage, the place to head for to enjoy interviews with the stars of motorsport.

## The National Running Show

NEC, Birmingham, Sat 22 & Sun 23 January



Catering for runners of all levels, The National Running Show features 250-plus exhibitors offering kit, tech and nutrition to take your running to the next level. Visitors can pick up expert advice via workshops at The Run Clinic or treat themselves to a massage from one of the highly experienced therapists in The Treatment Room. Some of the biggest stars from the running world will be making appearances over the weekend too, including Jonnie Peacock MBE, Lord Sebastian Coe, Scott Jurek and Carla Molinaro.

## British Basketball Cup Finals

Utilita Arena Birmingham,  
Sun 30 January

The two top teams from the elite men's and women's British Basketball League here battle it out for one of the UK game's most coveted pieces of silverware. Courtside entertainment comes courtesy of live music, cheerleaders and the hugely popular Slam Dunk contest.



## Meet The Makers Weekend

Compton Verney, Warwickshire,  
Sat 22 & Sun 23 January



To dovetail with Compton Verney's exhibition commemorating British woodcarver Grinling Gibbons, visitors to the venue can meet the award-winning carvers behind the show, including Sarah Davis (pictured). There's also a series of talks to enjoy, revealing the hidden stories of the parkland's ancient trees and providing the opportunity to learn more about the use of wood in the collections. Live performances from Warwickshire Baroque and the chance for children to try their hand at producing a linocut also feature.



# 22 HIGHLIGHTS OF '22

**TWENTY-TWO TERRIFIC REASONS FOR MIDLANDERS TO LOOK FORWARD TO THE NEXT 12 MONTHS...**

As we welcome 2022 with optimism and hope, we also look forward to a jam-packed calendar of arts & entertainment events taking place across the Midlands region. Here are 22 reasons to be excited about the coming 12 months. Happy New Year!

## **Birmingham Commonwealth Games**

The UK's most-anticipated event in 2022, Birmingham Commonwealth Games not only presents a high-profile platform on which Britain's best athletes can demonstrate their talent, it also provides a fantastic opportunity for the region to showcase its always-impressive cultural offer. Find out more on page 64.

## **South Pacific to stop off at The Alexandra**

The Chichester Festival Theatre production of classic Rodgers & Hammerstein musical South Pacific is coming to The Alexandra in Birmingham (27 September - 1 October) as part of a UK tour.

Brought to life by a big cast and full orchestra, the Tony and Pulitzer Prize-winning show is a powerful love story set on a South Pacific island during World War Two.



## **Mischief Theatre magic - direct from the West End**

The award-winning Mischief Theatre (The Play That Goes Wrong and BBC One's The Goes Wrong Show) return to the Birmingham Hippodrome this spring (24 - 29 May) with a production created in association with magic legends Penn & Teller.

Direct from its West End run, Magic Goes Wrong follows a hapless gang of magicians as they stage an evening of grand illusion to raise cash for charity. But as the magic turns to mayhem, things begin to spiral out of control - including their fundraising target.



## Camp Bestival sister festival debuts at Shropshire location

Family favourite Camp Bestival brings its sister festival to Shropshire's Weston Park for the first time from 18 to 21 August. Camp Bestival Shropshire is a stand-alone get-together featuring all of the unique and essential family-friendly elements of the original Camp Bestival. The event's full line-up of entertainment is yet to be announced, but organisers are promising lashings of family fun. We'll keep you posted.



## Diana Ross reigns Supreme in the Midlands

In a week that sees the Queen of Motown take over the 'legends' slot at Glastonbury Festival, the iconic Diana Ross will also grace the Utilita Arena Birmingham (20 June). Tickets for her Thank You tour are now on sale.



## Billy Elliot gets a new look with Leicester Curve production

The award-winning Billy Elliot The Musical gets a new look in a Made At Curve production. Directed by Nikolai Foster and choreographed by Lucy Hind, the show is based on the acclaimed Stephen Daldry film set in the mid-1980s - a time when men went down the pit and boys put on their boxing gloves...



## Wolverhampton Civic Hall to reopen after major revamp

After closing in 2015, Wolverhampton's Civic Hall is set to reopen in the autumn, having undergone a £40million refurbishment. And with one of the world's

top entertainment and venues operators, AEG Presents, taking charge, there should be plenty of big names heading Wolverhampton way in the years to come...

## BBC Radio One's Big Weekend visits Coventry

Returning after a three-year hiatus, BBC Radio One's Big Weekend heads to Coventry this spring.

The event, which always features some of the biggest names in music, takes place in the city's War Memorial Park from Friday 27 to Sunday 29 May, bringing Coventry's extended year as City of Culture to a close.

More than 70,000 fans are expected to attend the event across the three days. The line-up and ticketing details are yet to be announced.



## Reopening of the RSC's Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon

Early in 2020, the Royal Shakespeare Company announced it would be keeping its Swan Theatre closed for the foreseeable future. Although no reopening date has yet been confirmed, it's hoped that this intimate venue will be back up and running some time in 2022.

## A summer of Krazy Racing in the region

The Midlands is all set to get a little bit wackier this summer when the team behind the award-winning Krazy Races bring soap box derby fun to not one but *three* locations: Shrewsbury's Quarry Park (29 May), Sandwell Valley Country Park (10 July) and the streets of Wolverhampton (21 August).



## Crowded House in Brum

With new album Dreamers Are Waiting released in summer 2021, New Zealand five-piece Crowded House will appear at Birmingham Utilita Arena in the summer. The gig, rescheduled from last year due to Covid, takes place on 14 June.





## Immersive digital art gallery to open in Coventry

The UK's first permanent immersive digital art gallery opens in Coventry this spring. Located in the former home of the Coventry Evening Telegraph newspaper, The Reel Store will specialise in showcasing innovative experimental art commissions.

The first of these will be Refik Anadol's Machine Memoirs: Space. Refik's commission is the product of a long-term collaboration with NASA and features a 360-degree cinematic experience of futuristic visuals.



## The Cher Show Shoop Shoops into the region

A brand-new stage production of The Cher Show visits the Midlands this year. The biopic musical will play the Leicester Curve (15 - 23 April), Birmingham Hippodrome (2 - 6 August), Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent (30 August - 3 September)

and the Wolverhampton Grand (18 - 22 October). The production is directed by Arlene Phillips, with choreography by Oti Mabuse and costume design by Gabriella Slade (SIX, In The Heights, Spice World 2019 Tour).

## Social cricket experience Sixes opens first Midlands clubhouse

Fancy hitting a six in one of three high-tech batting nets before settling down in the bar & restaurant to tuck into some delicious cocktails, beers and British BBQ food? If so, then check out Sixes - the latest social gaming experience to open in Birmingham (26 January).



## Marvellous theatre at Staffordshire's New Vic

The life of Staffordshire legend Neil Baldwin is played out on the New Vic Theatre's stage this spring (11 March - 9 April). Directed by Theresa Heskins, Marvellous tells the story of Neil's extraordinary life - a fantastical tale filled with 'football stars, comedians, bishops, circus acts, budgies and politicians'. Neil has helped pen the play.

## Exclusive performance of Max Richter's VOICES at Warwick Arts Centre

Composer and pianist Max Richter's acclaimed new work, VOICES, is presented at Coventry's Warwick Arts Centre on 12 March (the only UK performance of the composition in 2022). Created by Max and his artistic partner, Yulia Mahr, the work features text adapted from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.





## Daniel Lismore exhibits at Coventry's Herbert Art Gallery & Museum

Coventry-born artist, designer and activist Daniel Lismore makes his home-town debut next month when he exhibits *Be Yourself; Everyone Else Is Already Taken* at the city's Herbert Art Gallery & Museum.

The exhibition, which runs from 18 February to 26 June, includes *An Army Of My Life*, a major installation featuring life-sized sculptures fashioned in Daniel's elaborate and extravagant ensembles.



## The Commitments bring soul to Wolves Grand

Back out on tour following a record-breaking run in the West End, *The Commitments* musical is adapted from Roddy Doyle's award-winning novel. It tells the story of Jimmy Rabbitte, a young, working-class music fan who shapes a bunch of amateur musicians and friends into the finest soul band Dublin has ever produced... The production stops off at the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre from 11 to 15 October.



## Utilita Creation Day festival debuts in Wolverhampton

Utilita Creation Day is a brand-new festival taking place on Saturday 28 & Sunday 29 May in Wolverhampton's West Park.

The event, exclusively curated by Alan McGee, is intended as a celebration of the

legendary Creation Records label and its legacy. The festival's line-up so far includes IDLES, Happy Mondays, Echo & The Bunnymen, Friendly Fires (pictured), Ash, Cast and many more.

## Shrewsbury Flower Show set to bloom once again

The prestigious Shrewsbury Flower Show was presented online in 2021 - only the third time in the show's 133-year history that it hasn't taken place in the town's Quarry Park. Organisers have promised that the event will be bigger and better when it returns to the Quarry this summer (Friday 12 & Saturday 13 August).



## Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery to partially reopen in the spring

After being closed for many months - firstly by the pandemic and then by essential electrical works - Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery will reopen its Round Room and Industrial Gallery on 28 April.

## Revolution a revelation: Les Misérables returns to Birmingham Hippodrome

Described as 'Les Mis for the 21st century', Cameron Mackintosh's revolutionary production continues to delight audiences with its magnificent staging, stirring narrative and memorable score.

Based on Bouil and Schönberg's musical of the same name, Cameron's version has so far been seen by 120 million people in 52 countries and 22 languages. We can't wait for its return to Birmingham Hippodrome in the summer (Tues 9 - Sat 27 August).







# A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

**The organisers of Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games are determined to make the event accessible and inclusive to everyone. Steve Adams speaks to Donna Fraser, Head of Inclusion & Engagement, to find out what her role involves, and what she's most looking forward to...**

With less than eight months to go until the opening ceremony, preparations are starting to ramp up for Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, an event that is not only a huge sporting occasion, but which aims to have a positive impact on the West Midlands as a whole, through targeted community involvement and engagement. The sporting extravaganza will feature 11

days of swimming and diving, eight days of cricket, eight days of gymnastics and seven days of athletics. All in all there will be a mammoth 286 sessions across 19 different sports.

The focus will inevitably be on Birmingham and the revamped Alexander Stadium, but events will also be taking place at other venues across the region.

These include gymnastics at Arena Birmingham, boxing, netball and other indoor sports at the NEC, swimming at Sandwell Aquatics Centre, rugby sevens at Coventry Arena, lawn bowls at Victoria Park in Leamington, triathlon at Sutton Park in Sutton Coldfield and cycling at Wolverhampton's West Park.





Delivering a top-quality sporting competition and breathtaking spectacle is of course a priority for the Games' Organising Committee, but embracing diversity and inclusion is a key element, too. With regard to this, there will be a specific focus on:

- Delivering a legacy of promoting and celebrating diversity and inclusion in the West Midlands and the Commonwealth
- More engagement in sports and physical activity, resulting in improvement regarding underrepresented groups getting involved with and/or participating in sport
- Ensuring the Games are accessible and inclusive for everyone - athletes, team officials, volunteers, spectators, media and key stakeholders

The Commonwealth Games is often referred to as the 'friendly Games', designed to bring together people from all backgrounds, and Birmingham 2022 will be no exception, according to its Head of Inclusion & Engagement, Donna Fraser.

The former sprinter has more than 20 years' experience as an international athlete, as well as 10 years of corporate experience in the fields of business, sport, leadership and wellbeing. Awarded an OBE in the 2021 New Year Honours list for services to equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace, Donna is now bringing her formidable skillset to the business of planning for the Games, helping to prepare an Equality & Diversity Action Plan that will become a thread which runs throughout the event.

"The West Midlands is a vibrant and culturally diverse region," says Donna, "and the 2022 Games provides the perfect opportunity to engage more communities in sports and physical activity. It's our responsibility to deliver a legacy of promoting and celebrating diversity and inclusion in the West Midlands and the Commonwealth."

The Organising Committee's stated intention is to deliver the Games 'sustainably, inclusively and creatively'. This puts even more emphasis on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. Donna says the five key priorities in terms of this are:

1. Developing a workforce reflective of the West Midlands
2. Delivering a highly accessible and inclusive Games
3. Creating a fair, supportive and open culture throughout the Games' delivery
4. Connecting communities to the Games through engagement and participation
5. Educating and developing people's shared

understanding on issues of inequality

"We are always open about how we're performing against these priorities and regularly share information as much as possible," says Donna.

But how does this translate in terms of engaging with local communities and getting them involved in the Games?

"We hold quarterly Equality, Diversity & Inclusion forums for community leaders and groups, so that they can hear first-hand the progress from various Organising Committee departments. We also have our community engagement team, who deliver events across the region."

So what does Donna hope Birmingham 2022 and its legacy can deliver in terms of promoting and celebrating diversity?

"The Organising Committee is working hard to achieve an inclusive and accessible Commonwealth Games experience for everyone.

"The Games is renowned for bringing people together from across the Commonwealth regardless of their cultural background, disability, gender or socio-economic background.

"The success of Birmingham 2022 will be measured on its legacy, and this will be a direct result of the lasting impression that everyone takes away. Ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion is a fundamental of the Games - a focus that will improve the experience and create a greater legacy."



## EVENTS TO LOOK OUT FOR...

Steve also asked Donna, as a sports fan and former competitor, which events she's most looking forward to seeing at Birmingham 2022.

Pretty much all of them, judging by her enthusiastic response!

### • WOMEN FIRST

"The Birmingham 2022 Games will be the first ever to feature more women's medal events than men's. And it's also set to have the largest integrated para-sport programme in history, with eight sports.

This will truly be a Commonwealth Games that stands out from the rest."

### • ALEXANDER STADIUM

"Obviously being a former Olympian competing in athletics, I'll be sticking pretty close to Alexander Stadium come Games time, enjoying elite athletes from across the world competing in a completely renovated venue that will be fresh from a £72million revamp, especially for the Games."

### • PARTY TIME

"The opening ceremony will be a truly special moment, marking the start of the Games and Birmingham's big moment to shine on the world stage. Due to high demand during the ticket ballot, the allocation for this landmark event is now currently unavailable, with people from across the West Midlands kicking off the Games with the party of all parties."

### • JUST THE WICKET

"I can't wait for the Women's T20 cricket, which is being hosted at Edgbaston Cricket Ground. India versus Pakistan on 31 July is definitely a date I've circled on my calendar."

### • RUGBY AND MORE

"The rugby sevens at Coventry Arena is another standout series I can't wait for, alongside weightlifting and netball. To be honest, if you love sport, you're spoilt for choice at Birmingham 2022 - the city will be electric!"

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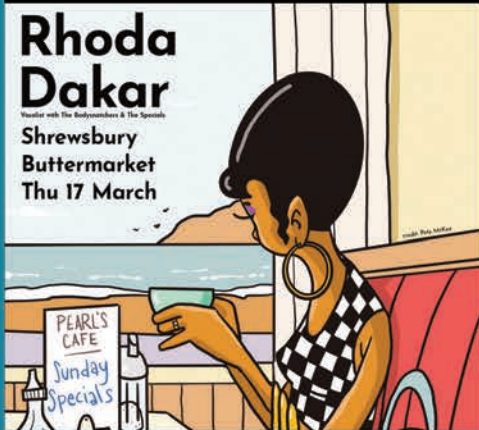
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