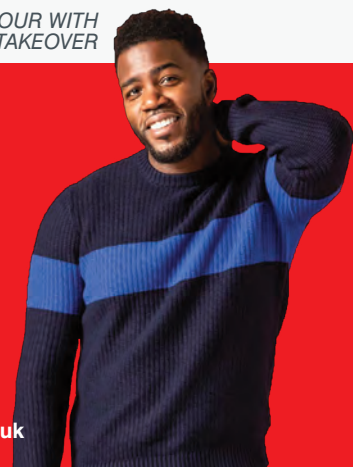


Coventry & Warwickshire

ISSUE 443 DECEMBER 2023

# What's On

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



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## inside:

### GRUFFALO ALERT!

Hit children's stage show comes to Coventry for Christmas



### A FAIR MAID...

much-anticipated revival opens at the RSC's Swan Theatre



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BY ISOBEL McARTHUR  
AFTER THOMAS HEYWOOD

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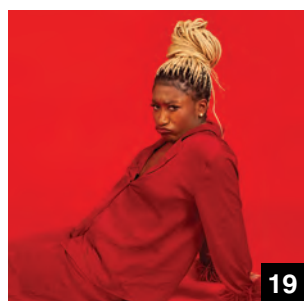
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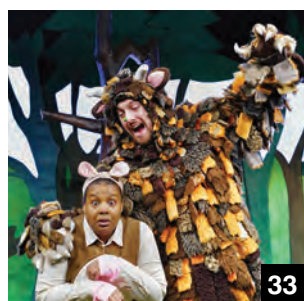
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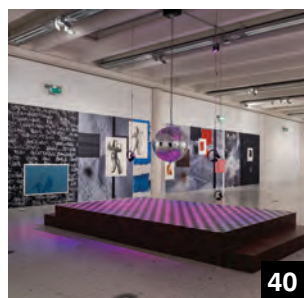
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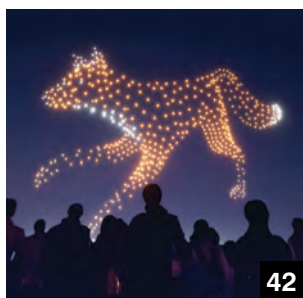
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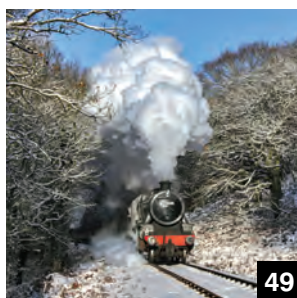
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## What's On

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## Arenacross back in the city

Motocross and off-road racing fans can look forward to a Second City showdown in the new year, as Arenacross makes a welcome return at Birmingham's Resorts World Arena on Saturday 3 February.

Featuring a high-octane mix of indoor motocross racing and freestyle motocross (FMX) derring-do, the series has been thrilling crowds the length and breadth of the UK for over a decade now, during which time it's entertained 300,000-plus action-hungry fans.

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

## From Ghosts to Dream

Matthew Baynton, the co-creator, writer and star of hit BBC TV comedy series *Ghosts*, will star as Bottom in the Royal Shakespeare Company's forthcoming production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Stratford-upon-Avon.



Commenting on the news, Matthew said: "I've always wanted to be part of a Shakespeare production, and I've been hoping to return to the stage for quite some time too - so to be able to combine those two ambitions in one of the great ensemble comedies is a dream come true."

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* shows at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre from Tuesday 30 January to Saturday 30 March.

For more information, visit [rsc.org.uk](http://rsc.org.uk)

## Time for a doze under Dippy the Diplodocus?

Coventry's Herbert Art Gallery & Museum is offering families the chance to spend a night snoozing under Dippy the Dinosaur. The Doze Under Dippy experience is designed for children aged six to 11 and takes place on two nights early next year: Saturday 27 January and Saturday 24 February. Dippy, a 26-foot replica of a *Diplodocus* skeleton, is on a three-year loan to the venue from the Natural History Museum. For further information, visit [theherbert.org](http://theherbert.org)

## Light Nights set to return to Worcester city centre

Light Night returns to Worcester on Wednesday 14 & Thursday 15 February. The popular event sees the city centre hosting a programme of creative and interactive work and playful street performances. For further information, visit [severnarts.org.uk](http://severnarts.org.uk)



## Games legacy cash to help community projects

A £9million pot of Commonwealth Games legacy cash is being made available for grassroots projects that will unite communities across the West Midlands and get local people more physically and mentally active.

Grants of between £500 and £300,000 are available for projects that will ensure 'the positive and long-lasting legacy from last summer's Games is felt right across the region'. Full details about the Inclusive Communities Fund and how to apply are available [wmca.org.uk](http://wmca.org.uk)



## CBSO welcomes in 2024 with Malvern theatre gala

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) is paying a visit to Malvern Theatres early next month to perform a New Year concert of Viennese music.



Taking place at the venue on Saturday 6 January, the programme for the evening features music by Smetana, Lehár and Strauss. The CBSO will be joined for the concert by Austrian maestro Christoph Koncz and soprano Francesca Chiejina (pictured).

For further information, visit [malvern-theatres.co.uk](http://malvern-theatres.co.uk)

## A Gospel Christmas at Warwick Arts Centre

Warwick Arts Centre in Coventry is hosting a Christmas concert by the highly regarded John Fisher and IDMC Gospel Soul Choir on Friday 15 December.

Next year celebrating their 30th anniversary, the choir is made up of Christian people who come together to sing gospel and inspirational songs.

To find out more about the concert and choir, visit [warwickartscentre.co.uk](http://warwickartscentre.co.uk)





## Nadiya and Kai on the road again

After success with debut tour *Once Upon A Time*, dance stars Nadiya Bychkova and Kai Widdrington are heading out on the road again in 2024. The dynamic duo will stop off at two Midlands venues: Malvern Theatres (Thursday 13 June) and Birmingham's Symphony Hall (Monday 24 June). For further information and to purchase tickets, visit either [ticketmaster.co.uk](https://ticketmaster.co.uk) or [nadiyaandkai.com](https://nadiyaandkai.com)



## Rock band Elbow make spring visit

Rock band Elbow will visit Birmingham's Resorts World Arena next spring as part of a UK tour (Friday 10 May). Commenting on the news, lead singer Guy Garvey said: "We love the intimacy of theatres, but we have some very big songs, and the electricity of 20,000 people singing along cannot be denied. So, the big rooms it is, and big shows they will be. Can't wait to see everybody again." Further information and tickets are available at [resortsworldarena.co.uk](https://resortsworldarena.co.uk)



## Dear Evan Hansen coming to two Midlands venues

A new production of Olivier, Tony and Grammy award-winning musical *Dear Evan Hansen* will visit the Midlands next year - and again in 2025 - as part of its first UK tour. The show focuses on title character Evan, a high-school senior with social anxiety whose desire to fit in sees him telling a terrible lie that

eventually catches him out.

The hit show visits Birmingham theatre The Alexandra from Tuesday 22 to Saturday 26 October. It then returns to the region in 2025, running at the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre from Tuesday 1 to Saturday 5 April.

## More Mormons

Smash-hit Broadway and West End musical *The Book Of Mormon* will visit Birmingham theatre The Alexandra next Christmas. The Tony, Olivier and Grammy award winner, which follows the misadventures of a mismatched pair of missionaries - will show at the Alex from Tuesday 3 to Saturday 28 December 2024. Further information and tickets are available at [atgtickets.com](https://atgtickets.com)



## Cirque du Soleil set to dazzle again

Cirque du Soleil will return to the UK for the first time in six years next spring, with their new tour including a stop-off at Utilita Arena Birmingham (Thursday 25 - Sunday 28 April). The world-renowned company will be performing the critically acclaimed OVO, which they describe as 'a colourful intrusion into a new day in the life of insects; a non-stop riot of energy and movement'. For further information and to book tickets, visit the venue's website at [utilitaarenabham.co.uk](https://utilitaarenabham.co.uk)



## Bear Grylls announces his Never Give Up tour

Television adventurer Bear Grylls is hitting the road again next spring with brand-new show Never Give Up.

Featuring 'unseen, hair-raising images and remarkable behind-the-scenes videos', the show stops off at Birmingham's Symphony Hall on Saturday 27 April.

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

## A Coventry Cabaret of Curiosities at the Albany!

A brand-new show from one-time Britain's Got Talent finalists The Circus of Horrors is coming to Coventry's Albany Theatre in the new year as part of a UK tour.

Titled Cabaret Of Curiosities, the production stops off at the venue on Saturday 17 February. Featured acts include 'sword swallowers, whirlwind jugglers, twisted contortionists, voodoo acrobats, pickled people and hula-hooping sideshow showgirls' - all presented against the soundscape of an original rock score. To find out more and book tickets, visit [albanytheatre.co.uk](http://albanytheatre.co.uk)



## Creative consortium to help deliver arts venue

A consortium of arts and creative organisations will work with Worcester City Council on the delivery and management of a new arts venue in the city centre. Based in the Scala and Corn Exchange buildings in Angel Street, the new venue will be funded by part of the £17.9million awarded to the City Council from the Government's Future High Streets Fund. The newly formed consortium of leading local arts and creative organisations is set to help the Council develop design and operating proposals for the new venue.

06 [whatsonlive.co.uk](http://whatsonlive.co.uk)

## More shows announced for the Coventry Belgrade

A new version of The Glass Menagerie is among the shows recently added to the Coventry Belgrade's spring & summer line-up of entertainment.

Alongside the Tennessee Williams semi-autobiographical masterpiece, the theatre is also presenting Tess - a groundbreaking circus adaptation of Thomas Hardy's Tess Of The D'Urbervilles - and new family-entertainment shows in the form of Sing-a-long Matilda and Spot's Birthday Party. Previously announced spring & summer season shows at the Belgrade include Shrek, The Woman In Black and Frantic Assembly's Metamorphosis.

To check out the theatre's whole programme of entertainment, visit [belgrade.co.uk](http://belgrade.co.uk)



## 'Challenging' exhibition at Coventry Cathedral

Coventry Cathedral is to host a 'challenging' new exhibition in early 2024.

Featuring illustrations by artist Beth Waters, the free-to-view interactive display gives an insight into people's experiences of hidden hardship in the rural North Cotswolds.

The exhibition shows at the cathedral from Tuesday 30 January to Monday 26 February.

## From Jane with love...

Jane McDonald will be making a stop-off in Birmingham next autumn as part of her With All My Love tour.

Promising a show 'filled with love, glamour and warm Yorkshire wit', Jane will perform at Birmingham Hippodrome on Saturday 16 November. To check ticket availability for the show, visit [cuffeandtaylor.com](http://cuffeandtaylor.com)



## A festive double from Coventry Cathedral Choir

Coventry Cathedral Choir are certainly getting into the Christmas spirit this month, performing in two special concerts.

On Saturday the 9th they team up with the Brass Band of Central England to present Christmastide Celebration, a concert of carols old and new. Then, on Monday the 18th, they sing Handel's Messiah by candlelight, accompanied by Orchestra Pro Anima. Both concerts take place at Coventry Cathedral.



## Change to two Worcester museums' opening times

Two Worcester museums' public opening hours are to be reshaped following a decision made by the city council.

Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum and The Commandery are key destinations for visitors to the city. The two venues attract a combined total of 80,000 people each year. Proposals have been agreed for the Art Gallery & Museum to open on Sundays, and for The Commandery - already open on Sundays - to have its Sunday opening times extended by an hour, to run from 10am to 3pm.



# B:Festive

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15-16 Dec | SH  
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17 Dec | SH  
**Candlelit Carols**



19 Dec | TH  
**The Lock In  
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The Demon Barbers**



20 Dec | TH  
**The King's Singers:  
When You Wish  
Upon A Star**



21 Dec | TH  
**The Amy Winehouse  
Band: Celebrating  
20 Years of Frank**



23 Dec | SH  
**Christmas Carol  
Singalong**



27-31 Dec | TH  
**Oh No! Shark in the  
Snow!**



2.30pm 31 Dec | SH  
**New Year's Eve Gala**



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Deniece Pearson & Carol  
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9pm 31 Dec | SH  
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# bmusic.co.uk



## Applications open for the Alex's Stage Experience

Birmingham theatre The Alexandra's pioneering summertime youth project, Stage Experience, will next year present a production of *The Sound Of Music* (Thursday 15 - Saturday 17 August).

Applications are now open to children and young people aged between nine and 24, with both performer and technical places available.

For more information and to apply to participate (the deadline is Friday 12 April), visit the website: [careers.atg.co.uk](http://careers.atg.co.uk)

## Severn Valley Railway launches early-bird offers

The Severn Valley Railway has launched an early-bird offer for a number of its special events in 2024.

Tickets for next year's spring and autumn galas and the summertime Step Back To The 1940s weekends are currently available at 2023 prices.

The special ticket offer applies to purchases made until Sunday 7 January.



## A Christmas menu at Solihull Japanese eatery

Solihull Japanese restaurant Kibou is currently offering a special set menu for Christmas.

Starters include prawn tempura and crispy takoyaki, with salmon teriyaki and duck & mushroom udon featuring on the main-course menu. A selection of decadent Japanese-inspired desserts is available to round off the culinary experience.

To view the restaurant's complete menu, visit the website: [kibou.co.uk/christmas2023](http://kibou.co.uk/christmas2023)



## After-dark illuminations set to light up the winter gloom

Midlanders are being invited to discover the nighttime wonder of Compton Verney via a spectacle of light and sound next month. Running at the Warwickshire venue from Friday 26 January to Sunday 18 February, the show features 'a beautiful illuminated trail

through the majestic woodland and around the parkland, all lit under the stars'.

For more information about the Spectacle Of Light and to book tickets for the show, visit the venue's website: [comptonverney.org.uk](http://comptonverney.org.uk)

## Roderick Williams in concert at Compton...

Critically acclaimed baritone Roderick Williams will perform two special Christmas concerts at Warwickshire's Compton Verney on Thursday 21 December.

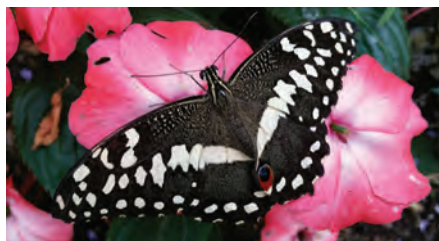
The concerts take place at 11am and 3.30pm, allowing audience members the option of adding a three-course lunch to the experience, either before or after enjoying the concert. To find out more, visit the venue's website at [comptonverney.org.uk](http://comptonverney.org.uk)

## Christmas butterflies at popular Stratford venue

Families are this Christmas being invited to step into some unseasonably tropical conditions at Stratford Butterfly Farm.

Boasting temperatures of 25°C, the popular attraction has two new residents for visitors to check out - the Christmas Butterfly and Hercules Beetle.

To find out more about the venue and purchase tickets, visit [butterflyfarm.co.uk](http://butterflyfarm.co.uk)



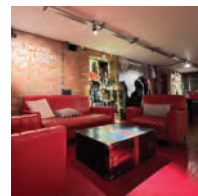
## An unspoken love story told through dance

Two hugely respected South Asian dancers - Aakash Odedra and Aditi Mangaldas - are bringing a brand-new production to Birmingham Hippodrome in the spring. Showing at the venue on Tuesday 9 April, *Mehek* is described as 'an exploration of the human heart, its desires, courage and resilience'. Centred around an older woman and a younger man, the dance delves deep into the different ways in which love can present itself. For further information, visit [birminghamhippodrome.com](http://birminghamhippodrome.com)

## RSC reopens facilities in The Other Place theatre

The Royal Shakespeare Company has reopened two facilities - Susie's Café Bar and the Warm Hub - in its Stratford-upon-Avon-located venue, The Other Place.

Offering barista-made coffee plus a wide range of drinks, snacks and cakes, Susie's is a popular destination for visitors. The Warm Hub, meanwhile, provides a space for individuals to come together, share experiences and build connections. You can find out more about Susie's and the Hub by visiting the website: [rsc.org.uk](http://rsc.org.uk)







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# IT'S OLIVER... WITH A TWIST

**Dickens' Victorian classic gets a 'minor makeover'  
this Christmas at Coventry's Albany Theatre**



## A new stage adaptation of Oliver Twist is set to put an interesting spin on the Charles Dickens classic when it shows at Coventry's Albany Theatre this month. The production's director, Kevin Shaw, explains how he's not only giving the dark tale a minor makeover but also turning it into a Christmas story...

Kevin Shaw, the Albany Theatre's ever-enthusiastic chief executive & artistic director, clearly has a thing for Charles Dickens, an author he calls "the master writer".

Now in his fourth year at the Coventry venue, he's about to helm his third Christmas show, and following well-received productions of A Christmas Carol, in 2021 and '22, will again be adapting source material from the man who's widely considered to be the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. Kevin admits, though, that Oliver Twist is a completely different beast to the Carol; not only is it a darker and much longer story, there's also the minor matter of needing to fabricate a Christmas connection for yuletide audiences!

"Obviously it's quite a sprawling old novel, so it needs condensing quite a lot," he says, admitting he's already on his fourth draft of the script. "What I really don't want is for it to be an epically long night at the theatre; it's really important that we don't have the audience raising the white flags!"

Kevin says the play - and he's keen to point out that it is very much a play, not a musical - will be a faithful retelling of the story. Dickens' words will be punctuated with folk songs from the period, not to mention a few Christmas carols just for good measure. The latter isn't the only link to the festive season, though, as the play is set on Christmas Eve. The key plot device is an accidental coming together of a group of former childhood friends, who bump into each other after many years apart. It turns out they were all members of Fagin's infamous gang of pickpockets.

"They've all grown up now," explains Kevin. "Some of them are still criminals, some might have gone straight, some might have done quite well for themselves. Because it's Christmas Eve and they recognise each other, they settle down to reminisce about their childhoods and tell the tale of Oliver Twist."

The grown-ups involved are mostly minor characters from the novel - there's no Artful Dodger for starters - but the play will have more than one timeline, so more familiar names and faces, including Fagin himself, will appear in flashback. It's a time-honoured

device but likely to be a challenging one for the ensemble cast of seven, who each play several characters.

"It's very much a hat-change show, and will be very fluid," says Kevin, who couldn't be happier with or more confident in the actors chosen to play the roles. All are local to the area, with three of the seven having appeared in his previous festive productions.

"The audition process was so hard because we had so many absolutely brilliant people - I probably could've cast it twice over. I think you forget that there's a huge talent pool in Coventry and the broader West Midlands."

One of the director's stated intentions is to invest in what he calls "the local theatre ecology". As a result he only hires actors from the immediate area.

"We're a community theatre, and I want our community to see members of their own community on the stage - I think that has a resonance both for the performers and the audience."

The community element extends to the entire company, as Kevin encourages everyone to be involved in the creative process when putting the show together.

"I go into the rehearsal room with loads of notes, but most of them end up in the bin as the actors come up with something better!"

"I'm never not prepared, but it's all about collaboration, and I think it's really important that everybody is involved in the creative process - not just the actors, but the musical director, the designers, everyone. It makes it a better show, but it also increases everyone's commitment to making it a better show."

"In terms of this year's cast, yes, there are some returnees, but there are also people who we've not worked with before, because I don't want to get too cosy, as it were. I think it's about building an ensemble of performers who are familiar with the theatre and the audience, and the audience becomes familiar with them."

The notion of not wanting to get too cosy also played a part in Kevin's decision not to bring back A Christmas Carol for a third time, even though it was hugely popular and has a

ready-made school-party audience, given the novella's continued presence on the GCSE syllabus.

"I just thought if we bring it back again for a third year running, yes, the schools will keep coming, but I wanted to challenge myself and the team in a different way. I didn't want to become the theatre that just does A Christmas Carol."

"I know there are people who are massive fans and who will come over and over again to see the same show, but there are also people who won't. I want to build a reputation for the Albany Christmas production as something to come and see, not just the [individual] title."

Achieving that aim inevitably means putting on bigger and better shows - last year's A Christmas Carol was lauded for its high-quality production values and has certainly set the bar high - but Kevin is up for the task.

"Let's hope we make a big step forward. I'm hedging my bets, but yes, of course we're aiming to improve all the time, and I think if people liked A Christmas Carol, they're gonna love Oliver Twist."

Although he's determined to keep highlights of the new production close to his chest, he's happy to reveal that audiences can expect a few showstopping scenes.

"I don't want to give any spoilers - I prefer a theatrical surprise to be an *actual* surprise - but yes, we've got a few moments which I think people will really respond to; some big visual set pieces. People can expect a cracking telling of a classic tale. It has some darker elements, as the novel does, but it will be a really interesting, visually arresting and fun night out at the theatre."

"Oliver Twist is a dark novel, and we won't shy away from that, but we're also mindful that there will be some young children there. Having said that, children watch such dark stuff that I'm not letting it bother me too much!"

**Oliver Twist shows at The Albany Theatre, Coventry, from Saturday 9 to Sunday 31 December**



# CHRISTMAS WITH THE CBSO



## CHORAL CHRISTMAS

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Symphony Hall, Birmingham

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Tickets start from £26

[CBSO.CO.UK](http://CBSO.CO.UK)



Classical music from across the region...



## The Orchestra Of The Swan: Handel's Messiah

Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, Sat 9 December

As retellings of the Christmas story go, Handel's Messiah is definitely one worth hearing...

Originally written for Easter and featuring a series of much-loved classics - including For Unto Us A Child Is Born and the legendary Hallelujah! - Messiah was first performed in 1742 and had been much anticipated. Indeed, so large an audience was expected

for its Dublin premiere that women who were attending were asked to wear dresses 'without hoops' in order to make 'room for more company'...

The Orchestra of the Swan Chamber Choir will be joined by four talented soloists - Samantha Hay, Nicholas Mulroy (pictured), David John Pike and William Towers. Rebecca Miller conducts.

## Worcester Festival Choral Society: Handel's Messiah

Worcester Cathedral, Sat 9 December

"Handel's Messiah is always a thrill to sing and to listen to," says Ben Cooper, chairman of Worcester Festival Choral Society, which is here performing the legendary work. "It really is the perfect way to herald the Christmas season. We're expecting a packed cathedral!"

The 162-year-old Society's 140 voices will be joined by four solo performers and the Meridian Sinfonia Baroque Orchestra. Worcester Cathedral's director of music, Samuel Hudson (pictured), conducts.



## Armonico Consort: Baroque Christmas by Candlelight

Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick, Wed 6 December; Malvern Theatres, Sat 9 December



Armonico Consort are certainly getting into the festive spirit this month...

As well as their traditional carol concert, the well-established local ensemble are presenting this celebration of German and Venetian Christmas music, including In Dulci Jubilo sung in 21 different parts. Armonico are keen to highlight the fact that their Malvern concert on Saturday the 9th will not be a 'by candlelight' experience.

## The Halle Christmas Concert

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Wed 13 December

A real force to be reckoned with since performing its first concert over 160 years ago, the Manchester-based Hallé here gets into the festive spirit by presenting an eclectic mix of compositions, including vocal highlights from Handel, Mozart, Mel Tormé and Les Misérables. A sackful of seasonal orchestral showpieces also features, as does music from the movies (Home Alone and The Chocolate Factory)... Hallé Associate Conductor Stephen Bell leads from the front, with versatile baritone Rodney Earl Clarke (pictured) also contributing.



## The King's Singers

Birmingham Town Hall, Wed 20 December

Founded in the late 1960s by six Cambridge University choral scholars, a cappella vocal ensemble The King's Singers have routinely performed a wide range of music, covering everything from jazz standards to pop-chart hits and taking in medieval motets, spiritual songs, folk favourites and Renaissance madrigals along the way.

Given such versatility, it's perhaps not surprising that they're here choosing to present a delightfully varied programme of music, in the process marking the 400th anniversary of Renaissance composer William Byrd and 100 years of Disney magic... A stockingful of Christmas crackers - including arrangements of traditional and modern carols - also features.





A choir of men and women in formal attire is performing in a large, ornate cathedral. They are holding lit candles, which provide the primary light source, creating a warm, intimate atmosphere. The background shows the architectural details of the cathedral, including arches and statues.

# CANDLELIT CHRISTMAS

**Festive magic with Ex Cathedra**





## **Birmingham's Ex Cathedra have been performing Christmas Music By Candlelight since 1970, and do so again this month in various venues across the region. Chris Morley chats to the critically acclaimed ensemble's founder & conductor, Jeffrey Skidmore...**

Ex Cathedra chamber choir's renowned Christmas Music By Candlelight concerts were launched in St Francis' Church, Bournville, in 1970 - a year after the ensemble's founding - and moved to St Paul's, in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, the following year.

"One concert became two, then three, and now five," explains Ex Cathedra's founder & conductor, Jeffrey Skidmore. "Later we expanded to concerts throughout the region, and now in London, in Trafalgar Square's St Martin in the Fields."

Jeffrey is busy thinking about 'Candlelight' all year long. "I am constantly, throughout the year, looking for new works and new composers. I listen to other musicians' recommendations and have a pile of music sent to me over the years that I visit every now and then."

This Christmas, Ex Cathedra adds another string to its bow, giving the annual Symphony Hall performance of Handel's Messiah, which has long been the province of much larger choral societies.

"There are obvious differences - period instruments, smaller forces," Jeffrey continues. "But it's Ex Cathedra's infrastructure of students, amateurs and professional singers that creates the sound, the precision and the freshness associated with the group."

"Having a company of very special professional singers who are not only choristers and consort singers but also skilled soloists who have grown up with Ex Cathedra, this produces the all-important stylistic consistency. There is a team of 12 soloists for Messiah, and they all sing regularly with the group and know me and the group."

And this hints at the ethos of Ex Cathedra, as Jeffrey explains in talking about the ensemble's origin.

"It was formed in 1969. I was at school in Bournville, had been a chorister at St Francis'

Church and sang as an alto Lay Clerk at Birmingham Cathedral with Roy Massey. Ex Cathedra brought these three elements (school, church and professional) together to sing music I loved and which no-one else seemed to be doing in Birmingham, particularly Renaissance and Medieval repertoire."

"I continued to develop Ex Cathedra from Oxford (1970-73), where I was an Academical Clerk at Magdalen with Bernard Rose and David Wulstan (Clerkes of Oxenford), two giants of the burgeoning choral scene in the 1970s, and I introduced Oxbridge singers to the Ex Cathedra mix."

As someone who has reviewed the work of Ex Cathedra almost since its founding, I have always been struck by the way soloists in whatever piece, even in something as mighty as Bach's St Matthew Passion, emerge from the choral ranks, returning into them after delivering their contributions. Many of these have subsequently gained international stardom, such as Carolyn Sampson, Roderick Williams and Nigel Short.

How much of the original philosophy behind the founding of Ex Cathedra is still maintained today, and how have other things developed?

"I still perform music I love with musicians I like and admire," is Jeffrey's smiling answer.

"Much of Ex Cathedra's repertoire is still music relatively untouched by other ensembles - Latin American, French Baroque and commissions from local composers, and often composers at the beginning of their careers."

"I have always looked to develop local talent and talent from around the country - our pros and travelling amateurs often comment on this. Nurturing young talent has also been crucially important, and the recent Scholars Ensembles schemes are a massively important formalisation of what's been going on since the beginning."

Now into his 70s, Jeffrey is planning for his

eventual retirement, and is making sure his beloved Ex Cathedra will be left in a safe pair of hands.

"We've been nurturing five talented young associate conductors and are now asking for applications for the 'job' to widen the net, but also including the associate conductors in the mix."

The Ex Cathedra story continues to develop. The ensemble recently presented their first-ever programme (titled Byrd To Bacharach And Bach) in Royal Birmingham Conservatoire's Bradshaw Hall.

"As a small tribute to the great songwriter Burt Bacharach, who died earlier this year, I arranged Anyone Who Had A Heart, one of his many great hits and a number one for Cilla Black in 1963. It was followed by a 'Swingle' arrangement of one of Bach's most popular Chorale Preludes - Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring."

The same mixture of new and old bubbles along in this year's Christmas Music By Candlelight programme - and we are also promised Summer Music By Candlelight next June. Before that, though, Ex Cathedra's season reaches its climax in Symphony Hall with a Good Friday performance of Bach's powerful St John Passion, 300 years after it was first performed in Leipzig.

.....

**Ex Cathedra perform Christmas Music by Candlelight at St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury, Fri 1 December; St John's Church, Hagley, Tues 5 December; Hereford Cathedral, Wed 6 December; Lichfield Cathedral, Thurs 7 December; St Peter's Collegiate Church, Wolverhampton, Sat 9 December; Coventry Cathedral, Thurs 14 December; St Paul's Church, Birmingham, Fri 15 - Wed 20 December. Ex Cathedra also presents Angels, Stars & Kings - family Christmas concert at St Paul's Church, Birmingham on Sat 16 December.**



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Dinh Q. Lê, Chincha Norte Island. Production shot of The Colony, 2016. Photo courtesy of Artangel and the artist.

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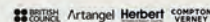
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Live music from across the region...

## Beans On Toast

St Swithun's Church, Worcester,  
Tues 5 December

Self-confessed drunkard Beans On Toast selected his name because he wanted to be called something basic and simple - to reflect his music!

"I'm not the greatest guitarist in the world," he once admitted to Listen Up Manchester. "I play simple three-chord folk songs, but if I see something that interests me, something that intrigues or angers me, I pick up my guitar and I write a song."

Emerging from the London folk scene over a decade ago and mainly singing about sex, drugs and politics, Beans On Toast is a surefire bet for an entertaining evening out.



## The Urban Folk Quartet

Huntingdon Hall, Worcester, Thurs 7 December

The Urban Folk Quartet are like no other folk band. With Birmingham's vibrant and diverse music scene having a significant influence on their work, they dabble in all kinds of sounds, from funk grooves and Middle-Eastern melodies, to afrobeat and north Indian rhythms. They tug their collective forelock in the direction of more-traditional folk too, describing their music as 'fiddle-led' and drawing heavily on 'celtic dance forms and traditional song'. The band are touring in support of their seventh album.



## The Young'uns

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry,  
Sat 9 & Sun 10 December

After the better part of a decade spent plying their trade at festivals and around the folk clubs of the North East, the Young'uns are established as one of the country's most popular folk/acoustic acts.

"In the past, songs have been inspired by history - of where we're from, of the landscape," says the trio's singer & accordion player David Eagle. "But then we

became more inspired by things now. We approach folk music as stories and songs and anecdotes. Every gig is about storytelling, so our songwriting has become more sophisticated. We're talking about things that are actually in the now. We know what we like, we're more unabashed, we know who we are."

Expect plenty of that heart-on-the-sleeve storytelling, along with beautiful lyrics, warm harmonies and relentless repartee, when the trio stop off in Coventry this month with a special Christmas show.

## Ramblin' Preachers

Temperance, Leamington Spa,  
Fri 15 December

Passionate purveyors of a southern-rock vibe, Ramblin' Preachers bring their 'arena-like power, relatable songwriting and face-melting live show' to Leamington Spa in the run-up to releasing debut album *Sins & Virtues* in the spring. The record will follow on from a clutch of acclaimed singles, including *Mind Your Own Business* - boasting a very southern-rooted rock approach - the 'modern rock'-influenced *Better Than Me*, the ballady *Jester*, and the groove-driven *Separate Ways*.

guitarist David Gedge being the band's only constant member. Their Coventry concert sees them performing a selection of songs from across their 38-year career.

## Julianna Riolino

The Tin Music & Arts, Coventry,  
Thurs 7 December

Julianna Riolino's Americana-indebted songs put the pain, love and healing that she's experienced in her own life very firmly under the spotlight.

"If I was a painter, this would be my blue period," says the Toronto singer-songwriter, whose output has been likened to 'Dolly Parton hanging out in Laurel Canyon in 1972'. "I'm looking at my life, all my decisions lined up, and either atoning for them or laughing them off."



## The Wedding Present

hmv Empire, Coventry, Sat 2 December

British indie rock group The Wedding Present have been gigging since 1985, when they formed following the demise of the Lost Pandas. With influences including The Fall, Buzzcocks and Gang Of Four, the band is best known for playing fast-paced indie rock. There have been numerous line-up changes down the years, with vocalist and



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# GEDDY WITH ANTICIPATION...

...is how Midlands-based fans of prog-rock band Rush feel at the prospect of the trio's singer, Geddy Lee, bringing his spoken-word tour to Wolverhampton this month...



Geddy Lee, the legendary singer & bass player of Canadian prog rock band Rush, is bringing his highly anticipated spoken-word tour to Wolverhampton this month.

The show, taking place to promote his long-awaited memoir, *My Effin' Life* - named after the singer's penchant for dropping 'F-bombs' in conversation - will see the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Famer, born Gershon Eliezer Weinrib, offer an insight into his near-50-year career with the iconic rock trio, as well as his early family life and his parents' background as Holocaust survivors.

During the evening, Geddy will be joined on stage by a special guest interviewer - Hollywood star Paul Rudd took on the role at the opening show in New York City - before reading key passages from his memoir and taking questions from the audience.

The show is set to be a unique opportunity for Rush fans to hear the 70-year-old singer reflect on his family and childhood, as well as the history of his multi-platinum-selling band, from their determined pursuit of music - surviving and ultimately thriving against the odds - to personal memories of his life-long friends and bandmates Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart.

Much-lauded drummer Peart retired from the band after their last tour in 2015 and passed away in 2020 after a three-year battle with brain cancer, a pivotal event that Geddy

struggled to deal with, acknowledging that "the funk" he entered after losing his friend partly inspired him to write the book.

"I took that particularly hard," he said in a recent interview. "Around the same time, I watched my mother descend into dementia. She was losing her memory, and that was really disturbing for me. It made me realise how tenuous our grip on the past really is in some ways."

Geddy's mother subsequently died in 2021, aged 96. A period the singer terms "a fiesta of grief" was completed when guitarist Lifeson was hospitalised with potentially fatal Covid. Mercifully, the man who Geddy calls his "BFF" survived - but the traumatic events triggered thoughts of the past, while the ongoing Covid lockdown in Toronto meant he was twiddling his thumbs and looking for something to do. That combination, allied to the encouragement of the editor who'd worked on Geddy's *Big Beautiful Book Of Bass* book, eventually forced the musician's hand.

"I've never lived my life looking anywhere but forward, which is why I resisted doing this kind of thing for so long," he says. "Being in a band all those years was reassuring because it was an ongoing thing - it felt like it was forever. There was always unfinished business - the next record, the next set design, the next tour. It's been the

theme of my life.

"But you need a lot more determination to proceed in the world of music without the comfort of your bandmates, and I can only hope that finishing this book will release me to return to what I do and love best."

What he does and loves best is playing music - and although Rush is never 'effin' likely to reunite without Peart, Geddy admits there could be "a show that paid tribute to the songs of Rush". He says performing with Lifeson at last year's Taylor Hawkins tribute concerts - alongside drummers including Dave Grohl, Chad Smith and Omar Hakim - was a massive step for the pair.

Geddy has been too busy finalising the book, its audio version, tour, and even filming his own TV series (*Geddy Lee Asks: Are Bass Players Human Too?*) to repeat the jam session the best friends enjoyed last year, but he admits they're both keen to pick it up again. What that might mean in terms of future music and live performance is one of the topics sure to be discussed at what should prove to be a fascinating evening.

**Geddy Lee In Conversation takes place at The Civic at The Halls in Wolverhampton on Sunday 10 December. Every ticket purchased for the show includes a copy of the book.**



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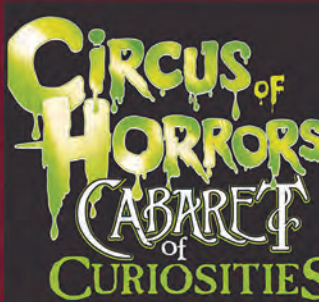
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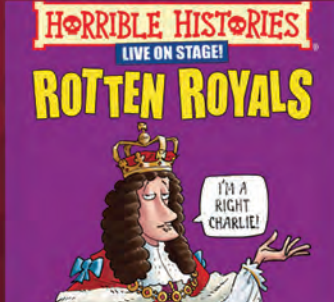
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## Comedy previews from across the region...

## Mo Gilligan

Utilita Arena Birmingham, Thurs 7 December 2023 & Sat 30 November 2024

London standup Mo Gilligan has enjoyed a meteoric rise to fame and fortune since first coming to wider public attention just a handful of years ago. It was back in December 2016 that Mo uploaded a video about grime MCs - since which time he's found himself catapulted to celebrity status. Hired by Channel Four to front The Lateish Show and rewarded for his television work with a coveted Bafta gong, Mo admits that his life has started to feel just a little bit crazy. "I wake up in the morning and think, 'This is nuts!'" admits the 35-year-old. "It's what I'd always dreamt about, and now that it's happened, I'm determined to make the most of it."

Mo visits Birmingham this month with the Black British Takeover Tour, a show that includes 'the very best in headline names and emerging artists from the Black British comedy circuit'.



## Kojo Anim

The Glee Club, Birmingham, Sun 10 December

Currently riding the crest of a wave, Kojo Anim's noteworthy success is long overdue. Kojo had been supporting other comics for the better part of two decades before an appearance on Britain's Got Talent gave his career an exciting new impetus.

The Hackney-born comedian is certainly making the most of his big break - he's been living in Los Angeles and is aiming to take Hollywood by storm!

This month's Birmingham stop-off sees him presenting brand-new show Man On Fire.



## Live At Christmas

Birmingham Town Hall, Wed 13 December;  
Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Thurs 14 December

As she attempted to establish herself on the circuit back in the early noughties, Jen Brister received a much-needed boost from a comedy legend. The occasion was the BBC New Act semi-finals in Brighton. The legend

in question, Spike Milligan, who was one of the judges. Although Jen didn't get through to the final, she did find out from the show's producer that Spike had voted for her. "He'd also remarked that I had 'a great pair of Bristols'," she recalls. "So clearly he had great taste in comedy and, er, tits!"

Jen here shares the festive-season limelight with David O'Doherty, Fern Brady, Josh Pugh and fast-rising newcomer Kyrach Gray.

## Sophie Duker

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Thurs 7 December

Familiar television face Sophie Duker's favourite things include breaking hearts and telling jokes 'with the confidence of a cis straight middle-class white man'. Nominated for best newcomer at Edinburgh in 2019, she returned there last year with Hag, the show she's bringing to Coventry this month and in which she waxes lyrical on subjects such as horoscopes, lesbian cruises and crystal witches. The set went down well with audiences at the Fringe but wasn't universally adored by critics, some of whom felt it was fragmented and incoherent. Why not buy a ticket and check it out for yourself?...



## Gary Pownland

Dudley Town Hall, Fri 22 December

"Life was tough growing up," says online sensation Gary Pownland, the alter-ego of Wolverhampton laughter merchant Jack Kirwan. "My mom and dad popped out for a loaf when I was younger, which is quite an ordinary thing, but I realised as they were leaving that they were carrying suitcases. Straight away I thought to myself, 'How much bread do they think we can eat?'"

Jack is very much enjoying his creation Gary's moment (or several) in the sun, but his own career in comedy hasn't always been plain sailing. "I've done my share of driving up to Newcastle for a 20 quid gig, getting back at 1am and needing to be up for work at five," says Jack. "And then there was the time I played Edinburgh and basically died on my arse every night for a month!"







# QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

**Award-winning musical The Bodyguard is coming to  
Birmingham theatre The Alexandra for the festive season...**



## The stage musical version of hit Whitney Houston and Kevin Costner movie The Bodyguard is stopping off in Birmingham for Christmas. Playing the part of Rachel Marron - the character made famous by Houston in the 1992 film - is Australian singer Emily Williams, who first played the role six years ago. What's On recently caught up with her to find out more...

This Christmas, singer & actress Emily Williams takes on the role of Rachel Marron in blockbuster musical The Bodyguard at Birmingham theatre The Alexandra.

It's the second time the New Zealand-born performer has played the lead part in the show, which is based on the famous 1992 movie starring Whitney Houston and Kevin Costner.

Rachel Marron is a superstar singer at the height of her fame. But when she begins receiving death threats from a sinister stalker, her manager hires former secret-service agent Frank Farmer as a bodyguard to keep her and her young son safe.

The story provides an insight into the sometimes scary world of stardom, and Emily, who shot to fame as runner-up on television talent show Australian Idol, says she can very much relate to that fear. Having been part of successful Australian all-girl group Young Divas, and then building a solo career, she knows only too well what it's like to be in the spotlight.

"I've gone through similar experiences and situations as Rachel in the show," says Emily, who first played the part back in 2017. "So I can now identify why she acts the way she does, how these scenarios would come up, and why she gets so frustrated all the time.

"I think there's more understanding of the character than I had seven years ago. I now understand the idea of having so many security guards around. And the idea that you've had some obsessed fans that have sent you some really interesting things - you have to open up that fan mail.

"There have been shows when it's actually been a bit scary on stage because you know there are some really strange people out there who love you to the point of no return. I've been through all of that, and I understand a bit about it."

While Emily is quick to point out that she has never received death threats like those sent to her character, she *has* sometimes needed bodyguards.

"I do now understand the idea of singing at big shows and having all that security and having people beside you 24/7. As soon as you get onsite, these security guards won't let you out of their sight. Even when you're in the dressing room, there are two or three standing outside.

"So I do understand that side of it, and I can understand the frustration of Rachel, where she thinks she knows what's going on but she actually doesn't safety-wise. So to know and to have experienced some of the things she's gone through has helped me understand her more.

"I think the UK has got the best version of me playing Rachel. Back in 2017 when I played her, I was so excited to sing those songs that I hadn't really connected with the character as much as I do today."

But, says Emily, being in the public eye is part of the experience of being a performer.

"When I found my own fame, I realised this is something you can't escape from, so either you learn to deal with it or you drown. You sink or you swim.

"Rachel is very sharp but yet very vulnerable in certain parts of the show. When you first meet her, you don't realise that - but then, as you watch, you begin to see these vulnerable parts of her. My favourite part of playing her is showing people how vulnerable she really is. She's this absolute goddess of a superstar, but there's more to her than just that."

The part of bodyguard Frank is played by Ayden Callaghan, who's best known for playing Miles De Souza in Emmerdale and Joe Roscoe in Hollyoaks.

Emily says Rachel's behaviour towards Frank is probably her least attractive quality.

"What I don't like about her is probably the way she treats Frank in the beginning; it's pretty full-on."

Emily first discovered the film as a teenager but was a fan of Whitney Houston long before that.

"I started singing at a young age and was

listening to Whitney's songs. The music from this film is timeless."

And she loves being able to perform hits such as I Will Always Love You, Queen Of The Night, I Have Nothing, The Greatest Love Of All and How Will I Know.

"Probably the biggest challenge of the role is having to sing those difficult high-pitched songs every night - but at the same time, I'm so grateful to be singing those songs because not everybody can pull that off. You need a lot of sleep. You have to have the eight hours - a lot of rest, honey! - and don't talk when you don't need to.

"There are so many highlights of the show, but mine would probably be the end, when I sing I Will Always Love You. That's always a moment, and I feel like if I don't get that moment right, then I definitely haven't done my job. The audience have been waiting for that moment, so I have to nail it."

The Alexandra performances will be the first time Emily has visited Birmingham - and she is particularly looking forward to seeing it under the Christmas lights.

"It excites me to perform around Christmas. I know absolutely nothing about Birmingham, so I'm really looking forward to going there. I think a lot of the cast and crew members are really excited to show me around; they say it's a beautiful place."

And she is understandably keen for Birmingham theatre-goers to take a night off from pantomime and check out The Bodyguard.

"I hope everyone just really enjoys themselves. I want them to understand the story and what it's all about. It's such an incredible show. I feel like everyone will walk away either crying or blown away by how great it is."

.....  
**The Bodyguard shows at The Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, from Monday 4 to Saturday 30 December**





## The Fair Maid Of The West

Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Sat 2 December - Sun 14 January

A play which featured in the opening programme of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Swan Theatre back in 1986, *The Fair Maid Of The West* this month makes a welcome return to the Stratford-upon-Avon venue for a short Christmas and New Year run.

The Thomas Heywood-written romp, first published in 1631, will certainly be in safe hands during its time at the RSC - the play is being directed by Isobel McArthur, whose West End show, *Pride &*

*Prejudice\** (\*sort of), last year won the Olivier Award for best comedy. This much-anticipated revival finds Amber James taking the lead role of Liz Bridges, a low-born tavern girl whose impressive skill at breaking up bar-room brawls comes in handy when - after receiving an inheritance - she purchases a ship, heads out on the storm-tossed seas, and finds herself unexpectedly engaging in the tricky business of international diplomacy...

## Oil

Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome, Thurs 7 - Sat 9 December

Described as a play that blends 'family drama with riveting history, bringing the past vividly to life while shining a light on the future', Ella Hickson's explosive and critically acclaimed *Oil* focuses on the character of May, a woman who time-travels across more than 150 years. In so doing, she throws into sharp focus Britain's fraught relationship with its imperial past and its fossil-fuel dependence...

The production is being presented by Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.



## Saved

Crescent Theatre, Birmingham, Thurs 7 - Sat 9 December

Controversial in its day, rarely revived in the decades since, and set in working-class South London in the 1960s, Edward Bond's *Saved* explores the way in which brutal and abhorrent behaviour can rear its ugly head when people exist in a dehumanising and morally bereft environment. When the play was originally staged in the mid-'60s, it outraged critics and caused alarm among audience members. Particularly shocking was a scene in which an illegitimate baby is stoned to death by a group of yobs... This new production is presented by Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

## Six The Musical

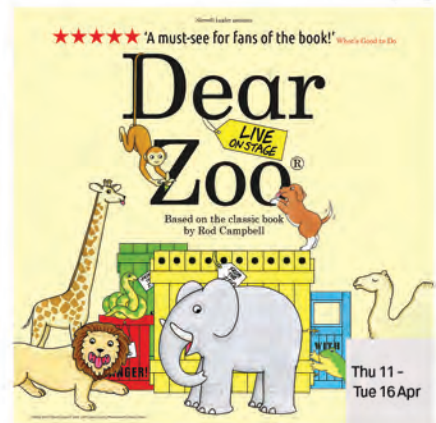
Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Tues 5 - Sat 9 December; Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tues 27 February - Sun 3 March; Birmingham Hippodrome, Tues 18 - Sat 22 June

From Tudor queens to battling boss-women, the 2022 Tony Award-winning *Six The Musical* sees the wives of Henry VIII take to the stage 'to remix 500 years of historical heartbreak' and tell their own versions of their lives. In the process, the six aim to decide which of them was most badly treated by the notorious ex they all have in common...

A colourful show that sits somewhere between a Girls Aloud gig and a traditional musical, the one-act production - premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2017, where it was performed by a group of Cambridge University students - is a loud and proud 80-minute celebration of 21st-century girl power. The show sees the cast being ably supported by all-female band The Ladies In Waiting.











## The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe

The Rep, Birmingham, until Sun 28 January

This much-loved story from the pen of CS Lewis is rightly regarded as an all-time classic of children's literature. It sees the lion-god Aslan coming to the aid of four youngsters who've accidentally stumbled into his mystical world of Narnia... Visiting Birmingham direct from the West End, the show features 'magical storytelling, bewitching stagecraft and incredible puppets'. "We have this epic stage and fantastic imagery," says the production's director, Michael Fentiman, "but there's not a lot of literal depiction of location of the show. Instead, we're asking the audience to take a leap with us. We work with an illusionist to try and do things that seem impossible. So the way we use magic and lighting and shift-of-focus achieves the possible from the seemingly impossible."

## The Box Of Delights

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, until Sun 7 January

The Box Of Delights, the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) festive family treat, is based on Poet Laureate John Masefield's fantasy novel of the same name, first published in 1935. Returning home for Christmas, schoolboy Kay Harker finds himself unexpectedly entrusted with a small wooden box that has magical powers beyond his wildest dreams. But a ne'er-do-well wizard is after the box and will stop at nothing to get it, even threatening to cancel Christmas... The RSC is promising theatre-goers a 'fantastically festive' production, with Justin Audibert taking the director's chair. Justin's previous work for the Company includes a critically acclaimed version of The Taming Of The Shrew back in 2019. The Box Of Delights is suitable for children aged seven-plus.



## Nativity! The Musical

Bridge House Theatre, Warwick, Fri 8 - Thurs 28 December

Debbie Isitt's 2009 movie, Nativity!, proved so popular that it spawned three further films. It also inspired the Birmingham-born writer & director to create a musical stage adaptation. For those unfamiliar with the plot, it concerns the children of St Bernadette's primary school and their ambition to present a musical version of the nativity. An already big challenge for the kids is made all the trickier by false promises, a complicated love interest and a rival school vying with St Bernadette's for the critics' award... Not surprisingly, chaos ensues! "I always believed that Nativity! would make a fantastic stage musical," says Debbie. "It's so full of joy, the children are so sweet and the songs so catchy - it really does lend itself to being the perfect Christmas musical." This brand-new production features a cast of professionals performing alongside local young people and is suitable for audience members aged four and older.

## Our Christmas Carol - A Musical

Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham, Wed 6 December - Sun 24 December

When Harold is widowed and his life comes to a grinding halt, daughter Sylvia is determined to put a spring back in his step. To do so, she hatches a plan to revive one of

her parents' special festive-season traditions - a performance of Dickens' A Christmas Carol, which they would routinely present for appreciative audiences in local venues. Now, with her mother having passed away, it falls to Sylvia to team up with Harold and perform the Dickens classic - albeit 'virtually'! 'Catchy songs, spontaneously created costumes and some very questionable props' all feature in this brand-new musical, which is here receiving its world premiere.

## Rumpelstiltskin

Festival Drayton Centre, Market Drayton, North Shropshire, Thurs 30 November - Sun 3 December

Now here's a fairytale that's rarely afforded the pantomime treatment. For those not familiar with the original story... A miller's daughter can spin pure gold from straw, and the nasty king expects her to do just that. But there's too much straw to spin in the time she's been allocated by the impatient monarch. Enter, Rumpelstiltskin, a curious little imp with supernatural powers, who is more than happy to save the young girl's bacon... as long as she agrees to his truly shocking demand...





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## Snow White

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Sat 2 December - Sun 7 January; Palace Theatre, Redditch, Fri 8 December - Wed 3 January; Prince of Wales, Cannock, Sat 23 - Sat 30 December

There's no guarantee nowadays that a pantomime version of Snow White will include her 'magnificent seven' mining pals - but even if the fellas are missing in action, there's still plenty about the much-loved fairytale to enjoy. Versions of the story are being presented at three major Midlands venues this Christmas... The Wolverhampton Grand's panto is always a high-energy and fun-filled extravaganza, and this year's production will be no exception, with ex-Eternal star Kéllé Bryan starring as Good Fairy Elementa.

Kéllé is joined in the show by CBeebies' Gyasi Shepp and Evie Pickerill, X Factor favourite Niki Colwell Evans, Tam Ryan and Ian Adams... Meanwhile, in Redditch, the stars of the Palace Theatre's production are Steps' Lee Latchford-Evans and Britain's Got Talent finalist Andrew Fleming... Snow White's wicked stepmother will also be asking "who's the fairest one of all?" - and not enjoying the answer she receives! - over in Cannock, where Maureen Nolan top-bills.

## Cinderella

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, until Sat 13 January; Crewe Lyceum Theatre, Fri 8 - Sun 31 December; Walsall Arena, Sat 9 - Sat 23 December; Malvern Theatres, Thurs 14 December - Sun 7 January

With its comical Ugly Sisters, matchmaking fairy godmother, drop-dead-gorgeous Prince Charming, super-cute mice, and fits-one-foot-only glass slipper, Cinderella can justifiably lay claim to being the most popular of all pantomimes (not this year, mind, where beanstalks are popping up all over the place!)... As is usual with the Belgrade's main-stage Christmas show, this year's production of Cinders has been written & directed by the multi-talented Iain Lauchlan... But Cinderella isn't going to the ball only in

Coventry this year. She's pulling on her bestest frock in Malvern and Walsall too - and also in Crewe, where you'll find X Factor winner Matt Terry joined by Malcolm Lord, Ste Johnson and Eve Parsons (pictured).



## Peter Pan The Musical

The Old Rep, Birmingham, Tues 5 - Sun 31 December

Second star to the right and straight on till morning - that's the way to Neverland... This new theatrical production offers sure-to-be-awestruck young audiences the chance to fly away with the boy who wouldn't grow up to a magical island filled with adventure. The 'swashbuckling' production comes complete with 'captivating costumes, spectacular songs, creative choreography and fantastic flying sequences'.

## The Nutcracker

New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, until Sat 27 January

"The ambition to do a stage play of The Nutcracker is one I've treasured for some time," says New Vic Artistic Director Theresa Heskins. "I want to bring together ETA Hoffman's original story, the adaptation by Alexandre Dumas and Tchaikovsky's music to tell the story of the enchanted Nutcracker, who takes a journey up the Christmas tree to the Kingdom of Sweets to settle a score with the ferocious Mouse Queen. "It's going to be a gripping story that's absolutely jam-packed with magic, beautiful music and Christmas sparkle!"





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## Peter Pan

Resorts World Arena, Birmingham,  
Fri 22 & Sat 23 December

The producers behind last year's arena-filling pantomime *Elf The Musical* are at it again this festive season. A new production of *Peter Pan*, which they're proclaiming a 'supersize spectacle', comes complete with special effects, aerial stunts, immersive digital sets and even a huge floating galleon. Oh, and there's a cast of 50 as well, including a dozen cirque performers, a troupe of Irish and Highland dancers, rising comedy star Jordan Conway, and pop icon Boy George (another Boy who never grew up?) as the villainous Captain Hook. "Although the show has traditional pantomime elements," says George, "it is so much more, being a mix of cirque and 'spectacular event'. And what's more, I get the chance to fight a giant animatronic crocodile! What's not to like?!"

## Beauty And The Beast

Lichfield Garrick, until Sun 7 January; Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Fri 8 - Sun 31 December; Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, Sat 2 December - Sat 6 January

When a young woman is captured by a hideous beast, she finds herself facing a life of isolation in his mysterious palace. The Beast, too, is trapped - seemingly forever - inside the grotesquery of his physical appearance, the consequence of a spell cast

upon him by an evil witch. Only Beauty's ability to look beyond his ugliness and see the person within can save him... So that's the storyline, but what about the panto element? Well, it's fair to assume that all the traditional aspects of pantomime will be present and correct in the three above-listed productions; we're thinking custard pies, double entendres, slapstick comedy and hilariously costumed Dames...

And speaking of the latter... Sam Rabone will yet again be donning a nice frock or several at the Garrick, where this year he's returning to star as Madame Bellie Fillop. Stafford Gatehouse's production, meanwhile, sees CBBC star and one-time Pop Idol contestant Mark Rhodes headlining... As for the Roses production, although it doesn't boast a 'star name', we're confident it will nevertheless prove to be a real, er, Beauty of a family show...



Mark Rhodes



Lichfield Garrick



Roses Theatre Tewkesbury

## Treasure Island

Telford Theatre, Oakengates, Shropshire,  
Fri 8 December - Sat 6 January

Robert Louis Stevenson's high-seas caper here gets the pantomime treatment, as young Jim Hawkins heads off on the adventure of a lifetime - one which will see him not only setting sail in search of buried treasure, but also spending time in the company of a one-legged pirate with murder in mind...

Boasting 'beautiful scenery, colourful costumes, a live band, dazzling dance routines, great songs and plenty of

laughter', this brand-new show stars *Strictly Come Dancing*'s Katya Jones, West End favourite Shelley Anne Rivers and *Coronation Street* actor Tom Roberts.





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Jack And The Beanstalk is popping up all over the region...



Birmingham Hippodrome



Artrix, Bromsgrove



Swan Theatre, Worcester

## Jack's back!

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, until Sun 7 January; Swan Theatre, Worcester, Mon 4 December - Sun 7 January; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sat 9 December - Sun 7 January; Sutton Coldfield Town Hall, Sat 9 - Sun 31 December; Artrix, Bromsgrove, Fri 15 December - Sun 7 January; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 15 December - Sun 7 January; Birmingham Hippodrome, Sat 16 December - Sun 28 January

Big and beautiful beanstalks are bustin' out all over the Midlands this festive season! No fewer than seven of the region's theatres are presenting pantomime versions of much-loved fairytale Jack And The Beanstalk - a story which sees a young lad named, yep, you guessed it, Jack, selling the family cow in return for a handful of beans...

But these are no ordinary beans, of course. These are magic beans. Beans from which a mighty beanstalk grows! And when Jack climbs to the top of it, he finds himself face-to-face with a decidedly unfriendly money-counting ogre...

The story of Jack And The Beanstalk is thought by some to be a staggering five millennia old. It was presented in print form

for the first time, so far as anyone knows, in 1734, under the title The Story Of Jack Spriggins And The Enchanted Bean.

Its history as a pantomime, meanwhile, stretches back to the early 19th century, since which time it's been a popular choice with theatres across the land at Christmastime...

...And clearly never more so than this year, given the number of productions available for Midlandsers to enjoy!...

Birmingham Hippodrome's pantomime is routinely considered to be the region's biggest, and 2023 sees the venue once again mounting a sure-to-be-spectacular show. Alison Hammond, Samantha Womack and Hippodrome favourite Matt Slack top-bill in the company of Doreen Tipton and 'panto dame extraordinaire' Andrew Ryan...

If you fancy seeing Jack climbing a beanstalk in the north of the Midlands, then check out the Regent Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent, where Jonathan Wilkes is headlining as usual. Johnny is this year joined by one-time Hear'Say star Noel Sullivan and Hollyoaks and Torchwood actor Kai Owen...

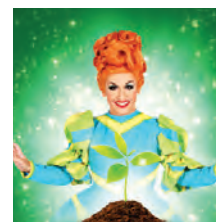
Over in Shrewsbury, the inimitable Brad Fitt is both pulling on the frocks and sitting in

the director's chair for Theatre Severn's offering, which opened late last month... Heading to the south of the region, the ever-fabulous JP McCue is starring as Dame Dolly in the Royal Spa Centre Leamington's version of the popular fairytale...

There's also some beanstalk-climbing, ogre-slaying action unfolding at the Swan Theatre Worcester and Artrix in Bromsgrove, the latter of which is this year hosting The Core Solihull's pantomime...

Last but certainly not least, Jack is also biting off more than he can comfortably chew at Sutton Coldfield Town Hall, in a show being presented by pantomime specialists TaleGate Theatre Productions.

To discover more about these various versions of Jack And The Beanstalk, check out the venues' websites. Then buy yourself a ticket or several and get ready for some no-holds-barred festive-season family fun!



Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury



Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent



Sutton Coldfield Town Hall







# FULL OF BEANS!

Much-loved television personality Alison Hammond makes her home-city panto debut this festive season, taking on the role of Spirit of the Beans in Birmingham Hippodrome's production of Jack And The Beanstalk. What's On caught up with the Great British Bake Off star as she prepared to bring some added sparkle to the second city's giant of a pantomime...

## **You're playing Spirit of the Beans - can you talk a little bit about the character?**

She brings the magic, she brings the nature, she brings the lols, she brings the vibes. That's what the Spirit of the Beans is gonna be doing in this panto. I'm gonna bring it, babes, I'm gonna be bringing the vibes!

## **And this is obviously your debut Brum panto...**

I've done panto before, but yes, this is my first Brum panto, which I've wanted to do all my life. I'm really excited!

## **What initially drew you to panto?**

Well, my mum brought us up on panto. Every year we'd go and see panto on Boxing Day. Boxing Day is a bit of a pants day anyway, a bit dry, so we always went to panto. I went into pantos after Big Brother, and then I stopped for, like, 10 years. This is my first panto back. I might be a little bit rusty, but I can't wait.

## **What are you most looking forward to about the production itself?**

Working with Matt Slack because he's so funny. I find him hilarious! I've seen and met him before but never worked with him, so I'm looking forward to that, and to seeing what his creativity is like. Meeting the cast, going out for drinks. You become a kid again! I'm also really looking forward to going home to my own bed every single night! I've never had that. Every panto I've done I've been away from home, so this is lovely! It's a six-week run and it's going to be so much fun.

## **What makes the story of Jack And The Beanstalk suitable for the panto treatment?**

You've got giants, you've got beanstalks, you've got the comedy, the dancing element, the singing. You've got me! What more do you need?!

## **Did you have a favourite pantomime growing up?**

Cinderella is my favourite, if I'm honest with you. One day I will be Cinderella. I know it's gonna happen. It's always been my favourite. I

don't know why; it's just a story I've always loved. I've never done Jack And The Beanstalk, though, so I can't wait!

## **Do you have any Christmas traditions that you're determined to fit in, despite the heavy workload?**

It's lovely because I will be at home. I'll be able to do all the decorations! It's going to be lovely not having to drive into London all the time. Traditions? I've definitely got to do the German market because I'll be in town. We always go if we can. Always buy a new tree! I'll get a nice, fresh turkey ordered, a nice table setting; all of that.

## **And what would your perfect Christmas Day look like?**

It looks like the typical Christmas Day. Wake up early. I put the turkey in early, 5am. I know that sounds really early! All the veg is prepared the night before. Get that food on, so that by 12 we're eating dinner. I'm an early-dinner person! King's speech, chill out, fall asleep, games in the evening, goodnight. More turkey sandwiches before I go to bed too.

## **What was your best Christmas present, or something that was really memorable to you?**

So, you know I love Chinese? I asked Mum if Santa could bring me a Chinese for Christmas - and low and behold, Santa is amazing and brought me spare ribs and fried rice. I had it for breakfast, and it was one of the best Christmases ever! I loved it. Santa is the best. It's true!

## **Obviously Birmingham has changed a lot since you were younger. In what ways is the city different?**

I used to know Birmingham like the back of my hand! I go in now and get lost and end up with a ticket because I've gone down a bus lane or a taxi lane. I never know where to park, so I just try and get the train now into Moor Street and go and do my shopping and stuff. I just don't know it as well. Then there's the clean-air charge too.

## **Do you still love it?**

Yeah! I still go to the same shops - I'm quite boring. Same old shops, do my threading, get my hair done, go to the wig shop, get some colour for my hair. Go to McDonald's. I do all the same things.

## **You're often referred to as the Queen of Birmingham. How does it feel to have that title?**

Well, it's pretty silly really because I'm not royalty, first of all! I do quite like it, though. I do secretly like the title, but in my heart I'm just me.

## **How was the Bake Off experience for you?**

It was one of the most wonderful experiences I've ever had. Think about it, your work place is outside, sunny weather, cake everywhere! You can eat as much as you want; there's no restriction. Lovely clothes. Lovely bakers! The nicest bakers! Honestly, I fell in love with them. There were tears from me too.

## **Is this series one of the best to date?**

Obviously - *I'm* in it! It's never had me in it before, so of course!

## **And finally, if you could change one thing about the world in 2024, what would it be and why?**

I'd stop social media and go back to life without it. I think it would solve a lot of issues and help a lot of teenagers and a lot of people.

Alison stars as Spirit of the Beans in Jack And The Beanstalk at Birmingham Hippodrome from Saturday 16 December to Sunday 28 January.

For further information and bookings, visit:  
[.birminghamhippodrome.com](https://www.birminghamhippodrome.com)





## Oh No! Shark In The Snow

Birmingham Town Hall,  
Wed 27 December - Sun 31 December

Nick Sharratt has illustrated hundreds of books, a significant number of which have been his own. One of these is the hugely successful *Shark In The Park!*, a children's story about a young lad named Timothy who goes to his local park to try out his new telescope. While there, he thinks he spots a shark - and not just on one occasion either, but several times in several places! The popularity of the book prompted Nick to write and illustrate two follow-ups - *Shark In The Dark!* and *Shark In The Park On A Windy Day!*... Now, this fun new production brings together the original story (plus *Shark In The Dark!*) with *Oh No! Shark In The Snow* - 'an enchanting winter tale' that puts a fresh and festive twist on the original.

## Motionhouse: Starchitects Save Santa!

Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham,  
until Sat 30 December

After scoring a stellar success with *Starchitects*, Motionhouse dance company now returns with a family-friendly sequel-show - and not a moment too soon, by the look of it! Why? Because it's Christmas Eve, Santa's gone missing, and the festive season is in serious danger of being cancelled. Cue, the *Starchitects* - a group of adventurous friends who blast off into the galaxy to rescue the gift-delivering Mr Claus.

Featuring 'gravity-defying choreography and amazing digital projections', this brand-new production is being hailed by Motionhouse as 'a visual spectacle like no other'.

If the company's first *Starchitects* show is anything to go by, you won't be disappointed.



## Dear Santa

Octagon Stafford, Sat 2 - Mon 4 December;  
Birmingham Hippodrome, Mon 11 - Sun 24  
December; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Tues  
12 - Sun 24 December

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

## Snow Play

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre,  
Tues 12 - Sun 24 December

There's no curbing Lyngo Theatre's enthusiasm when it comes to entertaining young audiences. Not only are they touring with *Little Red Riding Hood* (see opposite page), they're also out and about with *Snow Play*, a production that's described as a showdown between Winter and Spring over 'who gets to stay and who has to go away'. Audiences can join in the fun by making a snowman and getting stuck into a massive snowball fight. Seriously, what's not to like?...

## Santa's Sparkly Surprise

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry,  
Thurs 7 - Sun 24 December

Quite where Iain Lauchlan gets his energy and enthusiasm come the festive season is a mystery. But no matter what the answer is to

that particular yuletide conundrum, there's no denying his impact on 'Christmas at the Belgrade'. Not only is he directing this year's pantomime production of *Cinderella*, he also wrote the show *and* managed to find time to scribe this sure-to-be-magical production for pre-school audiences.

The 35-minute presentation catches up with Rudolph and Mouse at the North Pole, as they realise that everybody's been so busy getting presents ready for children around the world that they've completely forgotten to prepare for Christmas themselves.

With no decorations, no Christmas tree and no prezzies, they're going to need the help of all the children in the audience to make sure that Christmas is every bit as special as it should be...

## Little Red Riding Hood

The Rep, Birmingham,  
Thurs 7 December - Sat 6 January

Inspired by the spectacular success of last year's *Jack And The Magic Beanstalk*, The Rep has once again created a show to delight audience members aged three to six.

This year's offering takes families into the darkness of the woods for an adventure with *Little Red Riding Hood*, a young girl who's not only good at looking after her grandma but also knows a thing or two about outwitting big hairy wolves who'd like to make a meal of her...







## The Gruffalo

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Sat 2 - Sun 31 December

With millions of copies of the book having been sold, it's fair to say that Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler's award-winning Gruffalo has captured the hearts and minds of children everywhere.

Tall Stories' stage adaptation follows Mouse as he heads out on a journey through the deep dark wood, scaring away hungry animals with tales of the terrifying Gruffalo...



Imagine his surprise, then, when he suddenly finds himself coming face-to-face with the very creature he's imagined!

Tall Stories' delicate yet playful approach to their material - and their ability to let whatever story they're telling speak for itself, without flashy gimmicks or over-the-top costumes - places them at the very forefront of family theatre.

An imaginative and engaging musical that comes complete with some good old-fashioned audience participation, The Gruffalo offers truly 'monstrous' fun for children aged three and older.

## Horrible Histories: Horrible Christmas

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Thurs 28 December

The Horrible Histories team visits Birmingham in the dying days of 2023 to present 'the terrific tale of Christmas'.

Charles Dickens, Oliver Cromwell, King Henry VIII and St Nicholas himself are among the characters who turn up in Horrible Histories, Horrible Christmas - a show that features everything from 'Victorian villains and medieval monks, to puritan parties and Tudor treats'.



the Peak District-based Vagabonds.

"We believe that stories have the power to connect us, inspire us, and teach us about ourselves and the world around us. We create stories that are both entertaining and thought-provoking, and we hope that our work will leave a lasting impression on our audiences." There's every chance that this festive-season offering will do just that, as main character Lucy engages in a wild turkey chase of epic proportions, hoping against hope that she can somehow manage to recover her bothersome brother's beloved bear from the mysterious Christmas Toyshop...



whom think they've got the answer... Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer, Jingle Bells, When Santa Got Stuck Up The Chimney, The Twelve Days Of Christmas and We Wish You A Merry Christmas are among the songs featured in this 45-minute show.

Created for kids aged two to eight, the production also includes a meet-and-greet with Father Christmas, who'll be handing out a gift to every youngster.

## Little Red Riding Hood

Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton, Sat 9 - Sun 10 December

Hailed for their exceptional visual style and imaginative use of props, children's theatre company Lyngo here turn their attention to the famous fairytale in which a little girl discovers that there's way more to Granny than initially meets the eye...



## The Christmas Toyshop Mystery

Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton upon Trent, Sat 16 - Sat 23 December

Those Babbling Vagabonds make a welcome return with a show that's set to delight family audiences this Christmas.

"Our work is rooted in storytelling," explain

## Santa's Christmas Wish

The Civic, Stourport-on-Severn, Fri 1 December; Mitchell Arts Centre, Stoke-on-Trent, Sat 9 - Sun 10 December; Benn Hall, Rugby, Sat 9 December; Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock, Sun 10 December

Dotty the Elf is wondering what Santa wants for Christmas and needs help to find out. Enter, Dasher the Reindeer, Pompom the Penguin and Snowy the Snowman, all of



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## Sh\*\*ged, Married, Annoyed

Utilita Arena Birmingham, Wed 13 December

With their Sh\*\*ged Married Annoyed podcast boasting more than 100 million downloads, it's no surprise that amiable husband & wife team Chris & Rosie Ramsey decided to take the show out of the studio and onto the road. The first leg of the tour met with a lukewarm response from the critics, with many feeling that the sense of intimacy generated in the podcast was somewhat lacking in the cavernous spaces of the UK's biggest arenas. With all of that in mind, and lessons probably learned, Chris & Rosie are now out on the road again. The show deserves to succeed, so fingers crossed it ticks the boxes.

## Fairytale Of New York

Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Thurs 14 December

With a West End run and two sell-out tours under its belt, Fairytale Of New York visits the Midlands in fine fettle and with an enviable reputation in tow.

The high-energy production - described by its publicity as 'the ultimate feelgood Irish-inspired Christmas show' - features a cast of singers, musicians & dancers performing a selection of much-loved yuletide songs - from chart-toppers such as White Christmas to traditional carols like Silent Night. Throw in some of 'the greatest Irish singalong songs of all time' and you've got the kind of show that should well and truly put you in the Christmas spirit.

## Ladbaby: Live, Laugh, Love - Live

Birmingham Town Hall, Sun 17 December

LadBaby's history makes for quite the story. The fella behind the name is Mark Hoyle, who found fame on YouTube back in 2016 when he used the platform to document his own journey from 'lad to dad'. Joined in his humorous endeavours by wife Roxanne, LadBaby has since released a number of Christmas songs (to raise money for food-bank charity The Trussell Trust), published bestselling children's books, launched sell-out clothing lines and a podcast, and is now hitting the road with this 'Christmas extravaganza'.

Mark and Roxanne are promising plenty of singing, dancing and audience participation - and even some 'on-stage head-to-head live couples battles'!

Favourite podcast features, such as Date

Night Diaries, Living With A Southerner, Dial A Dilemma and Guess That Sound, are also included.

## Home Alone In Concert

Utilita Arena Birmingham, Wed 20 December

The experience of watching hit 1990 festive family film Home Alone on a giant HD screen, while a live orchestra and choir perform its John Williams-composed score, has been bringing pleasure to Christmas audiences for a decade now.

For those who've never seen the movie but would appreciate a heads-up, it tells the story of eight-year-old Kevin McCallister (played by Macaulay Culkin in his breakthrough role), who is accidentally left behind when his family leaves for a Christmas vacation. To make matters worse, Kevin finds himself having to defend the family home against two bungling burglars, brilliantly played by Daniel Stern and, at the height of his Goodfellas-inspired fame, the inimitable Joe Pesci...

## The Rat Pack: Christmas In Vegas

Crescent Theatre, Birmingham, Tues 26 - Thurs 28 December

The warm and authentic friendship between Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr - particularly during its heyday in the late 1950s and early 1960s - continues to be the stuff of legend.

The three superstar singers, affectionately known as The Rat Pack, were fun-loving guys who brought entertainment to millions with a nice'n'easy style it was hard to dislike...

This seriously impressive touring show, paying loving tribute to Frank, Dean and

Sammy, is packed to its yuletide rafters with memorable tunes - from Frank's My Way, through Dean's Amore, to Sammy's Mr Bojangles. It also features a host of festive favourites, including Winter Wonderland, Let It Snow and White Christmas.

## The D-Day Darlings: A Christmas To Remember

Halesowen Town Hall, Fri 22 December

With their appearance on Britain's Got Talent having worked wonders for their profile and record sales, The D-Day Darlings usually specialise in nostalgic songs from the wartime era but are here extending their repertoire to include a selection of much-loved festive favourites.

Featuring The D-Day Darlings Voices Choir, young trailblazers The D-Day Juniors, 'dazzling costumes and eye-catching choreography', the show includes such classics as Jingle Bells, Santa Clause is Comin' To Town and When A Child Is Born. The ensemble's much-loved duet of White Christmas with the late Dame Vera Lynn also features.

## An Evening Of Burlesque

Birmingham Town Hall, Tues 12 December

Fun, feathers and fabulous costumes abound when the UK's longest-running burlesque show brings some wintertime cheer to Birmingham Town Hall this month.

Alongside the obligatory champagne showgirls, there's cabaret, comedy, music and circus to enjoy. The entertainment is all brought together in a manner that means the evening is best attended only by audience members who're 18 years of age or older.



# THE 12 FILMS OF CHRISTMAS

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose... and a fabulous festive film on the telly to warm the cockles of your heart! Yes, Christmas is a-coming - but which magnificent yuletide movies should you choose for your holiday viewing? Here are 12 much-loved classics to consider...

## It's A Wonderful Life

For many people, Frank Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946) is *the* festive film of all festive films. Although it was shot during a summer heatwave, its heart and soul is pure Christmas!

James Stewart stars as George Bailey, a man whose sense of duty sees him forsaking his own dreams and aspirations for the good of his family and community. Weighed down by his heavy responsibilities and no small amount of ill fortune, George decides he'd be better off dead - until, that is, his guardian angel, Clarence, makes him see the error of his ways...



## Home Alone

The film that made a child star of Macaulay Culkin, *Home Alone* (1990) also features Joe Pesci - fresh from his time spent whacking fellow mobsters in Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* - and Daniel Stern as a pair of incompetent house-breakers. When the bumbling burglars attempt to rob a suburban Chicago home, they get plenty more than they bargained for: Kevin McCallister's family

has gone on vacation and accidentally left him behind. Home alone, he's determined to keep the property safe and sound...



## Love Actually

Riding on the back of his successes with *Four Weddings And A Funeral* and *Notting Hill*, Richard Curtis sent this film out into the festive ether back in 2003 and scored a giant Christmas hit. Sickly sweet and cringeworthy though it may be in many places (*many, many* places!), the film also features some truly touching and genuinely poignant scenes - not to mention stand-out moments to remember forever, such as Hugh Grant as the prime minister dancing around Number 10 to the Pointer Sisters' *Jump* (For My Love).



## Elf

There are those for whom no Christmas is complete without watching *Elf*. The now-cult movie - a stage-musical version of which is visiting the Midlands this month - finds Will Ferrell in fine form as Buddy, a man-child who, having been raised at the North Pole by Santa's elves, determines to head to New York in search of his biological father, played by Godfather actor James Caan... Celebrating its 20th anniversary next year, *Elf* is a movie that's positively overflowing with yuletide cheer. It also comes complete with many a visual gag to keep the kids happy.



## The Muppet Christmas Carol

What do you get if you combine a much-loved story by the Victorian era's most famous writer, with an ensemble cast of puppets and an Academy Award-winning actor? The *Muppet Christmas Carol*, of course! Charles Dickens' 1843 short story about a grumpy old sinner who's taught the error of his miserly ways by a trio of festive phantoms provides plenty of opportunity for



the Muppets to peddle their absurdist style of comedy. Michael Caine, the Oscar-winning actor mentioned above, stays rock-steady as Ebenezer Scrooge amid the puppet-powered pandemonium.



## How The Grinch Stole Christmas

Jim Carrey's career was very much firing on all cylinders when he took the starring role in this Year 2000 big-screen adaptation of Dr Seuss's classic story. The mean-minded, green-skinned Grinch lives at the top of a mountain overlooking Whoville, a town that certainly knows how to keep Christmas in style. Favouring isolation over living in the town - where he'd been brought up but bullied - the Grinch decides it's high time he took his revenge on the citizens of Whoville - by stealing all of their presents, decorations and food while they're asleep...



## Miracle On 34th Street

New York's 34th Street has seen more than its fair share of Miracles down the years, but there's no question that the two most popular ones happened in 1947 and 1994. Both versions have become perennial festive family favourites, with the original released just one year after that other classic Christmas cracker, *It's A Wonderful Life*... When New York's biggest department store finds itself short of a Santa, an old fella named Kris Kringle steps in to help out. So far, so good. But the store soon finds itself at

the centre of controversy when the benign senior citizen claims that he is, in fact, the real Santa Claus...

## The Holiday

Bolstered by an all-star cast, Nancy Meyers' 2006 romantic comedy has established itself as a modern-day Christmas classic and is considered by many to be essential yuletide viewing. The wafer-thin but effective storyline sees two thirtysomething singletons who've never met deciding to swap homes for Christmas, with Kate Winslet's Iris Simpkins heading for LA and Cameron Diaz's Amanda Woods travelling in the opposite direction to a cottage in the English countryside. Both women are recovering from heartbreak, but it isn't long before each of them finds the gift of a new romance in their festive stocking...



## Nativity!

You've seen the musical (or if you haven't, book yourself a ticket at the Birmingham Rep, where it's running across the festive season), now check out the original film! Midlands writer Debbie Isitt's movie was the surprise Christmas hit of 2009, bringing together an impressive cast of big-name performers and, in due course of time, spawning three sequels. Set in Coventry and partially improvised, the film follows the attempts of St Bernadette's Catholic primary school to pick up the prize for the best nativity play. But things threaten to spiral out of control when the teacher in charge of the production tells a big fat festive lie...

## The Polar Express

Listed in the 2006 Guinness Book of Records as the world's 'first all-digital capture' film, *The Polar Express* stars Tom Hanks in a variety of roles and follows the story of a young boy who's starting to wonder whether Santa Claus really exists. On Christmas Eve he sees a mysterious steam locomotive

outside his bedroom window. But this is no ordinary train; this one is transporting its passengers to the North Pole for a meeting with the man himself. The boy is invited on board the locomotive and the adventure begins...



## Scrooge

Of all the versions of *A Christmas Carol* to grace our cinema screens in the post-war years, this 1951 British offering is widely considered to be the greatest - not least because of a show-stopping portrayal of the title character by legendary English actor Alastair Sim.

Sim went on to voice Scrooge in an animated version of the Carol some 20 years later. His interpretation of the character on both occasions was so memorable that Jim Carrey decided to mimic him when he himself lent his voice to old Ebenezer (in another animated version of the story, released in 2009).

## The Snowman

This wordless, half-hour, made-for-television animated film was first screened in 1982, four years after the publication of the Raymond Briggs book on which it's based. It's a simple tale about a snowman who comes to life and takes a small boy on an adventure through the starry night sky. The film is routinely screened every Christmas (often alongside its sequel, *The Snowman And The Snowdog*) and is undoubtedly best known for the central song of its Howard Blake-composed score: *Walking In The Air*.







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## Dance previews from across the region



## Birmingham Royal Ballet: The Nutcracker

Birmingham Hippodrome, Fri 17 November - Sat 9 December

Sir Peter Wright's version of this firm festive favourite returns to the Hippodrome courtesy (of course) of Birmingham Royal Ballet. Created in 1990 as a thank-you to the city for its support of the company following its move to the Midlands from London's Sadler Wells, Sir Peter's production is seen by many as the finest interpretation of Tchaikovsky's magnificent and mesmerising score.

In true Christmas spirit, the story follows the young Clara as she's swept up in a fantasy of soldiers, giant rats, snow fairies, magic and mystery, before finally being transformed into a beautiful ballerina. A magical, must-see show for theatre-going dance lovers everywhere, the production was last year enhanced by a £1million makeover.

## Dancing In A Winter Wonderland With Aljaz And Janette

Symphony Hall, Birmingham,  
Sun 10 December

Janette Manrara and Aljaz Skorjanec take to the stage in a production that sees them combining 'world-class choreography, fabulous costumes and amazing sets' with the greatest hits of Christmas. The Strictly Come Dancing favourites are joined in the show by a supporting cast of dancers and singers.



## Wizard Of Oz

Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock,  
Wed 13 December

Ballet Theatre UK are inviting audiences to join them on the Yellow Brick Road this Christmas, as they visit Cannock with their two-act full-length ballet adaptation of L Frank Baum's iconic story. First performed by the company in 2019 and set to a classical score, the production is presented with 'beautiful backdrops, stunning theatrical sets' and costumes evoking the iconic sketches by WW Denslow that featured in the original book, published in 1900.

## All About The Fight: Going The Distance!

Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton,  
Tues 19 December

Sterran Dance Theatre have partnered with Bright Star Boxing Academy to develop this cross-discipline presentation, exchanging skills and 'exploring the creative possibilities between dance and boxing'.

Drawing on the personal experiences of members of the company, the highly physical piece explores the emotional fight which people can face for approval, survival, recognition and success.





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# GEDDY WITH ANTICIPATION...

...is how Midlands-based fans of prog-rock band Rush feel at the prospect of the trio's singer, Geddy Lee, bringing his spoken-word tour to Wolverhampton this month...



Geddy Lee, the legendary singer & bass player of Canadian prog rock band Rush, is bringing his highly anticipated spoken-word tour to Wolverhampton this month.

The show, taking place to promote his long-awaited memoir, *My Effin' Life* - named after the singer's penchant for dropping 'F-bombs' in conversation - will see the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Famer, born Gershon Eliezer Weinrib, offer an insight into his near-50-year career with the iconic rock trio, as well as his early family life and his parents' background as Holocaust survivors.

During the evening, Geddy will be joined on stage by a special guest interviewer - Hollywood star Paul Rudd took on the role at the opening show in New York City - before reading key passages from his memoir and taking questions from the audience.

The show is set to be a unique opportunity for Rush fans to hear the 70-year-old singer reflect on his family and childhood, as well as the history of his multi-platinum-selling band, from their determined pursuit of music - surviving and ultimately thriving against the odds - to personal memories of his life-long friends and bandmates Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart.

Much-lauded drummer Peart retired from the band after their last tour in 2015 and passed away in 2020 after a three-year battle with brain cancer, a pivotal event that Geddy

struggled to deal with, acknowledging that "the funk" he entered after losing his friend partly inspired him to write the book.

"I took that particularly hard," he said in a recent interview. "Around the same time, I watched my mother descend into dementia. She was losing her memory, and that was really disturbing for me. It made me realise how tenuous our grip on the past really is in some ways."

Geddy's mother subsequently died in 2021, aged 96. A period the singer terms "a fiesta of grief" was completed when guitarist Lifeson was hospitalised with potentially fatal Covid. Mercifully, the man who Geddy calls his "BFF" survived - but the traumatic events triggered thoughts of the past, while the ongoing Covid lockdown in Toronto meant he was twiddling his thumbs and looking for something to do. That combination, allied to the encouragement of the editor who'd worked on Geddy's *Big Beautiful Book Of Bass* book, eventually forced the musician's hand.

"I've never lived my life looking anywhere but forward, which is why I resisted doing this kind of thing for so long," he says. "Being in a band all those years was reassuring because it was an ongoing thing - it felt like it was forever. There was always unfinished business - the next record, the next set design, the next tour. It's been the

theme of my life.

"But you need a lot more determination to proceed in the world of music without the comfort of your bandmates, and I can only hope that finishing this book will release me to return to what I do and love best."

What he does and loves best is playing music - and although Rush is never 'effin' likely to reunite without Peart, Geddy admits there could be "a show that paid tribute to the songs of Rush". He says performing with Lifeson at last year's Taylor Hawkins tribute concerts - alongside drummers including Dave Grohl, Chad Smith and Omar Hakim - was a massive step for the pair.

Geddy has been too busy finalising the book, its audio version, tour, and even filming his own TV series (*Geddy Lee Asks: Are Bass Players Human Too?*) to repeat the jam session the best friends enjoyed last year, but he admits they're both keen to pick it up again. What that might mean in terms of future music and live performance is one of the topics sure to be discussed at what should prove to be a fascinating evening.

**Geddy Lee In Conversation takes place at The Civic at The Halls in Wolverhampton on Sunday 10 December. Every ticket purchased for the show includes a copy of the book.**



## Film highlights in December...

### Wonka CERT tbc (116 mins)

Starring **Timothée Chalamet, Olivia Colman, Hugh Grant, Sally Hawkins, Rowan Atkinson, Matt Lucas**  
Directed by **Paul King**

It's certainly proving to be a sweet end to 2023 for Midlands fans of *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory*. Not only did the touring stage musical make an autumn stop-off in the region, but now there's this intriguing new film to enjoy.

In a story that's set a quarter of a century before the events of Roald Dahl's classic children's book, Timothée Chalamet stars as Willy Wonka, a young man who's chockful of ideas and determined to change the world one delectable bite at a time... The character was first brought to life by Gene Wilder in a 1971 big-screen adaptation - and it's that much-loved film which proved to be the inspiration for Wonka director Paul King.

"What I wanted this movie to be was like a companion piece to that movie," Paul told EW. "If you imagine those people in that world 25 years earlier, that was my starting process. Eventually, he would grow into that person and that factory."

**Released Fri 8 December**

### Eileen CERT 15 (97 mins)

Starring **Thomasin McKenzie, Anne Hathaway, Shea Whigham, Sam Nivola, Siobhan Fallon Hogan, Tonye Patano**  
Directed by **William Oldroyd**



This film version of Ottessa Moshfegh's debut novel made a big impression at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival and looks set to score a hit with the cinema-going public when it's released this month.

The title character works in a youth prison in 1960s Massachusetts and longs for some excitement in her life. Enter, glamorous and enigmatic prison psychologist Dr Rebecca St John, who captivates Eileen from the off. But as the two women grow closer, Eileen's life takes a dark and sinister twist, as she becomes unwittingly entangled in Rebecca's mysterious past.

**Released Fri 1 December**

### Aquaman And The Lost Kingdom CERT tbc (115 mins)

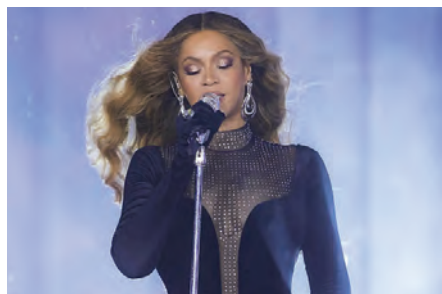
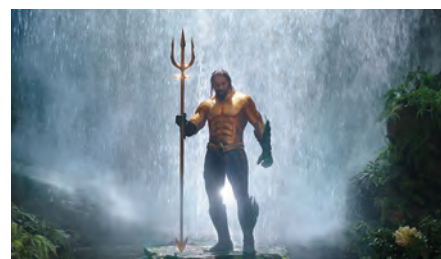
Starring **Jason Momoa, Ben Affleck, Patrick Wilson, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Dolph Lundgren, Nicole Kidman**  
Directed by **James Wan**

Having failed once before to defeat Aquaman, Black Manta - still driven by the need to avenge his father's death - will stop at nothing to take down the King of Atlantis once and for all.

But defeating Aquaman is no paddle in the sea, particularly when our underwater hero forms an unlikely alliance with his imprisoned brother, Orm...

DC Comics continues to trail arch rivals Marvel when it comes to making movies that chime with superhero-loving cinema-goers, so the company will surely be hoping against hope that this sequel Aquaman movie goes at least some way towards shifting that long-term-stubborn dial.

**Released Wed 20 December**





## The Iron Claw CERT tbc (130 mins)

Starring **Zac Efron, Holt McCallany, Harris Dickinson, Jeremy Allen White, Michael Harney, Lily James**  
Directed by **Sean Durkin**

Driven to succeed by their domineering father, the inseparable Von Erich brothers made history in the intensely competitive world of professional wrestling during the early 1980s.

But for all their success, tragedy held them in a headlock from which they just couldn't seem to escape, leading to rumours that a curse had been placed on the family.

"They put these walls up to the outside world in order to stay strong enough to persevere through everything they had to do," Iron Claw star Zac Efron told Entertainment Weekly. "They had to be perfect all the time..."

"It just doesn't seem like this could all happen to one family. There's a huge element of the movie that is, of course, about wrestling and the showmanship aspect. But really, at its core, this movie's an incredible story about family, love, loss, and ultimately the triumph of a man who tries to break the cycle of a crazy curse."

**Released Fri 22 December**



## Anyone But You CERT tbc

Starring **Sydney Sweeney, Glen Powell, Alexandra Shipp, Darren Barnett, Bryan Brown, Joe Davidson** Directed by **Will Gluck**

Bea and Ben look like the perfect couple and have an amazing first date. But then something happens that turns their fiery hot attraction ice cold.

The next time they meet is at a destination wedding in Australia; at which point they do what any two sensibly minded adults would surely do - they pretend to be a couple!... Featuring a familiar enough storyline that sees two people who ostensibly don't like one another finally finding themselves falling in love, *Anyone But You* is released on Boxing Day. If you're a romcom fan, it might therefore offer a perfect - albeit temporary - distraction from the serious business of eating and drinking yourself into a festive-season stupor.

**Released Tues 26 December**



## Ferrari CERT tbc (130 mins)

Starring **Adam Driver, Shailene Woodley, Sarah Gadon, Patrick Dempsey, Penélope Cruz, Jack O'Connell**  
Directed by **Michael Mann**

Behind the spectacle and danger of Formula One, ex-racer Enzo Ferrari is in crisis: bankruptcy stalks the company he and his wife built from nothing a decade earlier, he's torn between his marriage and his mistress, and his drivers' passion to win pushes them to the edge.

In 1957, all their fates converge in a single race - an iconic but treacherous 1,000-mile endurance slog across Italy known as Mille Miglia...

Although it never really puts its pedal to the metal, there's nevertheless plenty to enjoy in Michael Mann's new movie, which performed impressively at the recent Venice Film Festival. The appropriately named Adam Driver gives a solid performance as petrolhead turned automotive mogul Enzo, while the race scenes themselves are something to behold.

**Released Fri 29 December**



## Next Goal Wins CERT tbc (103 mins)

Starring **Michael Fassbender, Oscar Kightley, Will Arnett, Elisabeth Moss, David Fenech, Rachel House** Directed by **Taika Waititi**

Helmed by Jojo Rabbit and Thor: Ragnarok director Taika Waititi, *Next Goal Wins* follows the story of the infamously terrible American Samoa soccer team, best known for once losing a game 31-0.

With the 2014 World Cup Qualifiers approaching, the team hires maverick but down-on-his-luck coach Thomas Rongen (Fassbender), hoping against hope that he can somehow manage to turn around the fortunes of the world's worst soccer team... There have been plenty of seriously impressive sports movies down the years - think *The Wrestler*, *Million Dollar Baby*, *I, Tonya*, *Moneyball*; the list goes on and on and on - but this misfiring comedy is not one of them.

**Released Fri 29 December**





# SAVING SANTA!



Dance company Motionhouse's  
Starchitects return, this time  
to save Christmas...



**Motionhouse is offering young theatre-goers the chance to enjoy a cosmic Christmas treat at Birmingham's Midlands Arts Centre this month. A follow-up to the Leamington-based dance company's critically acclaimed Starchitects, brand-new production Starchitects Save Santa! finds the same group of intrepid children engaging in a fun-filled space adventure...**

Dance-circus company Motionhouse have teamed up with Birmingham's Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) to present a new festive show which promises to be an absolute Christmas cracker.

Featuring high-flying choreography and dramatic digital projection, Starchitects Save Santa! tells the story of a group of children who are blasted into space to find Santa Claus after he disappears on Christmas Eve. Racing against time to ensure youngsters everywhere receive their presents, the kids soon find themselves caught up in an intergalactic adventure like no other.

The production follows on from the huge success of Motionhouse's Starchitects show, which first introduced audiences to these intrepid children and their fun-filled space missions.

Both shows have been created and choreographed by Motionhouse's founder & artistic director, Kevin Finnan, who says the new production will appeal to children and adults alike.

"To make a really good Christmas show and a really good children's show, what you do is try and make it fun for everyone. So we're performing with a high level of skill, and there are a lot of things to watch and admire for adults and children together.

"We've been really pleased with the success of Starchitects. It's the same characters this time too; so a bit like the Famous Five, I think the Starchitects are going to have lots of different adventures.

"The new story is easy to follow. This time the Starchitects are all excited, it's nearly Christmas and everyone is waiting. But then something happens to Santa in space, so the Starchitects take it upon themselves to rescue him and save Christmas."

The Leamington Spa-based company has built up a worldwide reputation for its dramatic combinations of circus, dance and projection, and Kevin says the new show very much builds on that.

"It's always been Motionhouse's ambition to make really exciting, immersive shows, so we interact with projections, we use dance-

circus, we use aerial work and we include a lot of fun.

"This works really well in children's shows, as they're built around a sense of play, so we combine all these elements as dynamically as we can. So the dancers interact with the films to create an exciting explosion of action."

Starchitects Save Santa! is the first time Motionhouse has created a production for the festive season.

"I've never done a Christmas show in my life, and it's been tremendous fun," says Kevin. "We've really enjoyed creating the show and have been looking forward to bringing it to children.

"MAC has been there for us for years and years and has been a great supporter, so it's a real pleasure to be working with the venue to bring this new commission to the audience there."

MAC's chief executive & artistic director, Deborah Kermode, first discovered the Starchitects four years ago - and was immediately eager to bring their adventures to the Cannon Hill Park-located arts centre.

"I saw Starchitects at the Motionhouse studio space in Leamington, and it was really cheeky," she says. "Like all their work, it was really high quality, but it had a real playfulness about it. I thought it would be interesting to invite them to present it as a Christmas show.

"It's really unusual because most Christmas shows tend to have a much more familiar storyline or a more traditional approach to Christmas - even things like panto or some very well-known children's books. What excited me about the work was that it's more universal, in terms of our international community that we serve and what the festive season means to them. For some of these communities, the festive season doesn't always mean a traditional Christmas, but it is a chance to be with their families, have time off, and come to MAC to see a show."

For Deborah and the team, Christmas is a key part of their annual programme.

"We are absolutely committed to doing a high-quality family show at Christmas every

year, and it tends to be for younger children rather than for older teens. We really want young ones to feel at the heart of that Christmas presentation and feel the joy and the buzz about it.

"Christmas is the only show where we make a commitment to so many performances - more than 60 this year - so it's our commitment to doing a long run."

Although MAC aims to put itself at the heart of the community all year round, this is especially true at Christmas. Audience members are offered the chance to 'gift a ticket' - providing an opportunity for a child to enjoy a show which they might not otherwise have been able to see - and there are relaxed and British Sign Language performances available throughout the run.

"More and more people are visiting our relaxed performances," says Deborah. "Relaxed isn't just about children; it could be a family member with dementia, or someone who has considerations of their own. It's about making theatre open to as many people as possible."

MAC has a long relationship with Motionhouse, having showcased many of the company's works in the past. Deborah is proud the arts centre is premiering Starchitects Save Santa!.

"It's fantastic to be thinking that organisations such as MAC can pioneer in this relationship with this work and send it on its way. We want to have a generous relationship with the sector; it's really important that we keep making new work or adapting work.

"I think audiences will be excited about the physicality of Starchitects Save Santa!. There are lots of fantastic visuals, and the chemistry between the dancers is really beautiful. It's very daredevil and I'm sure all of our audiences will be impressed."

.....  
**Starchitects Save Santa! shows at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham, until Saturday 30 December**



## Visual Arts previews from around the region



### Coventry Biennial

various locations across Coventry,  
until Sun 14 January

The fourth Coventry Biennial investigates 'humankind's complex relationship with the world' and features the work of 15 artists displayed across five venues. Included in the programme is an immersive installation by Turkish artist Can Altay which draws inspiration from the rich traditions of public water fountains in Ottoman cities, most notably Istanbul. Also featuring in the Biennial is a site-responsive installation from A History Of Frogs, Vietnamese American artist Dinh Q Lê's powerful multi-screen installation The Colony, and local artist Janet Tryner's installation and sculpture examining the impact of housing developments on rural ecosystems. For further information, visit: [coventrybiennial.com](http://coventrybiennial.com)

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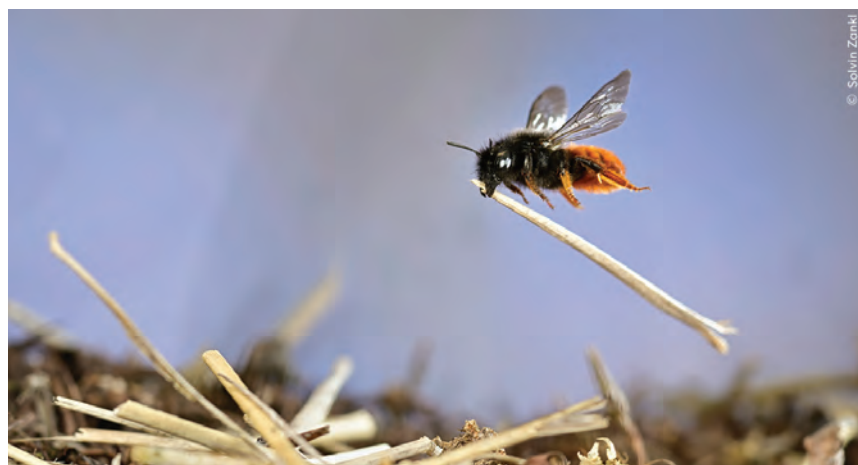


## Derek Boshier: Image Revolt

Wolverhampton Art Gallery, until Sun 21 January

Derek Boshier's lifelong fascination with the power, use and function of images is much in evidence in this celebration of his 60 years as a restlessly inventive artist.

Taking a rare overview of his career, the exhibition features examples of his artwork from the post-war period, right through to the digital age. His more-recent work includes expressive paintings and drawings confronting gender, technology and war at the height of the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements.



## Wildlife Photographer Of The Year

Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, until Mon 1 April

"We are facing urgent biodiversity and climate crises, and photography is a powerful catalyst for change."

So says Dr Doug Gurr, director of the Natural History Museum, which has developed and produced this year's Wildlife Photographer Of The Year

competition. "The exhibition reveals some of nature's most wondrous sights," adds Dr Gurr, "whilst also offering hope and achievable actions that visitors can take to help protect the natural world." The hugely prestigious show - visiting the Herbert as part of an extensive tour - features a host of awe-inspiring images capturing fascinating animal behaviour and breathtaking landscapes.

## Mali Morris: Calling

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, until Fri 22 December

Visual arenas in which colour moves through space and space moves through colour are a signature aspect of recent work by British artist Mali Morris.

Mali has been exploring the possibilities of abstract painting for more than half a century; she first mounted a solo exhibition at Ikon way back in 1979.

This latest show, featuring paintings produced during the past 25 years, illustrates the way in which she has rethought the role of gesture within abstract painting, using layers of colour to create luminous spaces which, although visually clear, are full of precisely judged ambiguities.



## The World That Belongs To Us

New Art Gallery, Walsall, until Sun 9 June

Autobiography and activism come together in this multimedia exhibition showcasing painting, photography, film, animation, wall drawing and site-specific installation.

Featuring work by intergenerational artists from the South Asian diasporas of the UK, US and Canada, the show aims to stimulate conversations around a wide range of subjects, from community and belonging, to migrant and diasporic storytelling and queer & feminist world-building.

## Fresh Air For The Potteries

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, until Sun 5 May

Fresh Air For The Potteries marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of William Blake, whose reputation as a photographer is mainly built around the popularity of his 'Smokies' - photos that depicted the Potteries' industrial landscape of bottle ovens and chimneys.

Blake also travelled throughout the region, taking photographs of the towns and villages he visited. In so doing, he built up a visual record of north Staffordshire during the early 20th century.



# EYES TO THE SKY

**new light show takes audiences on  
a journey through the story of evolution...**





## **Flying into Wolverhampton this month is Evolution, a new aerial spectacle that sees hundreds of drones not only illuminate the skies but also take viewers on a journey through time and space. Dominic Mills, the founder of the company organising the event, explains what audiences can expect...**

Wolverhampton is in for a unique treat this month when it hosts the world premiere of Evolution, a brand-new drone light show from award-winning storytellers Celestial.

One of the top drone-show operators in the world, the company has put on displays at an array of high-profile events, including New Year's Eve celebrations in London, the Eurovision Song Contest in Liverpool and the City of Culture celebrations in Coventry.

Celestial's production team, which includes animators, filmmakers and tech specialists, creates shows using hundreds of illuminated drones that fly in formation in a spectacular display of light and colour.

Evolution - which will also be performed at Bristol's Seat Unique Stadium - pushes the creative collective's boundaries even further, as it's the first show they've devised as a standalone production.

Dominic Mills, founder & CEO of Yuup, a three-year-old Bristol-based local experiences company that puts on events by partnering with creative and venue partners, saw the potential for creating a unique show - as opposed to fulfilling an external commission or brief - after meeting Celestial's founder, Tony Martin, last year.

"We talked about what they do," he says, "which is typically drone light shows that are part of some other event such as London's New Year's Eve, the launch of Eurovision, brand campaigns and so on.

"But a lot of people haven't seen a drone light show - or if they have, they've seen it in the background on the TV - so we said, wouldn't it be great to create a standalone production that the general public could attend? That's where the idea came from."

Dominic explains that Evolution will take audiences on a journey through time and space, telling the story of life on Earth, from the beginning of creation, through the reign of the dinosaurs, and eventually to life as we know it today.

"It's a narrated story that starts with the Big Bang and inception of the universe, and then journeys through the emergence of the sun, the solar system and the planets within it. It will take the audience on a voyage,

accompanied by narration and a cinematic soundtrack."

The latter elements, both new territory for Celestial, will take the show to a whole new level, according to Dominic.

"Even people who have seen them before are in for something exciting and new," he says, explaining that Evolution has been put together in similar fashion to a Hollywood movie.

"If you imagine you're making a short, animated film, you'd have a brief and a script and a storyboard, which animators use to create a 3D show using software. Once that process is complete, it's then programmed and uploaded to the drones.

"Accredited drone pilots are responsible for their operation, but the show itself is pre-programmed. As you can imagine, if you're flying hundreds and hundreds of drones, it needs to be tightly controlled - so the flightpaths, formation changes and light effects are all pre-programmed."

Flightpaths are, of course, an important consideration - drone shows obviously can't interfere with other aircraft and need to be licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). With this in mind, Dominic thinks the venue of Wolverhampton Racecourse is ideal.

"As you can imagine, there are a lot of constraints and you need CAA approval. Delivering a safe show from everyone's perspective is obviously very important to us. The racecourse is a perfect space because there's a big open area to put on a fantastic show and maintain the required distance between the humans and the drones. Everyone should have a fantastic view, as there's obviously a great line of sight when it takes place in the sky."

Another reason the show is being performed in the West Midlands is that Yuup expanded its operation to Birmingham earlier this year and has already recruited around 100 'experience hosts' in the region.

Going forward, Dominic believes that drone shows could well play a big part in his company's offering. He very much sees them as the future of entertainment, partly because rapidly developing technology is

enabling bigger and better spectacles to be created, but also because the format's green credentials make it environmentally friendly.

"It's an incredible new form of entertainment - like nothing people will have seen before. It's storytelling in the sky, and the sky is a huge canvas on which to tell stories.

"If you think about an equivalent type of show, pre-drones it was fireworks, and obviously there are environmental concerns in terms of the waste and the effect they can have on animals and so on. One of the things about a drone show is that you can put on a spectacular event in a way that is very friendly to the environment."

Celestial's green credentials also include charging the drones using renewable energy sources. But if that, and the fact that the shows are performed by pre-programmed machines, all sounds a little mechanical, then Dominic is quick to point out that audiences typically make a human, and often visceral, connection to what they are seeing.

"When you watch people watching these shows, the emotional reaction is often quite strong, which I think is partly because they don't perhaps expect the scale of it in the sky. And the storytelling element is really quite compelling."

The Evolution show tells its story in just 16 minutes, but Dominic says there's much more to the evening's family entertainment in Wolverhampton. As well as a 15-minute 'pre-show' - featuring lights and music - there's also a large funfair in the middle of the racecourse and a food village selling a variety of festive cuisine.

"People can come along and have a great evening with family and friends, get some food and enjoy the fairground. The combination of the sheer size of the display and the number of drones, coupled with the soundtrack and the narration, and what is arguably the greatest story of all time - the story of evolution - should make for a pretty special evening."

**Evolution takes place at Wolverhampton Racecourse, Dunstall Park, on Thursday 14 December**



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



## Winter Funland

NEC, Birmingham, Sat 9 December - Mon 1 January

Described as a 'full-on festive extravaganza', Winter Funland is home to the UK's largest indoor Christmas funfair. Attractions include an ice rink, a 1,200-seater circus and the chance to enjoy unlimited rides. As an added treat, youngsters can visit a

special festive grotto (pre-booking is essential), where Santa will be checking out who's been naughty or nice while his mischievous elves make themselves available for some not-to-be-missed photo opportunities.

## Winter Glow

Three Counties Showground, Malvern, until Sat 6 January

The 2023 edition of Winter Glow features a number of new activities, including elf circus-skills workshops and pet experiences (on selected dates).

One of the event's key features, the outdoor light trail, is 'bigger than ever' this year and takes visitors on a journey around the North Pole.

Other highlights include personalised 'Santa experiences', an indoor ice rink, a food quarter, a fairground and a Christmas market (which is available to visit without a ticket).



## Christmas at Compton Verney

Compton Verney, Warwickshire

Compton Verney is a hive of yuletide activity this month, with attractions at the venue including festive lunches (7 - 15 December), a Winter Wassail (on the 9th) and numerous Christmas concerts.

Those visiting on the weekend of the 16th & 17th will be greeted by the Christmas camel and his donkey friends, with opportunities available to stroke the animals and take a photo with them.

The following week sees Santa stopping off at the venue (from the 22nd to the 24th) and hiding out in the grounds and galleries, waiting for visitors to find him and share their festive plans and Christmas wishes.



## Christmas at Aston Hall

Aston Hall, Birmingham

With Christmas trees and twinkling flameless candles much in evidence, Aston Hall is dressed for the season and ready to welcome visitors!

On Sunday 10 December, the magnificent 17th-century mansion will host Aston Alive: Christmases Past, an event that will see a

cast of historical characters share stories about how they used to celebrate Christmas. Then, on Sunday the 17th, visitors can enjoy a day of action, humour and adventure courtesy of two cracking Christmas tales from the Court of King Arthur.







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# Winter Funland

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



## Victorian Christmas Weekends

Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge, Shropshire, Sat 9 - Sun 10 and Sat 16 - Sun 17 December

Take a step back in time this month and sample a Blists Hill Christmas Weekend (or two!). As well as enjoying the popular Victorian town's usual exhibits - decorated for the season - kids will also be able to whirl down the helter skelter, check out Punch & Judy shows and meet Santa in his grotto.

Candle dipping and Victorian Christmas card-making also feature, and there's a Christmas Emporium too, providing shoppers with the chance to purchase some unique gifts. A choir, brass band, reindeer and snow further add to the festive feel.

## Santa's Grotto Experience

National SEA LIFE Centre, Birmingham, until Sat 24 December

Get ready to dive into the ultimate, er, *fish-mas* adventure at the National SEA LIFE Centre in Birmingham, as Santa and his elves set about the business of spreading some serious Christmas cheer!

Sea explorers can check out more than 2,000 incredible creatures - including a colony of Gentoo penguins, jaw-some sharks and the UK's only sea otters - before heading to Santa's spectacularly snowy grotto, where every child will receive a special gift to take home with them.



## Christmas Bricktacular

Legoland Discovery Centre Birmingham, until Sat 24 December

Have yourself a brick-tastic little Christmas at Legoland Discovery Centre.

Get into the festive spirit by joining in with a selection of magical activities, including a scavenger hunt in the winter wonderland-themed Miniland. There's also the chance to build a Christmas tree out of Lego and meet Lego Santa in his brick grotto.

Fun rides, build & play zones and a 4D cinema further add to the popular visitor attraction's festive offer.



## Ice Skate Birmingham

Centenary Square, Birmingham, until Sun 7 January

Ice Skate Birmingham and the Big Wheel is back at Centenary Square for the festive season.

While the wheel offers the opportunity to enjoy fantastic views across the city, the weather-proofed ice rink accommodates up to 300 people per session.

Younger or inexperienced skating enthusiasts can keep upright by using special penguin aids.

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



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# CHRISTMAS EVENTS



9, 10, 16 & 17 December

BLISTS HILL VICTORIAN TOWN

## CHRISTMAS WEEKENDS



2, 3, 9, 10, 16 & 17 December

COALBROOKDALE

## BREAKFAST WITH SANTA



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BLISTS HILL VICTORIAN TOWN

## CHRISTMAS LATES



2, 3, 9, 10, 16 & 17 December

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# Santa Claws

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fun this Christmas

A Santa Claws Show & a Raptor  
training session run by elves  
Saturday 9th December

# Herbert

Art Gallery & Museum

Book your tickets in advance via  
[dippyincoventry.co.uk](http://dippyincoventry.co.uk)





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



## The Enchanted Express

Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster, every weekend from Sat 2 - Sun 24 December

Severn Valley Railway's ever-popular Enchanted Express will return to its Bridgnorth station each weekend until Christmas.

The voice of Dame Julie Walters will guide passengers aboard the train, where they will meet train driver Luna Loco, Pip the Christmas Mouse, Brigadier Dimple the Toy Soldier, Violet the Sugarplum Fairy, Mama Lumi the Post Elf and Father Christmas himself.

Once everyone has settled into their very own private compartment, an enchanting Christmas tale and festive music will play as the train steams through a winter wonderland. As the journey progresses, characters will appear to personally sign guests' hardback books, with each child receiving a gift from Father Christmas. And to top it all off, the experience includes a free 2024 return ticket for each child.



## Christmas Light Show

Lichfield Cathedral, Staffordshire, Sat 16 - Wed 20 and Fri 22 December

Acclaimed animation team Illuminos return to Lichfield Cathedral this month with another festive light spectacular.

The audio-visual shows will be displayed outside against the cathedral's Bishop's Palace and West Front, using the popular carol In The Bleak Midwinter to tell the

Christmas story. Visitors will be introduced to a kind and generous fox, who gives gifts to other animals he meets as he makes his way to see the newborn baby Jesus. The festive experience will then continue inside the cathedral, where visitors can check out the Christmas Tree Festival.

## Visit Santa: Vintage Sleigh Experience

Coventry Transport Museum, until Sat 23 December

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



## Step into Christmas at Cadbury World

Cadbury World, Birmingham, weekends until Sat 23 December, and also Thurs 21 - Fri 22 December

Festive celebrations are in full swing at Cadbury World this month. The popular venue is presenting a whole host of seasonal activities for families to enjoy, all of which come complete with that ever-important chocolate twist.

Visitors can catch one of the 17 daily performances of the Santa Show (included in the ticket price), where the super-helpful elves will be handing out gifts to young audience members.

Before heading for home, be sure to swing by the world's biggest Cadbury shop to pick up some handmade Christmas chocolates.









# NASTY NIK

**Niki Colwell Evans made a name for herself when she reached the semi-final of The X Factor in 2007. Since then, she's become a musical theatre powerhouse, starring in Blood Brothers, Kinky Boots and Legally Blonde. She's returning to Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre this Christmas to play the ever-so-evil Queen Dragonella. What's On caught up with her for a pre-panto chat...**

**You've often played 'goodie' characters. Do you enjoy playing the 'baddie'?**

I've been the baddie - this will be my fourth time. I think everybody likes playing the baddie, but today I forgot that I was - and what I looked like! I was on the back of a train in Dudley Zoo. I thought, "Ooh, yeah - I've got horns on my head, I'm the evil one!" It's fun!

**Are you modelling your panto character of Dragonella on any real-life baddies?**

I don't really know any real-life baddies. Well, I do - but they'd have to be male! I'm channelling some nasty man. My voice might go down...

**What makes the Grand so special to you personally?**

The Grand is my go-to theatre. If I'm going to watch anything, I'll go to the Grand. It's just the most stunningly beautiful theatre; it's got so much history, and it's nostalgic. I played my very first panto there - 2008, I think it was; Cinderella - and I played the Fairy Godmother. It's just like coming home, and it always feels like Christmas. I get that 'Christmassy butterflies' feeling at the Grand, whether I'm doing Kinky Boots, playing Mrs Johnstone in Blood Brothers or doing Legally Blonde... And today I've caught up with everybody's kids!

**Obviously you're not on stage on Christmas Day. What have you got planned for the day itself?**

I normally cook Christmas dinner, running back and forth from panto. This year I'm at home. I live in a small village, and I normally go to Midnight Mass. I can't wait not to have to rush to get to Midnight Mass, to rush home, to get the kids, to do this, to do that... I've booked a meal at 3 o'clock. It's going to be really weird - it's just me and my husband this year. Instead of fretting about cooking dinner - I'm a vegetarian, so he has to eat a

lot of turkey! - I thought we'd just go and have a nice meal out this Christmas.

**You're used to long theatre runs and tours. What do you do differently for panto?**

The difference with panto is it's a short, sharp shock to the system. Your body gets used to doing the same thing every day. With panto it's so quick, you've got to be on it - there's a whole story to do in half the time of a musical, and you've got to entertain the kids, and they want to scream at you, which is completely different to being on tour. You get different audiences. You get the kids in the daytime, who just want to scream and go 'Booo!' - I can't wait to be booed; I love it! - and then the adults of an evening, who get the 'older' humour. Sometimes you wait for a laugh that doesn't come - which can be quite embarrassing. It's something new every day. And the cast! Because I've been away, it's kind of the first time I've met them all today. I do a lot of shows with Tam Ryan [who's playing Muddles], and that's going to go badly, because I just can't stop laughing at him. I'll be playing a baddie that just wants to laugh all the time!

**Do you have a pre-show routine?**

I've got one of the biggest voices you've probably ever heard, and I have to use it all the time - I don't want my voice to decline. You tend to get into a routine - not knowing that you're doing the same routine - and if it slightly changes, you start to panic... I'll come in quite early, then I'll do a half an hour of vocal warm-up, and then - I don't know how I got into this because I'm not very healthy! - I always have to have fresh ginger and lemon; I have to have that before I go on stage. And I like to chill a little bit.

**You're an experienced panto performer - you must have some stories to tell! What's your biggest mishap?**

Somebody last night who came to see Blood Brothers in Brighton said, "I remember you

in the Grand doing Cinderella. It was the night you broke your leg!" That was pain. I came down the stairs to do my lovely curtsy, and I thought something had gone wrong, but I was in shock. I curtsied and I just went over like a Weeble... And I thought, "Ooooh that really hurts!" Jeanette Crankie jumped over me to do her bow and then one of the dancers, Peter Houston, who was just lovely, dragged me off. And then the company manager just went "Ugh!" cos my foot was swinging. I couldn't see because of the dress! Two days after that, I was back on, with my cast, flying through the air! Once I'd got the cast on, it was fine, so I finished the run in the cast. There were a lot of jokes about that. The worst thing is, I had to speak to the kids over the airwaves because they were so upset that the Fairy Godmother had hurt herself. How sweet is that?!

**People come back to see panto year after year. What do you think is the appeal?**

I think it's a release, it's a family thing, and it's hopefully a chance for people to get away from their normal lives and have a laugh for an hour and a half; to get with like-minded people who love Christmas and love to have a giggle. You get the kids in the morning, who are so excited; it's going to be really hard for me not to get excited with them this year. Christmas for a lot of people is a scary time. I've had Christmases in the past, when the kids were little, thinking: "Where am I gonna get it from? What am I going to do?" Hopefully it gives a bit of respite for the adults, watching their kids' faces, seeing something that's live rather than on a tablet. There's nothing that compares to it. That's what really gets me: watching the youngsters and seeing how excited they get.

.....  
**Niki stars as Queen Dragonella in Snow White at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre from Saturday 2 December to Sunday 7 January**





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# thelist

Your week-  
by-week  
listings guide

December 2023



*The Box Of Delights at Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon - until Sun 7 January*

Music | Comedy | Theatre | Dance | Events | Visual Arts | and more!

## What's On

Fri 1 - Sun 10 December



Angela Barnes -  
Evesham Town Hall  
**Thurs 7 December**

Mon 11 - Sun 17 December



The Lathums -  
hmv Empire, Coventry  
**Fri 15 December**

Mon 18 - Sun 24 December



Chantel McGregor -  
Temperance, Leamington Spa  
**Fri 22 December**

Mon 25 - Sun 31 December



Cinderella -  
Belgrade Theatre, Coventry  
**until Sat 13 January**



## VISUAL ARTS IN THE MIDLANDS

### Compton Verney, Warwickshire

#### PORTRAIT MINIATURES: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GRANTCHESTER COLLECTION

Showcasing over 40 miniatures from the 16th, 17th & 18th centuries, many of which are on show in public for the first time, until Sun 31 Dec

**SENSING NAPLES** Works from the gallery's Naples Collection, re-hung and reimagined, until Sun 31 Dec

**COMPTON VERNEY AND COVENTRY BIENNIAL EXHIBITION AND RESIDENCY** The result of a project in which artists created new work in collaboration with communities in Nuneaton, until Sun 11 Feb

**JO GANE: LIQUID SILVER** Part of Coventry Biennial. A solo exhibition of new co-created artworks by Nuneaton-based artist & researcher Jo Gane that explores early photographic processes and techniques and their relationships to people and the environment, until Sun 11 Feb

**HISTORY IN THE MAKING** New exhibition exploring the stories of materials and making in the collections of Woburn Abbey and the Crafts Council, 700AD to now, until Sun 11 Feb

### Herbert Museum & Art Gallery, Coventry

**DIPPY IN COVENTRY: THE NATION'S FAVOURITE DINOSAUR** Dippy the diplodocus is in Coventry on a three-year loan from the Natural History Museum

**...LIKE A SHORT CUT THROUGH THE BRAMBLES: COVENTRY BIENNIAL** One part of a major new group project featuring significant, newly commissioned artworks and existing projects on loan from national collections. The second part of this exhibition shows at the Old Grammar School, Coventry, until Sat 14 Jan

**WARWICKSHIRE'S JURASSIC SEA** Discover the amazing creatures that lived in Coventry & Warwickshire during the time of the dinosaurs, until 23 Feb

**WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR** Renowned exhibition on loan from the Natural History Museum, until Mon 1 April

### Ikon Gallery, Birmingham

**ASHOKKUMAR D MISTRY: DON'T STARE** New photography and moving-image show from an Ikon Youth Programme artist, using portraits to explore how our perception of ourselves fails to match that of others, until Sun 3 Dec, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham

### Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**PHANTOM SCULPTURE: COVENTRY BIENNIAL** Exhibition bringing together sculptures by some of the most important artists working today, and putting them into conversation with key works by older artists, until Sun 10 March

### Rugby Art Gallery

**A HISTORY OF RUGBY IN 50 OBJECTS** New exhibition featuring 50 objects from the museum's collection which represent a moment, person or event that helped shape the town.

**RUGBY OPEN 2023** Exhibition of contemporary art from emerging and established local artists, until Sat 3 Feb

**REDDING AROUND RUGBY** Temporary display featuring photographs of local companies, shops, transport and buildings taken by Rodney H Huntingford of Redding Photographers, until Sat 6 April

### Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum

**LOST LEAMINGTON: A PICTURE OF THE PAST** An exhibition which draws on the venue's extensive collection of prints, watercolours and photographs to show 'buildings and scenes from the town that are no more', until Sun 14 Jan

### Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery

**JEUDIS: DIFFERENT BUT THE SAME** Exhibition showcasing the varied approaches and artistry of the Jeudis textile artist group, until Sat 23 March

### Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum

**PETER COLLINS, F1 HERO - MUSTOW GREEN TO NÜRBURGRING** Exhibition telling Peter's remarkable story - through original photographs and letters - and featuring numerous personal items, including his racing helmet and gloves, until January 2024

**PAINT THE STREETS** Exhibition celebrating the story of graffiti and street art. Presented in partnership with Worcester Paint Festival, until Sat 6 Jan

### Elsewhere:

**TRANSITIONS: THE IMPACT OF INNOVATION** Exhibition exploring the technologies that are bringing cars into the future, until summer 2024, British Motor Museum, Gaydon



The Wedding Present - hmv Empire, Coventry

## Gigs

**SISTERS OF MURPHY** Fri 1 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

**HALOCENE + LAUREN BABIC** Fri 1 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**BILLY LOCKETT** Fri 1 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

**KEVIN JAMES THORNTON** Fri 1 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**KUMAR SANU, UDIT NARAYAN AND ABHIJEET BHATTACHARYA** Fri 1 Dec, Resorts World Arena, Birmingham

**THE HOUSE OF LOVE** Fri 1 Dec, The Assembly, Leamington Spa

**CROW BLACK CHICKEN** Fri 1 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**VAMOOSERY + K.A.B + FALCONER MUSIC** Fri 1 Dec, Arches Venue, Coventry

**NYJO + TIM GARLAND PRESENT: CHICK COREA** Fri 1 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**SPOUKY KIDS + NIN UK + KORN AGAIN** Fri 1 Dec, Queens Hall, Nuneaton

**JERSEY BEATS - OH WHAT A NIGHT** Fri 1 Dec, The Benn Hall, Rugby

**DREADZONE** Fri 1 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**FLEETWOOD BAC** Fri 1 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**A TRIBUTE TO LIONEL RICHIE + DIANA ROSS** Fri 1 Dec, Palace Theatre, Redditch

**DUDDA + THE REGGAE BOYZ FT MICHELLE** Fri 1

Dec, 45Live, Kidderminster

**EXTREME + LIVING COLOUR** Fri 1 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

**UK FOO FIGHTERS** Fri 1 - Sat 2 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

**THE ATLANTIC PLAYERS** Sat 2 Dec, The Night Owl, Birmingham

**AGAINST THE CURRENT** Sat 2 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**PHIL CAMPBELL AND THE BASTARD SONS + THE CARDS + SWEET ELECTRIC** Sat 2 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**COROOK + BLAIR** Sat 2 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**TREVOR BABAJACK STEGER TRIO** Sat 2 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**MACHIAVELLIAN ART + TENEBROUS LIAR + COMPLIANCE UNIT** Sat 2 Dec, The Tin At The Coal Vaults, Coventry

**THE WEDDING PRESENT** Sat 2 Dec, hmv Empire, Coventry

**SIMON HENLEY AS ELVIS & THE KINGCRAWLERS** Sat 2 Dec, Queens Hall, Nuneaton

**BUDAPEST CAFE ORCHESTRA** Sat 2 Dec, The Market Theatre, Ledbury

**TENBURY TOWN BAND** Sat 2 Dec, Regal, Tenbury Wells

**KROOKED TONGUE + PHON + DMOB PROJECT** Sat 2 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**KING PLEASURE AND THE BISCUIT BOYS** Sat 2 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**PHIL BATES** Sat 2 Dec, West Malvern Social Club

**MARK MORRISS & ADAM DEVLIN** Sun 3 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

**JAH WOBBLE** Sun 3 Dec, Hare & Hounds, B'ham

**BRONNIE** Sun 3 Dec, The Sunflower Lounge, Birmingham

**ASHNIKKO + HEMLOCKE SPRINGS** Sun 3 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**ROLLO MARKEE AND LEWIS FIELDING** Sun 3 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**SALLY BARKER** Sun 3 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**THE CHURCHFITTERS** Sun 3 Dec, The Fleece Inn, Bretforton, Nr Evesham

**JAMES KIRBY** Sun 3 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**THE ELVIS EXPERIENCE: MARK GREEN AND THE DIXIE ROCK AND ROLL BAND** Sun 3 Dec, Civic, Stourport

**LIL YACHTY + JEAN DAWSON** Mon 4 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

**ROACHFORD** Mon 4 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**SONS OF TOWN HALL** Mon 4 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**RAYE** Tues 5 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

**OF MICE + MEN + CASSETS + DEFECTS** Wed 6 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham



# Friday 1 - Sunday 10 December

**ELECTRIC SIX + US** Wed 6 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

**ICE CUBE + CYPRESS HILL + THE GAME** Wed 6 Dec, Resorts World Arena, Birmingham

**MATT DEIGHTON** Wed 6 Dec, The Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

**DAVID FORD** Wed 6 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**C4** Thurs 7 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

**MIST** Thurs 7 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**ERIC PASLAY** Thurs 7 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**THESE WICKED RIVERS** Thurs 7 Dec, The Asylum, Birmingham

**THE BOOTLEG BEATLES** Thurs 7 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

**BLACK VOICES: CHRISTMAS EXTRAVAGANZA** Thurs 7 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**KEITH JAMES - THE SONGS OF NICK DRAKE** Thurs 7 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**JULIANNA RIOLINO** Thurs 7 Dec, The Tin At The Coal Vaults, Coventry

**KADIALY KOUYATE** Thurs 7 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**JANICE BURNS & JON DORAN** Thurs 7 Dec, The Fleece Inn, Bretforton, Nr Evesham

**THE URBAN FOLK QUARTET** Thurs 7 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**TALON** Thurs 7 Dec, Malvern Theatres

**GOGOL BORDELLO + PEAT & DIESEL + PUZZLED PANTHER** Fri 8 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**TEN TONNES** Fri 8 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

**THE OVERTONES** Fri 8 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**THE AMAZONS** Fri 8 Dec, hmv Empire, Coventry

**THE UNTHANKS** Fri 8 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**BIG COUNTRY** Fri 8 Dec, Queens Hall, Nuneaton

**FOREVER QUEEN - QUEEN TRIBUTE** Fri 8 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**T-REXTASY** Fri 8 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**SIDE TWO** Fri 8 Dec, 45Live, Kidderminster

**THE CHARLATANS** Fri 8 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

**LUCAS D & THE GROOVE GHETTO** Sat 9 Dec, Nortons, Digbeth, Birmingham

**TURIN BRAKES** Sat 9 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**GROW YOUR OWN STUPID + ECHO THEORY + THE WESTLANDS + MAN MADE MOON + SUPERSEEDERS** Sat 9

Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**FUN LOVIN' CRIMINALS** Sat 9 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

**THE USED + THE HOME TEAM + HONEY REVENGE** Sat 9 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

**DECADENCE FT ALISON LIMERICK LIVE** Sat 9 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**DONNY OSMOND** Sat 9 Dec, Resorts World Arena, Birmingham

**SEAMUS MOORE** Sat 9 Dec, Irish Centre, Kings Heath, Birmingham

**THE ACHIEVERS** Sat 9 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**KARMA'S PUPPET + AMBRIUS + CHAPLAIN + KHARMA** Sat 9 Dec, Arches Venue, Coventry

**STONE FOUNDATION** Sat 9 Dec, Queens Hall, Nuneaton

**THE SHINE** Sat 9 Dec, The Benn Hall, Rugby

**SOUNDS OF SEATTLE** Sat 9 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**LEVELLERS + NED'S ATOMIC DUSTBIN + STEVE LAMACQ** Sat 9 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

**THE YOUNG'UNS** Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**CRYWANK** Sun 10 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

**BIG SHIP ALLIANCE** Sun 10 Dec, The Night Owl, Birmingham

**WARGASM + HARP + DROPOUT KINGS** Sun 10 Dec, XOYO, B'ham

**MY DARLING CLEMENTINE** Sun 10 Dec, The Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

**GENO WASHINGTON + THE SWAPS** Sun 10 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**THE VIRGINMARYS** Sun 10 Dec, Queens Hall, Nuneaton

**KIM WILDE** Sun 10 Dec, The Wulfrun at The Halls Wolverhampton

**GEDDY LEE** Sun 10 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton



Consone Quartet - Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa

## Classical Music

**LUNCHTIME RECITAL WITH HETTY COLLIS (SOPRANO) & CHRIS BOWEN (LUTE)** Fri 1 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick

**CONSONE QUARTET** Featuring Agata Daraškaite & Magdalena Loth-Hill (violins), Elitsa Bogdanova (viola) & George Ross (cello). Programme includes works by Mozart, Arriaga, Mendelssohn & Beethoven, Fri 1 Dec, Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa

**ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN: MIDWINTER** Featuring David LePage (director). Programme includes works by Corelli, Vivaldi, Holst/Le Page, Liszt arr. Le Page and much more... Fri 1 Dec, Willoughby Village Hall, Rugby

**UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK CHAMBER CHOIR: STRANGE IS THE NIGHT** UOW explores numerous composers' endless fascination with the latter part of the day, Fri 1 Dec, Helen Martin Studio, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF INDIA WITH ZAKIR HUSSAIN** Featuring Alpesh Chauhan (conductor), Zakir Hussain (tabla), Niladri Kumar (sitar) & Rakesh Chaurasia (bansuri). Programme includes Strauss Rosenkavalier Suite, Hussain Triple Concerto & Stravinsky Petrushka (1947), Fri 1 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN: MIDWINTER** Featuring David LePage (director). Programme includes works by Corelli, Vivaldi, Holst/Le Page, Liszt arr. Le Page and much more... Sat 2 Dec, Feckenham Village Hall, Redditch

**CANTICUM CONCERT** Presented by Warwick Schools Foundation Choral Society & featuring Richard Nicholson (conductor). Programme includes works by Poulenc & Rutter, Sat 2 Dec, Bridge House Theatre, Warwick School

**PROMS NIGHT SPECTACULAR! - AN ENCHANTED EVENING** Programme

includes works by Suppé, Ravel, Walton, Elgar, Howard Blake, John Williams & Rodgers & Hammerstein, Sat 2 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

**LEAMINGTON SINFONIA: ALPINE PICTURES** Programme includes works by Wagner, Strauss, Mahler & Schumann, Sat 2 Dec, All Saints' Church, Leamington Spa

**BIRMINGHAM GAY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: A CHRISTMAS CRACKER** Programme to include works by Tchaikovsky, Anderson, Custer, Wiffen and more... Sat 2 Dec, St Paul's Church, Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham

**MATHIS STIER BASSOON CONCERT** Programme includes works by Philipp Bötdecker, Paula Matthusen, Saint-Saëns, Maria Sigfúsdóttir, Clara Schumann, Alain Béraud & Daniel Schnyder, Sun 3 Dec, Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS: RUTTER MAGNIFICAT** Programme includes works by Boulanger, Schumann & Rutter, Sun 3 Dec, Butterworth Hall, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**EX CATHEDRA: HANDEL'S MESSIAH** Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Margaret Lingas, Imogen Russell & Katie Trethewey (sopranos); Gabriella Liandu, Martha McLorinan & Anna Semple (altos); Sebastian Hill, James Robinson & Bradley Smith (tenors); Thomas Lowen, Themba Mvula & Lawrence White (bass), Sun 3 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**SING CAROLS WITH THE CITY ORGANIST** Featuring Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir, Julian Wilkins (conductor), Jeremy Nicholas (compere) & Thomas Trotter (organ), Mon 4 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**PAUL LEWIS: SCHUBERT PIANO SONATAS 3** Programme comprises Sonata for Piano No 4 in A minor, D537, Sonata for Piano No 9 in B major, D575 & Sonata for Piano No 18 in G major, D894, Tues 5 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall



The Unthanks - Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry



**JOGLARESA** Featuring Katharine Hawnt (voice), Victoria Couper (voice & harp), May Robertson (fidel), Jordan Murray (percussion & dulcimer) & Jonny Akerman (percussion). Programme includes carols & wassails from Ireland, Scotland, England & Wales, Tues 5 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick

**MIRGA GRAŽINYTĖ-TYLA & THE CBSO** Also featuring Eugene Tzinkdelean (violin), Oliver Janes (clarinet), Marie-Christine Zupancic (flute), Adam Römer (viola) & Onutė Gražinytė (piano). Programme includes works by Čiurlionis, Weinberg, Loboda & Kakhidze, Wed 6 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT** Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Wed 6 Dec, Hereford Cathedral

**ARMONICO CONSORT: A BAROQUE CHRISTMAS** Featuring The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble & Christopher Monks (director). Programme includes Michael Praetorius' Christmas music alongside works by Monteverdi & Giovanni Gabrieli, Wed 6 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick

**VIENNESE CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR** Programme includes works by Strauss, Tchaikovsky & Brahms, Thurs 7 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

**CITY OF BIRMINGHAM CHOIR WITH THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: HANDEL'S MESSIAH** Featuring Adrian Lucas (conductor), Kathie Trethewey (soprano), Kate Symonds-Joy (alto), Nicholas Mulroy (tenor), Jamie Woollard (bass), Thomas Trotter (harp) & Martin Perkins (organ), Fri 8 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**EBORACUM BAROQUE: HANDEL'S MESSIAH** Fri 8 Dec, Great Malvern Priory

**WORCESTER MALE VOICE CHOIR CHRISTMAS CONCERT** Featuring Shelley Fairplay (harp) & Keith Hearnshaw (organ), Fri 8 & Sat 9 Dec, Pershore Abbey

**ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN: MESSIAH** Featuring Samantha Hay (soprano), William Towers (countertenor), Nicholas Mulroy (tenor), David John Pike (bass) & Rebecca Miller (conductor), Sat 9 Dec, Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon

**ARMONICO CONSORT: A BAROQUE CHRISTMAS** Featuring The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble & Christopher Monks (director). Programme includes Michael Praetorius' Christmas music alongside works by Monteverdi & Giovanni Gabrieli, Sat 9 Dec, Malvern Theatres

**COVENTRY CATHEDRAL CHORUS: A CHRISTMASTIDE CELEBRATION** Featuring Brass Band of Central England (formerly Jaguar Land Rover

Band), Coventry Cathedral Girl Choristers & Heart of England School, Sat 9 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

**WORCESTER FESTIVAL CHORAL SOCIETY: HANDEL'S MESSIAH** Featuring Emilia Morton (soprano), Tom Lilburn (countertenor), Matthew Minter (tenor) & James Oldfield (bass baritone), Sat 9 Dec, Worcester Cathedral

**COVENTRY & WARWICKSHIRE YOUTH ORCHESTRA: MYTHS & LEGENDS** Conducted by Joe Davies. Programme includes well known film themes plus an eclectic mix of solos including music by Sibelius, Sat 9 Dec, St John's Church, Kenilworth

**BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY SINGERS AT TENBURY WELLS** Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, St Michael's Church, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire

**PHOENIX SINGERS & MIDLANDS HOSPITALS' CHOIR: CHRISTMAS JOY** Featuring James Llewelyn Jones (leader), Gemini Brass, Joanna Cooke (soprano), Charles Matthews (organist), Charis Tai (pianist) & the Bournville Village Primary School Choir, Sun 10 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**ORCHESTRA PRO ANIMA** Featuring Michael Bochmann MBE (director & violin), Ruth Watson (oboe soloist) & Peter Adams (cello soloist). Programme includes works by Torelli, Bach, Corelli, Vaughan-Williams, Morricone, Popper & Anderson, Sun 10 Dec, Berkley Castle, Gloucestershire

## Comedy

**KEVIN JAMES THORNTON** Fri 1 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**BARRY DODDS, SCOTT BENNETT, ELEANOR TIERNAN & MARK NELSON** Fri 1 - Sat 2 Dec, The Glee Club, B'ham

**JO CAULFIELD** Fri 1 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

**JIMMY CARR** Fri 1 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**NABIL ABDULRASHID** Sat 2 Dec, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry



**SIMON EVANS** Sun 3 Dec, Evesham Town Hall

**NABIL ABDULRASHID** Tues 5 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

**CHRISTMAS COMEDY SPECIAL** Wed 6 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

**PROJECT MAYHEM COMEDY** Wed 6 Dec, Sky Blue Tavern, Coventry

**MO GILLIGAN** Thurs 7 Dec, Utilita Arena Birmingham

**ANGELA BARNES** Thurs 7 Dec, Evesham Town Hall



**JAVIER JARQUIN, KATE LUCAS & JON WAGSTAFFE** Thurs 7 Dec, The Royal Pug, Leamington Spa

**SOPHIE DUKER** Thurs 7 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**PIERRE NOVELLIE, CARL HUTCHINSON, LAURA SMYTH & DAVE FULTON** Thurs 7 - Sat 9 Dec, The Glee Club, B'ham

**BARBARA NICE'S CHRISTMAS CRACKER** Sat 9 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

**VIR DAS** Sat 9 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**STEPHEN K AMOS** Sat 9 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**GARY DELANEY** Sun 10 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

**KOJO ANIM** Sun 10 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

**HOT WATER COMEDY CLUB** Sun 10 Dec, The Rialto, Coventry

**BROMSGROVE CRAFTY MONKEYS** Sun 10 Dec, Craft Ale Bar, Evesham

## Theatre

**GHOST TRAIN** A revised version of Arnold Ridley's classic comedy-thriller, performed by the Nonentities Society, until Sat 2 Dec, The Rose Theatre, Kidderminster

**THE WORLD GOES 'ROUND** Revue of the songbook from Tony award-winning musical theatre collaborators Kander & Ebb, until Sat 9 Dec, The Loft Theatre, Leamington Spa

**THE BOX OF DELIGHTS** The RSC's festive family show follows an orphaned schoolboy who finds himself the guardian of a small wooden box with powers beyond his wildest dreams, until Sun 7 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** Festive family favourite starring Sam Rabone as Madame Belle Fillop, Ben Thornton as Phillipe, Kat Chatterton as Belle, Melad Hamidi as the Prince and the

Beast, Natalie Pilkington as the Fairy and Sarah Annakin as the Enchantress, until Sun 7 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

**CINDERELLA** Festive fun aplenty in Iain Lauchlan's panto adaptation of the much-loved rags-to-riches tale, until Sat 13 Jan, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

**THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE** Step through the wardrobe into the kingdom of Narnia, in this magical adventure based on C.S. Lewis' classic children's book, until Sun 28 Jan, The Rep, Birmingham

**ENID BLYTON - NODDY, BIG EARS AND LASHINGS OF CONTROVERSY** Liz Grand brings to life the story of one of children's literature's most controversial authors, Fri 1 - Sat 2 Dec, Malvern Theatres



**JAMES & THE GIANT PEACH** A Bear Pit Theatre Company production, adapted from the book by Roald Dahl, Fri 1 - Sun 10 Dec, The Bear Pit Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

**INTO THE WOODS** The Midlands Drama Academy presents an amateur version of Stephen Sondheim's musical fantasy, Sat 2 Dec, The Dovehouse Theatre, Solihull

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** Miranda Walker gives a contemporary twist to this much-loved fairytale, complete with 'catchy musical numbers' and hilarious comedic moments', Sat 2 Dec - Sat 6 Jan, The Roses, Tewkesbury

**SNOW WHITE** Panto favourite starring Kelle Bryan as Good Fairy Elementa, Gyasi Sheppy as the prince, Niki Colwell Evans as the wicked queen, Evie Pickerill as Snow White, Tam Ryan as Muddles and Ian Adams as Nanny Nolly, Sat 2 Dec - Sun 7 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

**THE FAIR MAID OF THE WEST** Isobel McArthur presents an 'open-armed' adaptation of Thomas Heywood's Elizabethan romp, Sat 2 Dec - Sun 14 Jan, Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

**THE BODYGUARD** Acclaimed musical based on the iconic film starring Whitney Houston & Kevin Costner. Australian Idol runner-up Emily Williams stars as Rachel Marron (evenings only) alongside Ayden Callaghan (Emmerdale, Hollyoaks), as Frank Farmer, Mon 4 - Sat 30 Dec, The Alexandra, Birmingham



**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** Worcester Repertory Company promise a gigantic amount of festive fun in a story of 'bravery & beans, giants & gold, friendship & fantasy', Mon 4 Dec - Sun 7 Jan, Swan Theatre, Worcester

**PETER PAN THE MUSICAL** Swashbuckling production complete with 'spectacular songs, creative choreography and fantastic flying sequences', Tues 5 - Sun 31 Dec, Old Rep, Birmingham

**OUR CHRISTMAS CAROL - A MUSICAL** UK premiere of a brand-new musical Christmas story about upholding family traditions, Wed 6 - Sun 24 Dec, Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

**GHOULS GALLERY** Don't Go Into The Cellar present an anthology stage show based on a selection of tales of terror, Thurs 7 Dec, Lapworth Museum, University of Birmingham

**OIL** Ella Hickson's explosive play exploring Britain's fraught relationship with its imperial past, Thurs 7 - Sat 9 Dec, Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome

**SAVED** Royal Birmingham Conservatoire present a production of Edward Bond's landmark drama, Thurs 7 - Sat 9 Dec, Crescent Theatre, Birmingham

**NATIVITY! THE MUSICAL** A feelgood festive production full of sparkle and shine, Fri 8 - Sat 9, Thurs 14, Sat 16 - Sun 17, Thurs 21 - Sun 24 & Tues 26 - Thurs 28 Dec, Bridge House Theatre, Warwick School

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: ADULT ONLY** A raucous and risqué Friday night of pantomime shenanigans, Fri 8, 15, 22 & 29 Dec, The Roses, Tewkesbury

**SNOW WHITE PANTO** Festive fun with Steps' Lee Latchford-Evans, Simon Howe, Georgina Combes & Britain's Got Talent semi-finalist Andrew Fleming, Fri 8 - Wed 3 Jan, Palace Theatre, Redditch

**A CHRISTMAS CAROL: IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO CHANGE** Jonathan Goodwin brings Charles Dickens to life in a one-man show of 'revenants and redemption, hauntings and humbug, seasonal spooks and sentiment', Sat 9 Dec, The Henrican, Evesham

**ARSENIC & OLD LACE** Amateur version of Joseph Kesselring's comedy concerning two old ladies who take it upon themselves to decide the fate of their wayward lodgers... Sat 9 - Sat 16 Dec, Criterion Theatre, Coventry

**OLIVER TWIST** New production based on Charles Dickens' classic tale. Read our feature with the show's director, Kevin Shaw, on page 10, Sat 9 - Sun 31 Dec, The Albany Theatre, Coventry

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** A giant panto starring JP McCue as Dame Dolly, Sat 9 Dec - Sun 7 Jan, Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa

## Kids Theatre

**MOTIONHOUSE: STARCHITECTS SAVE SANTA!** New festive show for families, fusing gravity-defying choreography, digital projections and magical characters, until Sat 30 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

**SANTA'S CHRISTMAS WISH** A festive song-filled interactive musical adventure - perfect for two to eight year olds. The show lasts 45 minutes and is followed by a special greet & treat with Father Christmas, Fri 1 Dec, The Civic, Stourport

**THERE'S A MONSTER IN YOUR CHRISTMAS SHOW** Tom Fletcher's interactive adventures for big imaginations come to the stage in a brand-new show for younger audiences, Sat 2 - Wed 6 Dec, Malvern Theatres

**THE GRUFFALO** Songs, laughter and monstrous fun for children aged three-plus. Adapted from the book by Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler, Sat 2 - Sun 31 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD** The Rep presents a fresh look at the classic fairytale, in a new production for children aged three to six, Thurs 7 Dec - Sat 6 Jan, The Rep, Birmingham

**SANTA'S SPARKLY SURPRISE** Audience participation and festive magic aplenty in Iain Lauchlan's festive production for pre-school children, Thurs 7 - Sun 24 Dec, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

## Dance

**THE NUTCRACKER** Birmingham Royal Ballet's sumptuous festive production. Expect magic, falling snow and a spectacular 30ft Christmas tree, until Sat 9 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome

**DANCING IN A WINTER WONDERLAND WITH ALJAZ AND JANETTE** The Strictly couple are joined by a supporting cast featuring some of the UK's very best dancers and singers, Sun 10 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

## Light Entertainment

**WARWICK CHRISTMAS LECTURES 2023** Join University of Warwick scientists for an evening of 'mind-boggling science, explosive experiments and audience participation', until Thurs 7 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**KEVIN JAMES THORNTON** Rising TikTok/IG star Kevin has built a vast following by posting 'hilarious and



Warwick Christmas Lectures - Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

heartfelt' moments of self-reflection, Fri 1 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**RICHARD AND ADAM CHRISTMAS SHOW** Featuring festive classics and all-time favourites, Fri 1 Dec, Malvern Theatres

**THE OPERA SHOW** Galina Averina, Timothy Nelson, Martha Jones & Richard Dowling present a journey through scenes from a dozen-plus popular and lesser-known operas, Sun 3 Dec, Malvern Theatres

**THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL: FILM WITH LIVE ORCHESTRA** Screening of Disney's 1992 musical comedy, accompanied by a live score, Mon 4 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**G4 CHRISTMAS** Tues 5 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

**TENORS UNLIMITED** Featuring festive favourites and popular classics, Wed 6 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS: THE FILM WITH LIVE ORCHESTRA** Large-screen showing of the festive favourite, accompanied by a full orchestra performing the film's soundtrack live to screen, Sat 9 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**BUBLÉ CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT** Featuring a live band and 'the UK's top Michael Bublé tribute act', Sat 9 Dec, Lichfield Cathedral

**TEENA'S TINSEL TEASE** Join Miss Teena Bizkit for some chaotic festive fun, complete with TV & movies quiz, stand-up comedy, songs, surprise guests and disco, Sat 9 Dec, Palace Theatre, Redditch

**TOWN HALL GOSPEL CHOIR 15TH ANNIVERSARY CHRISTMAS CONCERT** An evening of contemporary Gospel songs with a twist, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

**SUSIE DENT - THE SECRET LIVES OF WORDS** Join the star of Countdown as she explores the curious, unexpected and sometimes surreal origins of words we use everyday, Sun 10 Dec, Stratford Play House, Stratford-upon-Avon

**SUPERSONIC KIDS GIGS: BEN SADLER FESTIVE SPECIAL** A kids' gig created by 'the UK's premiere experimental music festival' and hosted by alt-rock and psycho-storyteller Anna Palmer from Dorcha, Sun 10 Dec, Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

## Events

**CHRISTMAS FAYRE IN THE CLOISTER** Grab your Christmas goodies in the glorious setting of a medieval cloister, until Sun 3 Dec, Worcester Cathedral

**CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL** Warwick businesses, schools and community groups display their very own decorated Christmas trees, until Sun 3 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick

**CANDLELIT CHRISTMAS** Enjoy an intimate, extended and candlelit tour of Shakespeare's childhood home, until Sat 16 Dec, Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon

**CHRISTMAS IN CATHEDRAL SQUARE** Featuring Midlands-based crafts, gifts and food & drink traders, until Sun 17 Dec, Cathedral Square, Birmingham

**CHRISTMAS PARTY WORLD 2023** A night of 'high-octane' entertainment, food & drink, all presented within the themed venue, until Sat 23 Dec, NEC, Birmingham

**ELF TRAIL** Spot the cheeky elves around the museum on this festive trail, until Sat 23 Dec, Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum

**SANTA'S GROTTTO** Wander through the Christmas-tree farm, pot a magic bean and meet Santa Claus as you decorate your own miniature tree, until Sun 24 Dec, Kingfisher Shopping Centre, Redditch

**BIRMINGHAM FRANKFURT CHRISTMAS MARKET** Offering a large range of traditional gifts and a selection of tempting food & drink, until Sun 24 Dec, Birmingham City Centre

**CHRISTMAS BRICKTACULAR** Get into the festive spirit with Christmas activities



BRIDGE HOUSE THEATRE IN ASSOCIATION WITH TURNPIKE PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

# Nativity!

## The Musical

8 DECEMBER - 28 DECEMBER 2023

BOOK AND LYRICS BY

**DEBBIE  
ISITT**

MUSIC BY

**DEBBIE ISITT  
& NICKY AGER**

ORCHESTRATIONS BY

**GEORGE DYER**

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in the Lego playground, until Sun 24 Dec, Legoland Discovery Centre Birmingham

**SANTA SAFARI** A magical festive day out for the whole family, combining a four-mile winter Safari and a visit to Santa in his Grotto, until Sun 24 Dec, West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**SANTA'S GROTTO** Get ready to dive into the ultimate underwater fish-massy adventure with Santa and his elves, until Sun 24 Dec, National SEA LIFE Centre, Birmingham

**LUMINATE COOMBE** Experience a 'spectacular illuminated trail, full of wonder and intrigue', until Tues 2 Jan, Coombe Abbey, Warwickshire



### THE ENCHANTED GARDENS NEVERLAND

A magical light trail taking you from Wendy's nursery in London over to Neverland, until Wed 3 Jan, Webbs Garden Centre, Wychbold, Worcs

### SNOWDOGS DISCOVER BIRMINGHAM

Enjoy a festive sculpture trail inspired by the animated sequel to the late Raymond Briggs' timeless picture book *The Snowman*™, until Thurs 4 Jan, across Birmingham City Centre

**WINTER GLOW** Immerse yourself in all things seasonal with a line-up of festive activities, until Sat 6 Jan, Three Counties Showground, Malvern

**ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM** Birmingham's largest, all-inclusive undercover ice rink is back! until Sun 7 Jan, Centenary Square, Birmingham

**IT'S CHRISTMAAS!** Explore the Hall dressed for a 1970s & '80s Christmas party, until Sun 7 Jan, Hanbury Hall, Worcestershire

**SAFARI SKATING** Get your skates on and try the Safari Park's first-ever festive ice rink, until Sun 7 Jan, West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**COVENTRY GIANT WHEEL** A 35-metre-high big wheel offers views across the city, until Sun 7 Jan, Broadgate, Coventry

**CANDLELIT CHRISTMAS** Enjoy an intimate and extended tour of Shakespeare's childhood home, experienced by the magic of candlelight, Fri 1 - Sat 2 Dec, Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon

**MCM BIRMINGHAM COMIC CON** Three-day weekend celebrating all the fandoms, from gaming and anime, to collectibles and memorabilia, Fri 1 -

Sun 3 Dec, NEC, Birmingham



**CLASSIC ANTIQUE FAIRS** Over 100 specialist dealers offer a wide variety of high-quality pieces, Fri 1 - Sun 3 Dec, NEC, Birmingham

### BEWDLEY LIGHTS SPECIAL TRAIN SERVICE

Travel in style to see the Christmas lights switch-on event at Bewdley, Sat 2 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Nr Kidderminster

### SEASONAL SATURDAY CRAFTS: NATURAL WINTER DECORATIONS

Craft handmade decorations with a mixture of natural and manmade resources, Sat 2 Dec, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry

**THE ENCHANTED EXPRESS** Inspired by the classic poem 'Twas The Night Before Christmas, journey through a winter wonderland, meeting fun characters along the way, Sat 2 - Sun 3 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**SANTA SPECIALS** Take a steam train ride around the country park and count Santa's missing presents, Sat 2 - Sun 3 Dec, Evesham Vale Light Railway, Worcestershire

### SANTA'S GROTTO AND MAGICAL TRAIN RIDE

Immerse yourself in festive fun with a magical train ride, a visit to Santa and an all-new VR sleigh ride, Sat 2 - Sun 3 Dec, Heart of England Conference & Events Centre, Coventry

### SANTA'S SCIENCE SPECTACULAR SHOW

From the science behind Rudolph's glowing nose to rocket-powered sleighs, this show is sure to get everyone in the festive spirit, Sat 2 - Sun 3 Dec, Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum

### CHRISTMAS AT CADBURY WORLD

Discover the chocolatey zones and see Santa in his very own stage show, Sat 2 - Sun 3 Dec, Cadbury World, Bournville, Birmingham

### FESTIVE STORIES WITH FATHER CHRISTMAS

The man himself tells seasonal stories among the traditional decorations, Sat 2 - Sun 3 Dec, Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire

**ENCHANTED CHRISTMAS KINGDOM** See the park transformed into a winter wonderland full of activities and festive entertainment, Sat 2 - Sun 3 Dec, Hatton Adventure World, Warwickshire

**CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR** Browse amongst a variety of food and craft stalls Sun 3 Dec, Forge Mill Needle Museum, nr Redditch, Worcestershire

**THE POLAR EXPRESS (2004) AND SANTA VISIT** The festive favourite presented on Birmingham's biggest screen - plus a visit from Santa himself, Sun 3 Dec, Millenium Point, Birmingham

### PORSCHE CHRISTMAS EXTRAVAGANZA

Porsche Club GB's annual festive-themed event, Sun 3 Dec, Warwickshire Event Centre, Leamington Spa

**CANDLELIT CHRISTMAS** Enjoy an intimate and extended tour of Shakespeare's childhood home, experienced by the magic of candlelight, Thurs 7 - Sat 9 Dec, Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon

**CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL** Check out Christmas trees designed and decorated by local schools, charities and organisations, Thurs 7 Dec - Sun 14 Jan, Worcester Cathedral

**CHRISTMAS EVENING TOURS** A tour of the house dressed for Christmas, with carols and a traditional three-course meal, Fri 8 Dec, Baddesley Clinton, Warwickshire

### DRIVING HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Navigate the Great Elf Hunt trail around the museum before taking part in some Christmas crafts, Fri 8 - Sat 23 Dec, British Motor Museum, Warwickshire

**WINTER FUNLAND** The UK's biggest indoor funfair, with all festive activities included in the ticket price, Fri 8 - Mon 1 Jan, NEC, Birmingham



**SANTA CLAWS** Roarsome festive fun with dinosaur experiences, Sat 9 Dec, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry

**YOUNG DRIVER LESSONS** A driving school for children and young people aged 10 to 17 where they can have fun and learn new skills, Sat 9 Dec, British Motor Museum, Warwickshire

### SEASONAL SATURDAY CRAFTS: NATURAL WINTER DECORATIONS

Craft handmade decorations with a mixture of natural and manmade resources, Sat 9 Dec, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry

**WINTER WASSAIL** Featuring lantern-lit processions, percussive music, joyful song and offerings of cider, Sat 9 Dec, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

**SANTA'S GROTTO** Enjoy outdoor festive fun and follow the Christmas trail around the Arboretum before meeting Santa, who will give all

children a gift, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Arley Arboretum, Upper Arley, Worcestershire

**THE ENCHANTED EXPRESS** Inspired by the classic poem 'Twas The Night Before Christmas, journey through a winter wonderland, meeting fun characters along the way, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**SANTA TRAINS** Travel on a steam train to see Santa in a pantomime, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**ENCHANTED CHRISTMAS KINGDOM** See the park transformed into a winter wonderland full of activities and festive entertainment, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Hatton Adventure World, Warwickshire

**CHRISTMAS MAKERS MARKET** With lovingly handcrafted gifts and local designers, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, FarGo Village, Coventry

**SANTA SPECIALS** Take a steam train ride around the country park, counting Santa's missing presents, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Evesham Vale Light Railway, Worcestershire

### SANTA'S GROTTO AND MAGICAL TRAIN RIDE

Immerse yourself in festive fun with a magical train ride, a visit to Santa and an all-new VR sleigh ride, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Heart of England Conference & Events Centre, Coventry

### SANTA'S SCIENCE SPECTACULAR SHOW

From the science behind Rudolph's glowing nose to rocket-powered sleighs, this show is sure to get everyone in the festive spirit, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum

### FESTIVE STORIES WITH FATHER CHRISTMAS

The man himself tells seasonal stories among the traditional decorations, Sat 9 - Sun 10 Dec, Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire

**REINDEER ROUNDUP** Help find all of Santa's reindeer in time for Christmas, Sat 9 - Sun 31 Dec, The Commandery, Worcester

**CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR** Browse around a variety of food and craft stalls Sun 10 Dec, Forge Mill Needle Museum, nr Redditch, Worcestershire

**ELF (2003) WITH COCKTAILS** Join the team at The Wine Events Company as they shake up a snow globe of festive cocktails to drink alongside a showing of this modern classic Christmas movie, Sun 10 Dec, Millennium Point, Birmingham

**CHRISTMAS DOG PARADE** Dressed-up four-legged friends strut their stuff in the festive mall, Sun 10 Dec, The Valley, Evesham

**EVESHAM CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL** Featuring dozens of trees decorated by local community groups, Sun 10 - Sat 30 Dec, Parish Church of All Saints Market Place, Evesham





The Lathums - hmv Empire, Coventry

## Gigs

**TIM EDEY + ENDA MCCABE** Mon 11 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**URNE + MOUNTAIN CALLER + TRIBE OF GHOSTS** Tues 12 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

**MILLIONZ** Wed 13 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

**THE BIG MOON** Wed 13 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**HOZIER + THE LAST DINNER PARTY** Wed 13 Dec, Resorts World Arena, Birmingham

**JACKIE OAKES & JOHN SPIERS** Wed 13 Dec, Stratford Playhouse

**SUEDE + DESPERATE JOURNALIST** Wed 13 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

**NAMVULA + BABAK ARIA** Thurs 14 Dec, Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**STEELEYE SPAN** Thurs 14 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**SOPHIE ELLIS-BEXTOR** Thurs 14 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

**LEONA LEWIS** Thurs 14 Dec, Utilita Arena Birmingham

**REED** Thurs 14 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**MERRY HELL** Thurs 14 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**FIT FOR A KING + EMMURE + THROWN + GLOOM IN THE CORNER** Fri 15 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**JOE + 112 + NEXT + BOBBY V + J HOLIDAY** Fri 15 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

**NOEL GALLAGHER'S HIGH FLYING BIRDS + TOM MEIGHAN** Fri 15 Dec, Utilita Arena Birmingham

**RAMBLIN' PREACHERS** Fri 15 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**THE LATHUMS** Fri 15 Dec, hmv Empire, Coventry

**GOSPEL CHRISTMAS** Fri 15 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**MARQUIS DRIVE** Fri 15 Dec, Queens Hall, Nuneaton

**CARA DILLON** Fri 15 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**BARRY STEELE AND FRIENDS** Fri 15 Dec, Civic, Stourport

**OCEAN COLOUR SCENE** Fri 15 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

**THE TWANG + PASTEL** Fri 15 Dec, The Wulfrun at The Halls Wolverhampton

**JOOLS HOLLAND AND HIS RHYTHM AND BLUES ORCHESTRA** Fri 15 - Sat 16 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**THE SHINE** Fri 15 - Sat 16 Dec, The Benn Hall, Rugby

**THERAPY? + BOKASSA** Sat 16 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**THE FRONT BOTTOMS + WE WERE PROMISED JETPACKS** Sat 16 Dec,

O2 Institute, B'ham

**SHORTWAVE + RIVERBUD + PARADISO + LEX + JESS BRETT** Sat 16 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**BOB MARLEY REVIVAL** Sat 16 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

**THE WONDER STUFF + IAN PROWSE** Sat 16 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

**KATE RUSBY** Sat 16 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**TOM JONES + GERMEIN** Sat 16 Dec, Resorts World Arena, B'ham

**MADNESS + LIGHTNING SEEDS** Sat 16 Dec, Utilita Arena B'ham

**THE CADILLAC KINGS** Sat 16 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**LUNA KISS + THE SURVIVAL CODE** Sat 16 Dec, The Tin At The Coal Vaults, Coventry

**RUSHED** Sat 16 Dec, Arches Venue, Coventry

**ELVIS - THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE** Sat 16 Dec, The Henrician, Evesham

**THE FLOWERS BAND** Sat 16 Dec, Number 8, Pershore

**FAUX FIGHTERS UK** Sat 16 Dec, Queens Hall, Nuneaton

**CAPAS + PINK TACO + LYCIO** Sat 16 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**THE SEARCHERS EXPERIENCE** Sat 16 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**BEYOND THE BARRICADE** Sat 16 Dec, Malvern Theatres

**ROVING CROWS** Sat 16 Dec, West Malvern Social Club

**MALVERN BIG BAND** Sat 16 Dec, Malvern Cube

**THE DARKNESS** Sat 16 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

**AMY A TRIBUTE** Sun 17 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**PASADENA ROOF ORCHESTRA** Sat 17 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

## Classical Music

**BEETHOVEN'S EROICA WITH KAZUKI YAMADA & THE CBSO** Featuring Kazuki Yamada (conductor), Eduardo Vassallo (cello) & Chris Yates (viola). Programme includes works by Strauss & Beethoven, Wed 13 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**THE HALLÉ CHRISTMAS CONCERT** Featuring Stephen Bell (conductor) & Rodney Earl Clarke (baritone). Programme includes works by Saunders, Handel, Mozart, Offenbach, Korngold, Adam, Jessel, Prokofiev and more... Wed 13 Dec, Butterworth Hall, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT** Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Thurs 14 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

**CBSO CENTRE STAGE: SYMPHONIC SIX** Programme includes works by Bach, Bizet, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Chopin & more... Fri 15 Dec, CBSO Centre, Birmingham

**COLIN MILLINGTON ORGAN RECITAL** Fri 15 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick

**EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT** Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Rupert Jeffcoat & Nicholas Wearne (organ), Fri 15 - Wed 20 Dec, St Paul's Church, Jewellery Qtr, Birmingham

**EX CATHEDRA: ANGELS, STARS & KINGS - FAMILY CHRISTMAS CONCERT** Featuring Ex Cathedra Choir & Academy of Vocal Music, Rebecca Ledgard & George Parris (conductor) & Nicholas Wearne (organ), Sat 16 Dec, St Paul's Church, Birmingham

**SING IT LOUD WINTER CONCERT** Featuring Seb Farrall (director), Sat 16 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick

**TEWKESBURY ABBEY SCHOLA CANTORUM: HANDEL'S MESSIAH** Featuring Kirsty Hopkins (soprano), Ben Sawyer (countertenor), Nathan Vale (tenor) & Malachy Frame (bass). Simon Bell conducts, Sat 16 Dec, Tewkesbury Abbey

**THE ROYAL BIRMINGHAM CONSERVATOIRE CHAMBER CHOIR: CHRISTMAS CONCERT** Directed by Julian Wilkins, Sat 16 Dec, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

**CHRISTMAS CONCERT: COMMUNITY CHOIR** Featuring The Contemporary Choir & Amicantus Choir, compered by John Tompkins, Sun 17 Dec, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

**CANDLELIT CAROLS** Programme includes works by Cullen, Willcocks, Handel & Bach - alongside a selection of well known carols, Sun 17 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**BIRMINGHAM BACH CHOIR: NINE**

**LESSONS & CAROLS SERVICE** Sun 17 Dec, St Paul's Church, Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham

## Comedy

**DAVID O'DOHERTY, FERN BRADY, JEN BRISTER, JOSH PUGH & KYRAH GRAY** Wed 13 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**KANE BROWN & COMICS TBC** Wed 13 Dec, Herberts Yard, Birmingham

**PROJECT MAYHEM COMEDY** Wed 13 Dec, Sky Blue Tavern, Coventry

**ESTHER MANITO, SCOTT BENNETT, GARRETT MILLERICK & ROB ROUSE** Wed 13 - Sat 16 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

**DAVID O'DOHERTY, FERN BRADY, JEN BRISTER, JOSH PUGH & KYRAH GRAY** Thurs 14 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**STEVE BUGEJA + KANE BROWN** Thurs 14 Dec, Cofa's Social, Coventry

**ED BYRNE** Thurs 14 Dec, The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury



**ANDREW BIRD** Sun 17 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

## Theatre

**ARSENIC & OLD LACE** Amateur version of Joseph Kesselring's comedy concerning two old ladies who take it upon themselves to decide the fate of their wayward lodgers... until Sat 16 Dec, Criterion Theatre, Coventry

**OUR CHRISTMAS CAROL - A MUSICAL** UK premiere of a brand-new musical Christmas story about upholding family traditions, until Sun 24 Dec, Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

**THE BODYGUARD** Acclaimed musical based on the iconic film starring Whitney Houston & Kevin Costner. Australian Idol runner-up Emily Williams stars as Rachel Marron (evenings only) alongside Ayden Callaghan (Emmerdale, Hollyoaks), as Frank Farmer, until Sat 30 Dec, The Alexandra, Birmingham

**PETER PAN THE MUSICAL** Swashbuckling production complete with 'spectacular songs, creative choreography and fantastic flying sequences', until Sun 31 Dec, Old Rep, Birmingham

**OLIVER TWIST** New production based on Charles Dickens' classic tale. Read our feature with the show's director, Kevin Shaw, on page 10,



# Monday 11 - Sunday 17 December

until Sun 31 Dec, The Albany Theatre, Coventry

**SNOW WHITE PANTO** Festive fun with Steps' Lee Latchford-Evans, Simon Howe, Georgina Combes & Britain's Got Talent semi-finalist Andrew Fleming, until Wed 3 Jan, Palace Theatre, Redditch

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** Miranda Walker gives a contemporary twist to this much-loved fairytale, complete with 'catchy musical numbers and hilarious comedic moments', until Sat 6 Jan, The Roses, Tewkesbury

**THE BOX OF DELIGHTS** The RSC's festive family show follows an orphaned schoolboy who finds himself the guardian of a small wooden box with powers beyond his wildest dreams, until Sun 7 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** A giant panto starring JP McCue as Dame Dolly, until Sun 7 Jan, Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** Worcester Repertory Company promise a gigantic amount of festive fun in a story of 'bravery & beans, giants & gold, friendship & fantasy', until Sun 7 Jan, Swan Theatre, Worcester

**SNOW WHITE** Panto favourite starring Kelle Bryan as Good Fairy Elementa, Gyasi Sheppy as the prince, Niki Colwell Evans as the wicked queen, Evie Pickerill as Snow White, Tam Ryan as Muddles and Ian Adams as Nanny Nolly, until Sun 7 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

**CINDERELLA** Festive fun aplenty in Iain Lauchlan's panto adaptation of the much-loved rags-to-riches tale, until Sat 13 Jan, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

**THE FAIR MAID OF THE WEST** Isobel McArthur presents an 'open-armed' adaptation of Thomas Heywood's Elizabethan romp, until Sun 14 Jan, Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

**THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE** Step through the wardrobe into the kingdom of Narnia, in this magical adventure based on C.S. Lewis' classic children's book, until Sun 28 Jan, The Rep, B'ham

**WHISTLE AND I'LL COME TO YOU** Toby Burchell presents a one-man show based on MR James' ghost story, Tues 12 - Wed 13 Dec, Malvern Theatres

**LIOLA** Royal Birmingham Conservatoire presents its version of Pirandello's pastoral comedy, Thurs 14 - Sat 16 Dec, Crescent Theatre, Birmingham

**CINDERELLA** Starring Coronation Street's Katie McGlynn as Fairy Godmother, Mark James as Buttons, Jamie Morris & Tarot Joseph as the Ugly Sisters, Bethan Jacks as Cinderella, Mark Faith as Baron

Hardup, Ben Brooker as Prince Charming & Jordan Lee Davies as Dandini, Thurs 14 Dec - Sun 7 Jan, Malvern Theatres

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: ADULT ONLY** A raucous and risqué Friday night of pantomime shenanigans, Fri 15, 22 & 29 Dec, The Roses, Tewkesbury

**ALADDIN - A MUSICAL PANTO** Amateur version 'filled with magic to make wishes come true'... Fri 15 - Sun 31 Dec, Stratford Play House, Stratford-upon-Avon

**ALADDIN** A genie-us festive adventure for all the family, Fri 15 - Sun 31 Dec, Regal, Tenbury Wells

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** A giant festive adventure starring Potteries' favourite Jonathan Wilkes as Jack, Hear'Say star Noel Sullivan as Fleshcreep, Torchwood actor Kai Owen as Farmer Trott and Rio Maye as Spirit of the Beans. Michelle Andrews stars as Princess Jill, Fri 15 Dec - Sun 7 Jan, Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** Award-winning Little Wolf Entertainment promise 'giant jokes and marvellous moo-sic' in a festive show for all the family, Fri 15 Dec - Sun 7 Jan, Artrix, Bromsgrove (Booking via The Core, Solihull)

**BEAUTY & THE BEAST** Stephen Duckham's amateur version of the much-loved fairytale, Sat 16 - Fri 30 Dec, Talisman Theatre & Arts Centre, Kenilworth

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** Alison Hammond, Matt Slack, Samantha Womack, Doreen Tipton, Andrew Ryan & Alexandra O'Reilly star in a 'giant panto full of fun', Sat 16 Dec - Sun 28 Jan, Birmingham Hippodrome

**CINDERELLA: THE ASH GIRL** Retelling of the timeless Brothers Grimm story of neglect and bravery, Sat 16 - Sat 30 Dec, Playbox Theatre, The Dream Factory, Warwick

## Kids Theatre

**DEAR SANTA** A festive introduction to theatre, based on Rod Campbell's much-loved children's book, until Sun 24 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome

**LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD** Worcester Repertory Company presents an introduction to theatre for children aged 3 - 6, until Sat 24 Dec, Swan Theatre, Worcester

**SANTA'S SPARKLY SURPRISE** Audience participation and festive magic aplenty in Iain Lauchlan's festive production for pre-school children, until Sun 24 Dec, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

**MOTIONHOUSE: STARCHITECTS SAVE SANTA!** New festive show for families,



*The Box Of Delights - Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon*

fusing gravity-defying choreography, digital projections and magical characters, until Sat 30 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), B'ham

**THE GRUFFALO** Songs, laughter and monstrous fun for children aged three-plus. Adapted from the book by Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler, until Sun 31 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD** The Rep presents a fresh look at the classic fairytale, in a new production for children aged three to six, until Sat 6 Jan, The Rep, Birmingham

## Light Entertainment

**AN EVENING OF BURLESQUE** Fusion of cabaret, comedy, music, circus and burlesque, Tues 12 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**THE CHRISTMAS IMPROV SHOW** Join the talented Improv troupe from Warwick School and King's High School in an off-the-cuff Christmas show, Thurs 14 Dec, Bridge House Theatre, Warwick School

**A CHRISTMAS WASSAIL** Popular festive show featuring choral music, solo songs, spoken word and comedy, Sat 16 Dec, Hartlebury Castle, Nr Kidderminster

**BEYOND THE BARRICADE** Musical theatre tour featuring songs from Broadway and the West End, Sat 16 Dec, Malvern Theatres

**WORCESTERSHIRE WINDS CONCERT BAND: THE SNOWMAN** Raymond Briggs' much-loved tale, accompanied by live music, Sun 17 Dec, Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire

**LADBABY: LIVE, LAUGH, LOVE - LIVE** An insight into the crazy world of the popular podcasting duo, Sun 17 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

## Events

**CANDLELIT CHRISTMAS** Enjoy an intimate, extended and candlelit tour of Shakespeare's childhood home, until Sat 16 Dec, Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon

**CHRISTMAS IN CATHEDRAL SQUARE** Featuring Midlands-based crafts, gifts and food & drink traders, until Sun 17 Dec, Cathedral Square, Birmingham

**CHRISTMAS PARTY WORLD 2023** A night of 'high-octane' entertainment, food & drink, all presented within the themed venue, until Sat 23 Dec, NEC, Birmingham

**ELF TRAIL** Spot the cheeky elves around the museum on this festive trail, until Sat 23 Dec, Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum

**SANTA'S GROTTO** Wander through the Christmas-tree farm, pot a magic bean and meet Santa Claus as you decorate your own miniature tree, until Sun 24 Dec, Kingfisher Shopping Centre, Redditch

**BIRMINGHAM FRANKFURT CHRISTMAS MARKET** Offering a large range of traditional gifts and a selection of tempting food & drink, until Sun 24 Dec, Birmingham City Centre

**CHRISTMAS BRICKTACULAR** Get into the festive spirit with Christmas activities in the Lego playground, until Sun 24 Dec, Legoland Discovery Centre Birmingham

**SANTA SAFARI** A magical festive day out for the whole family, combining a four-mile winter Safari and a visit to Santa in his Grotto, until Sun 24 Dec, West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**SANTA'S GROTTO** Get ready to dive into the ultimate underwater fish-massy adventure with Santa and his elves, until Sun 24 Dec, National SEA LIFE Centre, Birmingham

**WINTER FUNLAND** The UK's biggest indoor funfair, with all festive activities





## Tewkesbury's Traditional Family Pantomime!



# BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

WRITTEN BY MIRANDA WALKER

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## Handel's MESSIAH

City of Birmingham Choir  
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra  
Symphony Hall, Birmingham B1 2EA  
Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023 7pm

Conductor: **Adrian Lucas**  
Soprano: **Kathie Trethewey**  
Alto: **Kate Symonds-Joy**  
Tenor: **Nicholas Mulroy**

Bass: **Jamie Woollard**  
Harpsichord: **Thomas Trotter**  
Organ: **Christopher Allsop**

Tickets £15\*, £20, £25.50, £32, £38, £45 (including ticket commission)

\*£15 tickets for 16-25-year-olds across all seats.

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Free (limited) ticket for Disabled Visitors Carers, as per Access Scheme  
please call 0121 289 6343. Access lines are open 10am - 2pm, Mon - Sat.

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JEFFREY SKIDMORE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



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**Hereford Cathedral**  
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**St Martin-in-the-Fields,  
London**  
**Coventry Cathedral**  
**St Paul's Church,  
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**LUMINATE COOMBE** Experience a 'spectacular illuminated trail, full of wonder and intrigue', until Tues 2 Jan, Coombe Abbey, Warwickshire

**THE ENCHANTED GARDENS NEVERLAND** A magical light trail taking you from Wendy's nursery in London over to Neverland, until Wed 3 Jan, Webbs Garden Centre, Wychbold, Wors

**SNOWDOGS DISCOVER BIRMINGHAM** Enjoy a festive sculpture trail inspired by the animated sequel to the late Raymond Briggs' timeless picture book *The Snowman*™, until Thurs 4 Jan, across Birmingham City Centre

**WINTER GLOW** Immerse yourself in all things seasonal with a line-up of festive activities, until Sat 6 Jan, Three Counties Showground, Malvern

**ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM** Birmingham's largest, all-inclusive undercover ice rink is back! until Sun 7 Jan, Centenary Square, Birmingham

**IT'S CHRISTMAAS!** Explore the Hall dressed for a 1970s & '80s Christmas party, until Sun 7 Jan, Hanbury Hall, Worcestershire

**SAFARI SKATING** Get your skates on and try the Safari Park's first-ever festive ice rink, until Sun 7 Jan, West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**COVENTRY GIANT WHEEL** A 35-metre-high big wheel offers views across the city, until Sun 7 Jan, Broadgate, Coventry

**MINI MOTORISTS MONDAYS** Under-fives activity morning with a Christmas theme, Mon 11 Dec, British Motor Museum, Warwickshire

**SENSORY STORIES & RHYMES: CHRISTMAS STORY SPECIAL** Under-fives can enjoy *The Night Before Christmas* via a sensory play-based approach, Tues 12 Dec, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry

**CHRISTMAS EVENING TOURS** A tour of the house dressed for Christmas, with carols and a traditional three-course meal, Wed 13 Dec, Baddesley Clinton, Warwickshire

**EVOLUTION** Epic drone light show taking audiences on a mesmerising journey through time and space, Thurs 14 Dec, Wolverhampton Racecourse

**FARGO'S CHRISTMAS BIERKELLER** Dress up Bavarian style and enjoy an evening of live entertainment, Thurs 14 - Fri 15 Dec, FarGo Village, Coventry

**CANDLELIT CHRISTMAS** Enjoy an intimate and extended tour of Shakespeare's childhood home, experienced by the magic of candlelight, Thurs 14 - Sat 16 Dec, Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon

**THE MURDER OF NICHOLAS PICKLE** A Christmas party-inspired murder-mystery night, Fri 15 Dec, West Midlands Police Museum, B'ham

**EVERLASTING FLOWERS WITH LAYLA ROBINSON INTERIOR DESIGN** Create a one-of-a-kind flower panel or lampshade in this workshop as seen on Channel Four's *Extraordinary Escapes*, Sat 16 Dec, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

**A CHRISTMAS WASSAIL** A festival of choral music, solo songs, spoken word and comedy, Sat 16 Dec, Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire

**SEASONAL SATURDAY CRAFTS: NATURAL WINTER DECORATIONS** Craft decorations made by hand using a mixture of natural and manmade resources, Sat 16 Dec, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry

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**SANTA'S GROTTO** Enjoy outdoor festive fun and follow the Christmas trail around the Arboretum before meeting Santa, who will give every child a gift, Sat 16 - Sun 17 Dec, Arley Arboretum, Upper Arley, Worcestershire

**SANTA'S GROTTO AND MAGICAL TRAIN RIDE** Immerse yourself in festive fun with a magical train ride, a visit to Santa and an all-new VR sleigh ride, Sat 16 - Sun 17 Dec, Heart of England Conference & Events Centre, Coventry

**CHRISTMAS CAMEL AND FRIENDS** Stroke the animals and take a photo with them before entering a prize draw by guessing the camel's name, Sat 16 - Sun 17 Dec, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

**FESTIVE STORIES WITH FATHER CHRISTMAS** The man himself tells seasonal stories among the traditional decorations, Sat 16 - Sun 17 Dec, Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire



Winter Glow - Three Counties Showground, Malvern

**SANTA TRAINS** Travel on a steam train to see Santa in a pantomime, Sat 16 - Sun 17 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**CHRISTMAS LIGHT SHOW: A LIGHT SPECTACULAR BY ILLUMINOS** Enjoy a light show and listen to popular carols, Sat 16 - Wed 20 Dec, Lichfield Cathedral

**CHRISTMAS TALES FROM THE COURT OF**

**KING ARTHUR** Listen to two tales of 'Medieval yuletide splendour fit for the court of Camelot and Queen Guinevere herself', Sun 17 Dec, Aston Hall, Birmingham

**ORIGINS OF MIDDLE-EARTH: JRR TOLKIEN AND SAREHOLE GUIDED WALK** Guided walk introducing the scenery that inspired JRR Tolkien when he lived near Sarehole Mill as a child, Sun 17 Dec, Sarehole Mill, B'ham



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Nathan Dawe - O2 Academy, Birmingham

## Gigs

**MUSYCK ANON** Tues 19 Dec, The Fleece Inn, Bretforton, Nr Evesham

**REDSKIES + FLOOD** Tues 19 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**JOHNNY FOREIGNER** Wed 20 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

**MAD JOCKS & ENGLISHMEN** Wed 20 Dec, Red Lion Folk Club, Birmingham

**THE CHURCHFITTERS** Wed 20 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**ST AGNES FOUNTAIN** Wed 20 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**THE DESTROYERS + ODMANBOX** Thurs 21 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

**THE AMY WINEHOUSE BAND** Thurs 21 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**THE ALBION CHRISTMAS BAND** Thurs 21 Dec, The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury

**FURY** Thurs 21 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**THE MAGIC OF MOTOWN** Thurs 21 Dec, The Civic at The Halls, Wolverhampton

**THE TWANG + THE DREAM MACHINE** Fri 22 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**ISSA + WOODEN DOG + JET BLACK ORANGE + MOLLY GONE MAD + LIAM HAYES** Fri 22 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

**THE TOTAL STONE ROSES + THE SMITHS PRESUMABLY + OAYSIS** Fri 22 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

**NATHAN DAWE** Fri 22 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

**SHOTTY HORROH** Fri 22 Dec, The Flapper, Birmingham

**TALON** Fri 22 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**CHANTEL MCGREGOR** Fri 22 Dec, Temperance, Leamington Spa

**YES PRINCESS + SUNS OF REST + DUCK THIEVES + MATT FISHER + STEFANO BELLAVIA** Fri 22 Dec, The Tin At The Coal Vaults, Coventry

**MOTORPACE + STILL REMAINS UK** Fri 22 Dec, Arches Venue, Coventry

**ULTIMATE COLDPLAY** Fri 22 Dec, Queens Hall, Nuneaton

**SOUL STRIPPER - AC/DC TRIBUTE + DIZZY LIZZY - THIN LIZZY TRIBUTE** Fri 22 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**THE TWANG + THE HEADSHRINKERS** Sat 23 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

**SLADE + SONS OF THE SEVENTIES** Sat 23 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

**DISCHARGE + ROTUNDA + FACE UP! + BIG BLACK EYE + FATAL DOSE + ASYLUM** Sat 23 Dec, Castle & Falcon, Birmingham

**THE INSTITUTES + THE MUCKS + DUKE KEATS + SILHOUETTES + ARMY OF SKANKS + GRAIL GUARD + THE ASTRAS + MASSASAUGA + UNCHAINED + TIN DOG** Sat 23 Dec, hmv Empire, Coventry

**DEFINITELY MIGHTBE** Sat 23 Dec, Queens Hall, Nuneaton

**FRED ZEPPELIN** Sat 23 Dec, Marris Bar, Worcester

**PEAT LOAF** Sat 23 Dec, 45Live, Kidderminster

## Classical Music

**SYMPHONY HALL CAROLS** Featuring the Salisbury Cathedral Choir, David Halls (conductor) & Thomas Trotter (organ), Mon 18 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**COVENTRY CATHEDRAL CHORUS: HANDEL'S MESSIAH BY CANDLELIGHT** Featuring Rachel Mahon (conductor), Katy Hill (soprano), Matthew Farrell (countertenor), Samuel Jenkins (tenor) & Jonathan Brown (bass), Mon 18 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

**ANDREW CASKIE ORGAN CONCERT** Programme comprises Meditations on the birth of the Saviour by Olivier Messiaen, Tues 19 Dec, Great Malvern Priory

**CBSO CHORAL CHRISTMAS WITH ANNA LAPWOOD** Also featuring Simon Halsey CBE (conductor), CBSO Chorus, CBSO Youth Chorus, CBSO Children's Chorus & SO Vocal, Tues 19 - Wed 20 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**THE KING'S SINGERS: WHEN YOU WISH UPON A STAR** Programme includes works by Grieg, Byrd & Saint-Saëns, Wed 20 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**ARMONICO CONSORT'S PRESIDENT'S CAROLS AT THE CASTLE** Wed 20 Dec, Warwick Castle

**CHRISTMAS AT THE MOVIES WITH THE CBSO** Featuring Michael England (conductor), Gary Williams & Louise Dearman (singers). Programme includes scores from Home Alone, Love Actually, The Holiday, Elf, Gremlins, Miracle on 34th Street, The Polar Express, The Snowman and more... Thurs 21 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**BRITTEN'S CEREMONY OF CAROLS** Performed by the Cathedral Choristers, Thurs 21 Dec, Coventry Cathedral

**RODERICK WILLIAMS: CHRISTMAS CONCERT** Featuring Susie Allan (piano). Programme comprises Ralph Vaughan Williams' Song of Travel, Thurs 21 Dec, Compton Verney, Warwickshire



**ARMONICO CONSORT: CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT** Thurs 21 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick  
**CEREMONY OF CAROLS** Benjamin

Britten's work, sung by the Girls' Choir of the Collegiate Church of St Mary, Fri 22 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick

## Comedy

**MIKE GUNN & COMICS TBC** Wed 20 Dec, Herberts Yard, Birmingham

**PROJECT MAYHEM COMEDY** Wed 20 Dec, Sky Blue Tavern, Coventry

**ANDY ROBINSON, MATT BRAGG, PAUL MCCAFFREY & LINDSEY SANTORO** Wed 20 - Sat 23 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

**DAISY EARL, DAMAN BAMRAH, CHRIS BROOKER & DAVE TWENTYMAN** Thurs 21 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

## Theatre

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**THE BODYGUARD** Acclaimed musical based on the iconic film starring Whitney Houston & Kevin Costner. Australian Idol runner-up Emily Williams stars as Rachel Marron (evenings only) alongside Ayden Callaghan (Emmerdale, Hollyoaks), as Frank Farmer, until Sat 30 Dec, The Alexandra, Birmingham

**CINDERELLA: THE ASH GIRL** Retelling of the timeless Brothers Grimm story of neglect and bravery, until Sat 30 Dec, Playbox Theatre, The Dream Factory, Warwick

**BEAUTY & THE BEAST** Stephen Duckham's amateur version of the much-loved fairytale, until Fri 30 Dec, Talisman Theatre & Arts Centre, Kenilworth

**PETER PAN THE MUSICAL** Swashbuckling production complete with 'spectacular songs, creative choreography and fantastic flying sequences', until Sun 31 Dec, Old Rep, Birmingham

**ALADDIN - A MUSICAL PANTO** Amateur version 'filled with magic to make wishes come true'... until Sun 31 Dec, Stratford Play House, Stratford-upon-Avon

**ALADDIN** A genie-us festive adventure for all the family, until Sun 31 Dec, Regal, Tenbury Wells

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**SNOW WHITE PANTO** Festive fun with Steps' Lee Latchford-Evans, Simon Howe, Georgina Combes & Britain's Got Talent semi-finalist Andrew Fleming, until Wed 3 Jan, Palace



Chantel McGregor - Temperance, Leamington Spa



Theatre, Redditch

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** Miranda Walker gives a contemporary twist to this much-loved fairytale, complete with 'catchy musical numbers and hilarious comedic moments', until Sat 6 Jan, The Roses, Tewkesbury

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** Award-winning Little Wolf Entertainment promise 'giant jokes and marvellous moo-sic' in a festive show for all the family, until Sun 7 Jan, Artrix, Bromsgrove (Booking via The Core, Solihull)

**THE BOX OF DELIGHTS** The RSC's festive family show follows an orphaned schoolboy who finds himself the guardian of a small wooden box with powers beyond his wildest dreams, until Sun 7 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** A giant panto starring JP McCue as Dame Dolly, until Sun 7 Jan, Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** Worcester Repertory Company promise a gigantic amount of festive fun in a story of 'bravery & beans, giants & gold, friendship & fantasy', until Sun 7 Jan, Swan Theatre, Worcester

**SNOW WHITE** Panto favourite starring Kelle Bryan as Good Fairy Elementa, Gyasi Sheppy as the prince, Niki Colwell Evans as the wicked queen, Evie Pickerill as Snow White, Tam Ryan as Muddles and Ian Adams as Nanny Nolly, until Sun 7 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

**CINDERELLA** Starring Coronation Street's Katie McGlynn as Fairy Godmother, Mark James as Buttons, Jamie Morris & Tarot Joseph as the Ugly Sisters, Bethan Jacks as Cinderella, Mark Faith as Baron Hardup, Ben Brooker as Prince Charming & Jordan Lee Davies as Dandini, Thurs until Sun 7 Jan, Malvern Theatres

**CINDERELLA** Festive fun aplenty in Iain Lauchlan's panto adaptation of the much-loved rags-to-riches tale, until Sat 13 Jan, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

**THE FAIR MAID OF THE WEST** Isobel McArthur presents an 'open-armed' adaptation of Thomas Heywood's Elizabethan romp, until Sun 14 Jan, Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

**THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE** Step through the wardrobe into the kingdom of Narnia, in this magical adventure based on C.S. Lewis' classic children's book, until Sun 28 Jan, The Rep, Birmingham

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK** Alison Hammond, Matt Slack, Samantha Womack, Doreen Tipton, Andrew Ryan & Alexandra O'Reilly star in a 'giant panto full of fun', until Sun 28

Jan, Birmingham Hippodrome

**DICK WHITTINGTON** Amateur version of the traditional family pantomime, Wed 20 Dec - Sun 7 Jan, Priory Theatre, Kenilworth

**PETER PAN: THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PANTO ARENA TOUR** Boy George stars as Captain Hook and Jordan Conway as Peter Pan in a big-budget version of JM Barrie's much-loved story, Fri 22 - Sat 23 Dec, Resorts World Arena, Birmingham

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: ADULT ONLY** A raucous and risqué Friday night of pantomime shenanigans, Fri 22 & 29 Dec, The Roses, Tewkesbury

## Kids Theatre

**DEAR SANTA** A festive introduction to theatre, based on Rod Campbell's much-loved children's book, until Sun 24 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome

**MOTIONHOUSE: STARCHITECTS SAVE SANTA!** New festive show for families, fusing gravity-defying choreography, digital projections and magical characters, until Sat 30 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), B'ham

**THE GRUFFALO** Songs, laughter and monstrous fun for children aged three-plus. Adapted from the book by Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler, until Sun 31 Dec, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

**LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD** The Rep presents a fresh look at the classic fairytale, in a new production for children aged three to six, until Sat 6 Jan, The Rep, B'ham

**THE CHRISTMAS TREE WHO CAME FOR TEA** A festive tale for younger audiences, narrated by Mary Christmas, Sat 23 Dec, The Civic, Stourport

## Light Entertainment

**WHO KILLED FATHER CHRISTMAS???** Immersive Christmas-themed whodunnit extravaganza. Price includes a three-course meal, Thurs 21 - Fri 22 Dec, The Civic, Stourport

**DILLIE KEANE AND BARB JUNGR - TWO TURTLE DOVES** Two of cabaret's 'grandest of Dames' present an evening of festive favourites, including a 'hilarious' take on the Twelve Days Of Christmas. Tony award winner Sarah Travis accompanies on piano, Fri 22 Dec, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester

**GREENMATTHEWS: A CHRISTMAS CAROL IN CONCERT** A unique retelling of Dickens' much-loved tale, brought to life with an array of traditional and modern instruments and authentic



*Peter Pan: The World's Biggest Panto Arena Tour - Resorts World Arena, Birmingham*

musical arrangements, Sat 23 Dec, Number 8, Pershore

**THE SNOWMAN FILM WITH ORCHESTRA** Also including Wallace & Gromit: The Wrong Trousers, Sat 23 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**THE SNOWMAN WITH LIVE ORCHESTRA** Screening with live orchestra and a solo chorister, Sat 23 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick

## Events

**CHRISTMAS LIGHT SHOW: A LIGHT SPECTACULAR BY ILLUMINOS** Enjoy a light show and listen to popular carols, until Wed 20 Dec, Lichfield Cathedral

**CHRISTMAS PARTY WORLD 2023** A night of 'high-octane' entertainment, food & drink, all presented within the themed venue, until Sat 23 Dec, NEC, Birmingham

**ELF TRAIL** Spot the cheeky elves around the museum on this festive trail, until Sat 23 Dec, Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum

**SANTA'S GROTTO** Wander through the Christmas-tree farm, pot a magic bean and meet Santa Claus as you decorate your own miniature tree, until Sun 24 Dec, Kingfisher Shopping Centre, Redditch

**BIRMINGHAM FRANKFURT CHRISTMAS MARKET** Offering a large range of traditional gifts and a selection of tempting food & drink, until Sun 24 Dec, Birmingham City Centre

**CHRISTMAS BRICKTACULAR** Get into the festive spirit with Christmas activities in the Lego playground, until Sun 24 Dec, Legoland Discovery Centre Birmingham

**SANTA SAFARI** A magical festive day out for the whole family, combining a four-mile winter Safari and a visit to

Santa in his Grotto, until Sun 24 Dec, West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**SANTA'S GROTTO** Get ready to dive into the ultimate underwater fish-massy adventure with Santa and his elves, until Sun 24 Dec, National SEA LIFE Centre, Birmingham

**WINTER FUNLAND** The UK's biggest indoor funfair, with all festive activities included in the ticket price, until Mon 1 Jan, NEC, Birmingham

**LUMINATE COOMBE** Experience a 'spectacular illuminated trail, full of wonder and intrigue', until Tues 2 Jan, Coombe Abbey, Warwickshire

**THE ENCHANTED GARDENS NEVERLAND** A magical light trail taking you from Wendy's nursery in London over to Neverland, until Wed 3 Jan, Webbs Garden Centre, Wychbold, Worcs

**WINTER GLOW** Immerse yourself in all things seasonal with a line-up of festive activities, until Sat 6 Jan, Three Counties Showground, Malvern

**ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM** Birmingham's largest, all-inclusive undercover ice rink is back! until Sun 7 Jan, Centenary Square, Birmingham

**IT'S CHRISTMAAAS!** Explore the Hall dressed for a 1970s & '80s Christmas party, until Sun 7 Jan, Hanbury Hall, Worcestershire

**SAFARI SKATING** Get your skates on and try the Safari Park's first-ever festive ice rink, until Sun 7 Jan, West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley, Nr Kidderminster

**COVENTRY GIANT WHEEL** A 35-metre-high big wheel offers views across the city, until Sun 7 Jan, Broadgate, Coventry

**DA CAPO: SLEIGH RIDE** A casual evening of festive music and food, Tues 19 Dec, St Mary's Church, Warwick



## Classical Music

**MALVERN FESTIVAL CHORUS: CAROLS**  
FOR ALL Thurs 28 Dec, Great Malvern Priory

**LONDON CONCERT ORCHESTRA: NEW YEAR'S EVE GALA** Featuring Anthony Inglis (conductor). Programme includes works by Mendelssohn, Sibelius, Rossini, Elgar, Grieg & Verdi, plus classics Nessun Dorma & Land Of Hope And Glory, Sun 31 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

## Comedy

**RICHARD BLACKWOOD, SLIM, NABIL ABDULRAHID & DALISO CHAPONDA**  
Wed 27 Dec, The Glee Club, B'ham

**PROJECT MAYHEM COMEDY** Wed 27 Dec, Sky Blue Tavern, Coventry

**COMEDY CAROUSEL WITH ANDY ROBINSON, LINDSEY SANTORO & COMIC TBC** Thurs 28 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

**ANDY ROBINSON, LINDSEY SANTORO, KARL PORTER & COMIC TBC** Fri 29 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

**SUKH OJLA, TOMMY SANDHU, FAIZAN SHAH & NABIL ABDULRAHID** Fri 29

Dec, The Rep, Birmingham

**ANDY ROBINSON, LINDSEY SANTORO, KYRAH GRAY & MATT BRAGG** Sat 30 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

**RICHARD BLACKWOOD, NABIL ABDULRAHID, CURTIS WALKER & SLIM** Sat 30 Dec, The Rep, Birmingham

**ANDY ROBINSON, KYRAH GRAY, MATT BRAGG & GARRETT MILLERICK** Sun 31 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

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gold, friendship & fantasy', until Sun 7 Jan, Swan Theatre, Worcester

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**THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS** A one-woman play offering 'a hilarious and modern alternative to the old standards of the holiday season', Wed 27 - Sat 30 Dec, Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

**BEWDLEY AND THE BEAST: THE REVENGE OF THE GILGAL** Beauty And The Beast-inspired panto for grown-ups featuring a brand-new story, Thurs 28 - Fri 29 Dec, The Civic, Stourport

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: ADULT ONLY** A raucous and risqué Friday night of pantomime shenanigans, Fri 29 Dec, The Roses, Tewkesbury

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**OH NO! SHARK IN THE SNOW!** A 'fantastic family musical combining three exciting adventures', Wed 27 - Sun 31 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

**HORRIBLE HISTORIES: HORRIBLE CHRISTMAS** 'Hair-raising adventure' in which Charles Dickens, Oliver Cromwell, King Henry VIII and St Nicholas join forces to save the festive season, Thurs 28 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

## Light Entertainment

**THE MUSIC OF LORD OF THE RINGS, GAME OF THRONES & BEYOND** Featuring music from Lord Of The Rings, The Hobbit, The Witcher, Game Of Thrones, The Chronicles Of Narnia, How To Train Your Dragon & Pirates Of The Caribbean, Fri 29 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

**SHEN YUN** Travel back to the magical world of ancient China via an acclaimed theatrical performance of Chinese dance, orchestral music and high-tech backdrops, Fri 29 - Sun 31 Dec, The ICC, Birmingham

**THE MUSIC OF ZIMMER VS WILLIAMS** Presented by the London Concert Orchestra. Programme features scores from Star Wars, Batman Begins, Harry Potter, Jurassic Park, Pirates Of The Caribbean, The Dark Knight Rises and many more... Sat 30 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

## Events

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**SNOWDOGS DISCOVER BIRMINGHAM** Enjoy a festive sculpture trail inspired by the animated sequel to the late Raymond Briggs' timeless picture book *The Snowman*™, until Thurs 4



*Cinderella - Belgrade Theatre, Coventry*

Jan, across Birmingham City Centre

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THE GIANT PANTOMIME SPECTACULAR!

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK**  
by Morgan Lord

15 Dec '23 - 7 Jan '24

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**Win! A family ticket to see The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe!**

Direct from the West End, The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe shows at Birmingham Rep until Sunday 28 January. We have a family ticket to give away for the evening performance on Friday 19 January.

**Competition closes Monday 8 January**



**Win! A family ticket to see Evolution drone light show!**

Witness an epic-scale theatrical presentation of the story of evolution, told via a swarm of mesmerising drones flying in unison.

We have a family ticket to give away for the show at Wolverhampton Racecourse on Thursday 14 December.

**Competition closes Monday 4 December**



**Win! Four tickets to see Peter Pan!**

Starring Boy George as Captain Hook, this big-budget adaptation of JM Barrie's much-loved tale flies into Resorts World Arena Birmingham this month.

We have four tickets to give away as a prize for the Saturday 23 December performance of the show.

**Competition closes Friday 15 December**



# Oliver Twist

The classic tale... with a Twist

**Exclusive readers' offer - Get £2 off each ticket to Oliver Twist at The Albany Theatre**

From the team that created The Albany's A Christmas Carol comes a new play adaption of the story of Dickens' most famous creation - Oliver Twist.

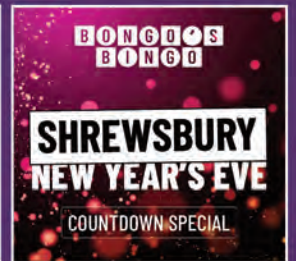
It's Christmas Eve when fate throws an unlikely group of rogues together. To their astonishment they recognise each other. As children, each one of them had been part of Fagin's notorious pickpocketing gang. They start to reminisce and between them recreate the original Dickens story of Victorian London's much celebrated child.

Whats On readers can get £2 off each ticket using the code **WTW2** at the checkout or quoting the code when contacting the box office.

For your chance to WIN! with What's On, visit:  
**[whatsonlive.co.uk](http://whatsonlive.co.uk)**



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