

Staffordshire

ISSUE 455 DECEMBER 2024

What's On

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The Three Musketeers ride into the New Vic Theatre



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WINTER FUNLAND

festive extravaganza makes a welcome return at the NEC



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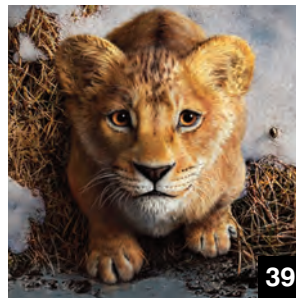
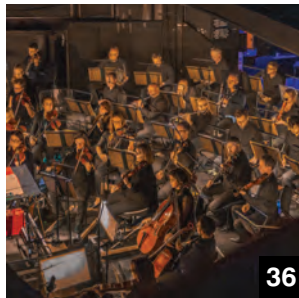
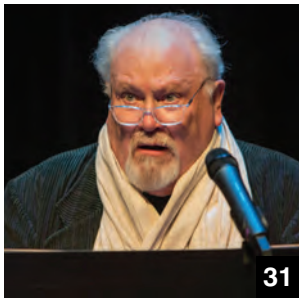
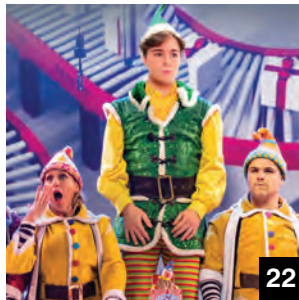
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What's On

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New artists announced for Shrewsbury Folk Festival

Next year's Shrewsbury Folk Festival will include the last-ever UK festival performance of Oysterband.

The folk rock group, who first came together in 1976 and are now retiring from touring, will be joined at the West Mid Showground (from Friday 22 to Monday 25 August) by Scottish artists Skerryvore, Jim Moray, The Fontanas (pictured) and The Laurettes. El Pony Pisador (Spain), Haitian voodoo songstress Moonlight Benjamin and Shrewsbury's own Dan Owen also feature. To check out who else has so far been confirmed for the 2025 get-together, visit the website at shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk

Tickets now on sale for Cosford Air Show 2025

The RAF Cosford Air Show returns on Sunday 8 June next year and will take the theme Commemorate, Celebrate, Innovate. More than 50,000 visitors attended last summer's Air Show, with organisers confident that their promise of another action-packed get-together will see a similarly impressive number of people turning out for the 2025 edition of the event... For more information, visit the venue's website at cosfordairshow.co.uk

Ore back in the Midlands - in not one show but two!

Ore Oduba will be paying not one but two visits to Birmingham in 2025. The Strictly Come Dancing favourite will star as Caractacus Potts when a new production of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang visits Birmingham Hippodrome next spring (Tuesday 4 - Sunday 9 March). Ore then makes a return to the city in the summer, to appear in the brand-new stage adaptation of crime writer Peter James' Picture You Dead, showing at The Alexandra from Tuesday 24 to Saturday 28 June.



Let's Rock launches its Daytime Retro Club

The iconic Let's Rock Festival brand is bringing a daytime retro clubbing event to Shrewsbury. Taking place at the town's Buttermarket venue on Saturday 15 March, Let's Rock Club Tropicana will feature a host of chartbusting hits from the 1980s. Organisers are calling on clubbers to dress to impress, with 'rah rah skirts, leg warmers and mullets a must'! To find out more and book tickets, visit the venue's website: thebuttermarket.co.uk

Fisherman's Friends heading to the Potteries

Legendary Cornish folk-music group Fisherman's Friends will be making a visit to the landlocked Potteries next autumn.



The sea-shanty-singing ensemble drop anchor at Stoke-on-Trent's Victoria Hall on Thursday 2 October for a show that will see them celebrating their 30th anniversary. Seats for the gig can be booked now by visiting the website atgtickets.com/stoke

Small festival, big laughs in rural Staffordshire

A village in rural Staffordshire is to host a brand-new comedy festival in the spring. Taking place in the Grosvenor Centre in Gnosall, the event is being presented by Jokes On Us Comedy Club and will feature, along with other comedians, Seann Walsh, Terry Alderton and Lindsey Santoro. The festival takes place from Friday 21 to Sunday 23 March.

Katy Perry to bring her new tour to the Midlands

Katy Perry will make an autumn visit to the Midlands in 2025, stopping off at Birmingham's Utilita Arena on Saturday 11 October with her Lifetimes tour.



For every ticket sold for the concert, Katy will be donating £1 to Music Venue Trust, the UK charity which acts to protect, secure and improve UK grassroots music venues. For more information about the show and to check on ticket availability, visit the venue's website at utilitaarenabham.co.uk

Hidden history of firearms at Theatre Severn

Respected historian and familiar television face David Olusoga will visit Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn next autumn with a brand-new show exploring the hidden stories of firearms that changed history. David stops off at the venue with A Gun Through Time on Tuesday 4 November. Tickets for the show are available now at theatresevern.co.uk



Military Wives in Dudley next year

The Military Wives Choir will perform at Dudley Town Hall next summer as part of a UK tour.

The wives, who shot to fame on the hit BBC TV series *The Choir*, visit Dudley on Friday 27 June. To find out more and book tickets, visit the website at awaywithmedia.com

Derren Brown is Only Human

Derren Brown is making a springtime visit to the Grand Theatre in Wolverhampton with brand-new show *Only Human*. The multi-award-winning 'master of mind control and psychological illusion' stops off at the venue from Tuesday 15 to Saturday 19 April. Further information and tickets are available at grandtheatre.co.uk



James to play Forest Live 2025

Cult indie-rock band James will perform in Cannock Chase Forest next summer as part of the annual Forest Live concert series.

The Manchester band will be joined on Saturday 28 June by indie-rock heavyweights Razorlight and 'people's poet' Jamie Webster. Further information is available at forestlive.com



Hit musical Miss Saigon to return to the Midlands in 2025

Hit musical *Miss Saigon* will return to the region next autumn.

Written by Alain Boublil & Claude-Michel Schönberg - the team behind *Les Misérables* - the epic production will play Birmingham theatre *The Alexandra* from Tuesday 18 to Saturday 29 November.

Commenting on the news, Cameron Mackintosh, who is producing the show in association with Michael Harrison, said: "Thirty-five years after

opened to international success, I am delighted that this powerful, heart-wrenching love story has remained timeless around the world.

"The story of two young people, an American soldier and a Vietnamese girl, who fall in love as their lives are torn apart by war - ultimately causing a mother to sacrifice her life for her child - has become a worldwide hit."

For further information and to book your seat to see the show, visit the website atgtickets.com



Vamos returning with hit show

Worcester full-mask theatre company *Vamos* are once again heading out on tour with their acclaimed show *Boy On The Roof*. Telling the story of an unlikely friendship between a young man struggling with ADHD and a lonely pensioner, the show visits a number of West Midlands venues during February and early March. To find out where and when, go to the company's website at vamostheatre.co.uk

Paul and friends back in the region

Former *America's Got Talent* winner Paul Zerdin will be stopping off at three Midlands venues next autumn as part of a UK tour.

Ventriloquist Paul, who won the hit US TV talent competition back in 2015, will be bringing his brand-new *Jaw Drop* show to Lichfield Garrick Theatre (Wednesday 10 September), Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn (Wednesday 1 October) and the Royal Spa Centre in Leamington (Thursday 30 October). The new show will feature all of Paul's best-known characters, including cocky teenager Sam and witty pensioner Albert. Tickets can be booked via paulzerdin.com



Step Into Christmas for Shropshire Mental Health

Shropshire families are being invited to 'step into Christmas' by attending a 'joy-giving, jingle-bell-rock dance workshop' at Shrewsbury's St Mary's Church. Taking place on the morning of Sunday 15 December, the event is raising funds for Shropshire Mental Health Support Charity. To find out more, visit shropshiremhs.com

A Matter Of Life And Death at the New Vic

A new stage adaptation of the iconic Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger film *A Matter Of Life And Death* features among the spring-season highlights at Newcastle-under-Lyme's New Vic Theatre. Commenting on the news, the venue's artistic director, Theresa Heskins, said: "The New Vic stage and auditorium keeps pushing us to be ever more inventive, both creatively and technically. For Powell & Pressburger's *A Matter Of Life And Death*, a huge challenge is presented - how to create a stairway to heaven in a theatre-in-the-round? I'm looking forward to exploring that challenge with an inspiring creative team, and staging another impossible-to-stage play!" *A Matter Of Life And Death* shows from Friday 28 March to Saturday 19 April. To check out the venue's spring-season programme in full, visit the website at newvictheatre.org.uk

St Chad's free Christmas Tree Festival returns...

St Chad's Church in Shrewsbury is once again hosting its free-to-attend Christmas Tree Festival. The trees will be on display from Friday 13



December to Thursday 2 January. Commenting on the festival, St Chad's churchwarden Joanna Hepper said: "We really would like people to come and enjoy what promises to be a lovely experience in the tranquil atmosphere of our beautiful Georgian church. A Christmas programme of music to entertain visitors will include performances by school choirs and performing-arts groups, as well as the regular Friday Concerts in the Round."



Pomp and pageantry as International Tattoo returns

Birmingham International Tattoo will return with 'three hours of pomp, pageantry and spectacle' in the new year. Taking place at the city's bp pulse LIVE venue on Saturday 8 & Sunday 9 February, the 2025 edition of the hugely popular

extravaganza will feature 'massed marching bands, the skirl of the pipes and drums, the fast-paced action of the field gun and flyball dog races, and the pomp and pageantry of the massed standard bearers'. To purchase tickets, visit bhamtattoo.com

Sam Rabone goes solo!

Lichfield Garrick pantomime favourite Sam Rabone will be back at the venue in the spring with his very own show. Currently appearing in the Garrick's festive-season production of *Jack And The Beanstalk*, Sam will return with his *Big Bostin' Variety Show* on Sunday 16 March. Tickets can be purchased via the theatre's website at lichfieldgarrick.com



Naughty confessions at Newhampton Arts Centre

The internet's 'naughtiest, funniest, cringiest confessions' are set to be revealed at Wolverhampton's Newhampton Arts Centre. Live comedy show *Fesshole* - visiting the venue on Thursday 30 January - will see Rob Manuel 'digging into the bin of unpublished confessions and uncovering the depths of human grotesqueness'. Find out more at newhamptonarts.co.uk

Britpop icons Supergrass to play Ludlow Castle

Britpop icons Supergrass will celebrate 30 years of their classic debut album, *I Should*

Coco, at Ludlow Castle on Friday 25 July, playing the whole record live alongside their greatest hits. The band will be joined by singer-songwriter Jake Bugg and indie favourites The Cribs. Tickets can be bought at the website futuresound.seetickets.com

Severn Valley Railway on the right track...

The Severn Valley Railway (SVR) has been awarded the status of Inclusive Worcestershire Leader, as part of a county-wide initiative. The railway received the award at the inaugural Inclusive Worcestershire Forum. The Forum - which is being run by Worcestershire County Council, Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and Worcestershire Growth Hub - aims to help organisations promote and enhance equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Congratulations to SVR for leading the way!



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02 Dec | Symphony Hall



Home Alone in Concert
09 Dec | Symphony Hall



Christmas with Anton Du Beke
17 Dec | Symphony Hall



The Amy Winehouse Band
18 Dec | Town Hall



The Big Christmas Party
22 Dec | Symphony Hall



The Tiger Who Came To Tea
Various Dates | Town Hall



Ministry of Sound Classical
28 Dec | Symphony Hall

The B:Music team wishes you a very merry Christmas and a 2025 full of live music, cracking comedy & great nights out at Town Hall & Symphony Hall!

bmusic.co.uk/bfestive

Wolves Literary Festival launches poetry contest

The Wolverhampton Literature Festival 2025 poetry competition is now taking entries. Applicants have until midnight on New Year's Eve to submit poems on any subject. The festival itself takes place from Friday 31 January to Sunday 2 February. Further information is available by visiting wolvesliteraturefestival.co.uk

Ella Henderson and Pixie Lott to headline Alderfest

A family-favourite festival will make a return next summer with a music line-up that includes Ella Henderson, Pixie Lott, Vengaboys, Toploader, Dave Pearce, Artful Dodger and Ultrabeat.

Taking place at Alderford Lake on Friday 4 & Saturday 5 July, AlderFest also features a wide variety of children's entertainment, including a climbing wall, a stunt bike show, zorbs and a silent disco.

For more information and to book tickets, visit the website alderfest.com

Hamlet at the Gatehouse

Local actor Benedict Shaw will take the title role in next year's Stafford Shakespeare production of Hamlet at the town's Gatehouse Theatre. The show will run from Tuesday 24 June to Saturday 5 July.



Commenting on the news, Benedict said: "I'm delighted to be making my Stafford Shakespeare debut at the Gatehouse. This is where it all began for me many years ago, and it feels like things have come full circle to be back in my home town at a theatre that means so much to me."

Theatre manager Gary Stevens added: "We've had two wonderful productions since moving Stafford Shakespeare to the Gatehouse, and I'm sure that will continue next year. One of the things we've been looking to do is to provide a platform for local talent, and it doesn't get much better than Benedict, who started out at the Gatehouse Youth Theatre and has now got a successful stage and TV career."

Tickets for the show are now available and can be purchased by visiting the venue's website: gatehousetheatre.co.uk



Christmas Light Show returns to Lichfield Cathedral

Lichfield Cathedral is once again hosting its annual Christmas Light Show this year. Available to enjoy from Monday 16 to Sunday 22 December ('relaxed' presentations take place on the 19th), the display has been created by acclaimed animation team

Illuminos.

Entry includes after-hours access to the Christmas Tree Festival, the cathedral's gift shop and crib... For more information and to buy tickets to see the show, visit the website at lichfieldcathedral.littleboxoffice.com

Classic Rock Show set to make Midlands stop-offs

A show celebrating three decades of 'the world's greatest classic rock music' is visiting three Midlands venues in the new year. Stopping off at Birmingham's Symphony Hall (Sunday 12 January), Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn (Monday 27 January) and Malvern's Forum Theatre (Saturday 8 February), The Classic Rock Show sees a live band 'thundering' through the hits of, among others, Led Zeppelin, The Who, Deep Purple, Pink Floyd, AC/DC, Queen and Fleetwood Mac... Tickets are available at theclassicrockshow.com

Friends parody coming to Wolverhampton Grand

A brand-new production of Friends! The Musical Parody will stop off at the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre next autumn as part of a pre-West End UK tour. Described by its publicity as 'a side-splitting musical comedy packed with all of the iconic moments from all 10 seasons of the beloved television series', the show visits the Grand from Monday 13 to Saturday 18 October.

Tickets are available to purchase now at grandtheatre.co.uk

The magic of storytelling at Stafford Film Festival

Stafford Film Festival returns next month (Friday 31 January) with an eclectic programme of feature films, documentaries, short films, animation, experimental projects and cutting-edge AI-generated works. Taking place at the town's Gatehouse theatre, the event provides a perfect opportunity for filmmakers, film enthusiasts and the local community to connect. For further information and tickets, visit gatehousetheatre.co.uk

Nativity! The Musical at Shrewsbury School

Shrewsbury Musical Theatre Company will be getting into the Christmas spirit this month when they present an amateur production of firm festive favourite Nativity! The Musical.

The hit show, adapted for the stage by Midlander Debbie Isitt from her critically acclaimed 2009 film, runs at Shrewsbury School's Barnes Theatre from Wednesday 18 to Sunday 22 December.

To find out more and book your tickets, visit the website shrewsmusicals.co.uk

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Wed 19 Feb



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Christmas hits & festive fun
That'll Be The Day: So This Is Christmas
Mon 9 Dec



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The Overtones
Thu 12 Dec



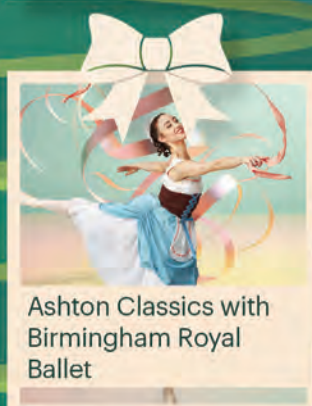
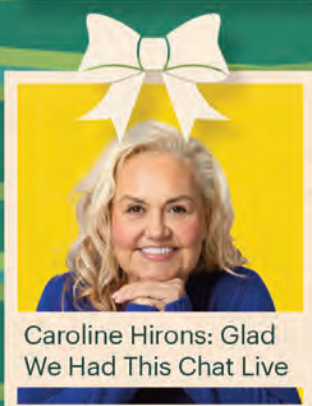
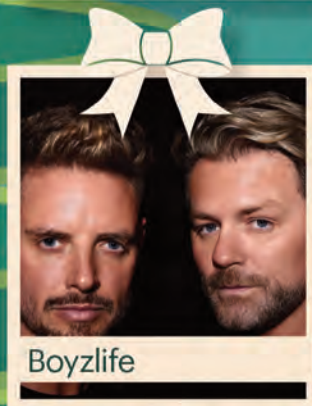
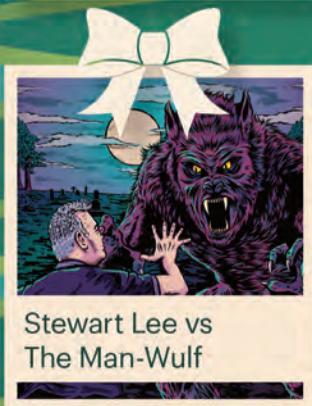
He's up in space man!
Sam Ryder
Fri 13 Dec



The perfect family show
Dear Santa Live by Rod Campbell
Sat 21 Dec

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LARGER THAN LIFE

There are plenty of sizable personalities in evidence at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre over Christmas - as is normal during panto season - but this year look out for a bigger-than-usual presence on stage. Fresh from the BBC's revival of hit 1990s TV series *Gladiators*, Jamie Christian-Johal - better known as Giant - is making his pantomime debut. What's On spoke to the colossal character to find out more...

Pantomime and *Gladiators* might seem an unlikely pairing, but for the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, it's a match made in heaven. This year's production of *Beauty And The Beast* features Giant, one of the stars of the family-favourite TV show. Also known as Jamie Christian-Johal, Giant certainly lives up to his name. Standing at an impressive six feet and five inches tall, he will be making his pantomime debut at the Grand Theatre.

"I'm very excited - slightly nervous, but more excited," he tells What's On. "My first memory of panto, going on a trip as a school kid, was throwing sponges at the stage. I don't know whether there are any sponges in this one, but I'd provide a nice target for the kids..."

The BBC's revival of *Gladiators*, the first series of which ran from 1992 to 2000 on ITV, hit television screens in January this year. Proving an instant ratings success, the second series has already been filmed - and within a year 'Giant' has become a household name.

"What surprised me most is how switched-on kids are with their facial recognition software. They will notice me instantly, whereas you'll see the parents looking and going 'Is it...?'" and looking at their phone. Kids, for whatever reason, just say 'It's Giant!' straight away."

Part of the revival's success might be down to the young people who loved the original show in the 90s passing on their passion to their own children. Finding fame practically overnight might be proving a whirlwind experience, but Giant is delighted to be continuing that tradition of family entertainment.

"It's been great, because the show's been so well received. To have put something out there, and for it to be received like it has been, and to stick with my morals and ethos around fitness and health for the family, and getting the family together on the sofa on a Saturday night watching TV, which is something that I did when I was a kid... What could I not like? It's been amazing!"

Making the leap to another family tradition, Giant has now been fully inducted into the world of pantomime. He's also seriously impressed with the Wolverhampton Grand, a venue which is very different from Utilita Arena Sheffield, where *Gladiators* is filmed.

"The theatre just looks gorgeous; it's so



traditional. I think it's going to feel like home for seven weeks."

All of the *Gladiators* are used to playing to huge crowds - normally while wielding a pugil stick or tackling a contender to the ground - but it will be quite a change to tread the boards in front of a theatre audience. That said, it's not the first time Giant has stepped out into the theatrical limelight - although the circumstances were very different on the previous occasions...

"I have been on stage before - I used to be a bodybuilder. I used to wear tiny pants with fake tan and oil! So there are some similarities - but at the same time, it's very different. I'm wearing more clothes this time - which might be to some people's disappointment!"

It's hard to believe anyone could be disappointed to see Giant's character, Gladus, clad in a shiny, iridescent version of a Roman gladiator's outfit. Of course, he's still got plenty of muscle on display - if any

panto-going bodybuilders happened to be wondering!

To maintain his impressive physique takes a huge amount of time, dedication and hard work. With two panto performances every day - not to mention the rehearsal period - how will Giant stay on top of his fitness routine?

"I'm going to have to work it into the panto schedule, which is pretty hectic. It will involve waking up early, probably at about half five or six, getting a coffee and some breakfast, and then hitting the gym. I find if I start my day like that, I'm mentally and physically ready to take on anything. So that's what I'll be doing every day before the panto. Early starts and late finishes - but if I stick to that routine, I'll just feel better for it."

This year, the Grand's panto cast features a host of musical theatre performers, including original *SIX* Queen Jarnéia Richard-Noel and erstwhile star of *Waitress*, Olivia Mitchell (as Belle). Wolverhampton panto legends Tam Ryan and Ian Adams also make their return, having written the script - for a second year running - that includes a part tailor-made for a *Gladiator*.

There are plenty of experiences to enjoy when taking on the mantle of a pantomime performer, but Giant is most excited about the prospect of meeting and working with new people.

"I'm 39 years old - I think for most people at 39, their friends and family situation is set, their work-life balance is set, and that will perhaps be the future for them as well. The fact that I'm 39 and get to meet all sorts of different people from different fields - experts in their own right - is just fantastic. I feel like I'm living parts of life that I'd perhaps missed out on in the past."

And finally... Giant and his wife, Katie, have two children, who will doubtless be in the audience to witness his panto debut. Are they looking forward to the show?

"Yeah, of course! They want to come and laugh at Dad! They're older - one's 15, one's 18 - but they will still definitely not want to miss this!"

Beauty And The Beast runs at the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre until Sunday 5 January

ALL FOR ONE, AND ONE FOR ALL!

The Three Musketeers ride into Newcastle-under-Lyme...



Newcastle-under-Lyme’s New Vic Theatre is presenting a Christmas show with a difference - one of the greatest adventure stories ever told, with fast-paced action and a dastardly heist to boot! Performed on the venue’s immersive ‘in the round’ stage, The Three Musketeers is a spectacular festive-season treat for theatre-goers of all ages. What’s On spoke to Theresa Heskins, who has adapted the story and directed the play, to find out more about this swashbuckling show...

Seventeenth-century Paris may be a rather unusual setting for a Christmas production, but that’s exactly where Newcastle-under-Lyme’s New Vic Theatre is transporting its audiences this month and next...

The reason? The venue’s festive-season show is a brand-new adaptation of The Three Musketeers - the exhilarating story of Athos, Porthos and Aramis (the titular trio) and the plucky d’Artagnan, who leaves behind him a life on the farm in pursuit of adventure.

The Three Musketeers might not be a traditional choice for a Christmas show, but the decision to adapt the famous novel was taken via a process of consultation with younger members of the local community.

“Every year we do a really special Christmas show,” explains New Vic Artistic Director Theresa Heskins. “It’s a centrepiece in our programme and very popular with local people. Back in January, we consulted with schools and asked what they would like to see this year, and the schools chose The Three Musketeers. Isn’t that fabulous!”

The story instantly conjures up a world of swashbuckling adventure. The tale of the legendary Musketeers is deeply ingrained in popular culture and familiar even to people who have never read the original, or seen one of the (many) adaptations.

“After it was written and published in 1844, it just went global,” says Theresa. “It was published in so many languages across the world and has kept being published, and abridged, and made into movies and cartoons. It’s quite extraordinary.”

The original text, written by Alexandre Dumas, was an epic, so condensing the story into a stage performance lasting under two hours has proved quite a challenge. Theresa, who adapted the novel for this production and has also directed the show, had a huge amount of source material to sift through, particularly in terms of telling the story of the adventure-hungry d’Artagnan - and not forgetting the antagonistic Milady.

“I wanted to tell the story of that young man from a relatively humble background wanting to achieve his ambition. I felt like Milady was an important character as well, so I wanted to make sure that she’s as significant as she is in the novel. She has a backstory of being a thief, so in our production, rather than being a grand lady,

she starts off as a bit of a street thief. Together, their ascent is mapped in parallel.”

The Three Musketeers are famous for their swordplay, so this was one of Theresa’s priorities when casting the show. The initial auditions were large-scale fight workshops, to ensure that the action on stage lived up to expectations.

“One of the big elements of the play is these amazing sword fights, where all the heroes have to defend themselves from evil and villainy. They’re brilliant fighters - they’re really fantastic. I’ve never seen anything like it on stage.”

Dumas’ story was set in the 1620s, and versions of the characters’ costumes have been well documented since its publication - but the New Vic’s production explores different avenues of design.

“We’ve looked at 1620, when it was set, but we’ve also looked at the 1840s, when it was written, and also the 1790s, when France had this massive revolution. Alexandre Dumas had been a kid and grown up in France looking at the results of the revolution and the civil unrest that resulted from it - we’ve combined all of those eras. It’s set in 1620, but it’s got a little bit of the contemporary world as well, so it doesn’t feel old-fashioned.”

Theresa believes audiences will be surprised by the show’s design - but in a good way.

“The costume designer, Lis Evans, has taken the design from the 1620s but also looked at cowboys, looked at what you would wear if you were actually going to fight on a daily basis. Would you wear a floppy hat with a feather in it and a doily collar and cuffs, or would you decide to wear something more practical, with a bit of protection in it? We’ve got a few biker jackets in there... It’s a really epic adventure that we’re offering. I think people are used to our Christmas shows being massive and a feast for the eyes, and each year we have to exceed what we did the last time!”

Christmas shows also have to toe the difficult line of appealing to pretty much everybody - from a selection of school groups to families and friends of any age.

“It’s about finding ways for people of different ages to connect with it. We go quite young - primary schools come in, and I think for them it’s the action and adventure and

the non-stop thrill of it all.”

The team at the New Vic are experienced in creating high-quality productions, with one of their shows for young people, The Princess And The Pea, recently returning to the UK after a stint in New York.

Garnering international acclaim is one thing, but there’s no place like home - particularly when home comes complete with the benefit of an ‘in the round’ stage.

“It’s quite a revelation for children to come to this theatre for the first time and feel like they’re in the story. This one will also be really appealing to teenagers, and I think anybody who’s looking for something to do with their teenage children would find it a great, memorable outing. About a third of our audience are adults who’re just out for their own Christmas treat, not bringing any children with them at all. It’s quite a vast age range to entertain! I think it’s one of the things that theatre-goers enjoy so much as well. They love being in an audience with loads of different people of different ages - especially at this time of year. It’s such a treat.”

There is a large cast to play with this year, but Theresa’s favourite character is, of course, the aspiring musketeer who’s out in the big city for the first time.

“D’Artagnan is just so adorable! He’s a lovely character; just full of optimism and enthusiasm. On the page of the original novel, he’s quite a naive lad. I think he’s so charming, and I think audiences are just going to love him. Lemar Moller, who plays him - this is Lemar’s first job out of drama school - has got this winning charm to him. He’s really nailed the character in a fantastic way - and great fighting!”

“Our Musketeers themselves - what a charming, fantastic group of people! It’s such a pleasure being in the room with them, and this fantastic enthusiasm and energy they’ve got, this positivity... I think audiences are just going to love being in the theatre with them.”

.....

The Three Musketeers shows at the New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, until Saturday 25 January

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Classical music from across the region...



Ex Cathedra: Christmas Music By Candlelight

St John's Church, Hagley, Wed 4 December; St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury, Fri 6 December; Lichfield Cathedral, Tues 10 December; St Mary's Church, Moseley, Wed 11 December; St Peter's Collegiate Church, Wolverhampton, Sat 14 December; Coventry Cathedral, Tues 17 December; St Paul's Church, Birmingham, Thurs 19 - Sat 21 December

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

Under the directorship of its founder, Jeffrey Skidmore, Ex Cathedra this month presents

its atmospheric and much-loved Christmas Music By Candlelight evening, an event that features festive favourites from around the globe and across the ages, interspersed with a variety of seasonal readings.

Nadia Eide: Winter Light

Shrewsbury Abbey, Sun 15 December

"You hit notes that we mortals can only dream of!" So said Sir Tom Jones of Nadia Eide when she appeared on ITV talent contest The Voice.

And he wasn't alone in his admiration of her, with fellow judges Olly Murs, Anne-Marie and will.i.am all similarly blown away.

The Scandinavian-born classical crossover coloratura soprano has gone on to garner further critical acclaim, enjoy chart-topping success, and perform in some of the world's biggest arenas.

She visits Shrewsbury this month in support of recently released album Winter Light, presenting 'a spectacular Christmas concert for all ages' which comes complete with a special guest.



BBC Philharmonic Orchestra: Finlandia

Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 6 December

Residing at the Corporation's Manchester home of Media City in Salford Quays, the BBC Philharmonic are no strangers to Stoke-on-Trent, regularly presenting Victoria Hall concert-goers with works from their impressive repertoire.

This latest presentation, coming in celebration of Finnish Independence Day, sees John Storgårds picking up the baton to conduct a concert featuring Elgar's Violin Concerto - performed by Christian Tetzlaff (pictured) - and two compositions by Sibelius: his fifth symphony and Finlandia.



Halesowen Orchestra: Two Great Symphonies

Halesowen Town Hall, Sat 14 December

The Halesowen Orchestra has been described as one of the town's hidden jewels - a description with which the ensemble's many supporters would no doubt wholeheartedly agree.

Founded in 1986, the amateur group of musicians meet once a week to practise a wide and varied repertoire of works by some of the world's greatest classical composers.

This month's concert features Schubert's eighth symphony (Unfinished) and Glazunov's Symphony No4.

Wombourne & District Choral Society: A Winter's Night

Beckminster Methodist Church, Wolverhampton, Sat 14 December

Presenting a varied repertoire of full-scale classical works, madrigals and part-songs, the well-established Wombourne & District Choral Society this month turn their attention to Cecilia McDowall's A Winter's Night, an engaging Christmas cantata - composed in 2014 - which incorporates a number of popular carols.

Choral Christmas With Jess Gillam

Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Thurs 19 & Fri 20 December

Jess Gillam (pictured) has been described as a musical force of nature, and it's easy to understand why. Routinely blending electrifying

performances with eclectic programming, the 26-year-old musician shot to stardom when she became the first saxophonist to reach the finals of the BBC Young Musician contest, and the youngest-ever soloist to perform at the Last Night of the Proms. Jess here plays her part in a festive-season concert that also features the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the CBSO Chorus, Youth Chorus, Children's Chorus (on the Friday) and CBSO SO Vocal (on the Thursday). Simon Halsey conducts.



FESTIVE FARCE

Christmas comedy as Twelfth Night returns to
the Royal Shakespeare Theatre...



The Royal Shakespeare Company's main-house Christmas show is a star-studded production of Twelfth Night. While offering a few nods to the winter blues, the bittersweet comedy also boasts plenty of humour and farce - as the show's director, Prasanna Puwanarajah, explains to What's On...

The Royal Shakespeare Company typically eschews the work of their titular playwright at Christmas, but this year is one of the exceptions, with a new production of Twelfth Night set to be performed in the venue's main house over the festive period.

The title and winter setting of the poignant drama-meets-farce make it a natural choice in many ways, but director Prasanna Puwanarajah says the latest adaptation will be a seasonal rather than festive show.

"It's a wintry production rather than a specifically Christmas one, and that's in keeping with the play's roots and reality as a winter play," he says. He suggests that there's a "baked-in calendar point" that sits naturally alongside the grief and bereavement that some of the characters are dealing with at the outset.

"There's something about the turn of the year that makes for a time of reflection, where you can take an audit and see how the last year has gone and what the next year might bring. There's also something valuable to be explored in the play about coming out of the festive period. Christmas time for families is not always straightforward [especially] in terms of remembrance and what anniversaries of loss can do to people around this time of year. It's about recovery from grief when the days are short and the nights are long, and you're trying to navigate a dark time of the year in a place of sad remembrance."

All of which might sound a bit doom and gloom, but like so many of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, the play - with the subtitle *What You Will* - has plenty of farce and humour (the jester Feste is widely regarded as one of the Bard's funniest characters) to balance things out.

This year's all-new production has also been sprinkled with some festive sparkle in the shape of a few familiar TV faces. These include Samuel West (*All Creatures Great And Small*, *Slow Horses*), Freema Agyeman (*Doctor Who*, *New Amsterdam*), Gwyneth Keyworth (*Alex Rider*, *The Trouble With Maggie Cole*) and Coventry-born RSC regular Bally Gill (*Slow Horses*, *Interview With The Vampire*).

Prasanna says he couldn't be happier with the mix of old and new hands among the "kind, creative, bold and soulful group of

artists" that has been assembled by casting director Matthew Dewsbury.

"It's a very mixed group, and I think what's nice about it is that everyone brings a different energy and approach. Shakespeare's plays are like any other piece of acting - you have to work out why people do and say the things that they do and say, what's been happening, and how that context feeds people's actions and speech. We're trying to be as empirical as possible, and every one of our 20 cast members has something to bring to that process."

But as the director, how does he marshal that? Even if he knows what he wants to ultimately achieve, does he give the actors much leeway in terms of their performance and interpretation?

"As director, one of the things you're doing is building a single storytelling lens and trying to secure its unity and internal reality - within that, anything may or may not be a valuable direction to go in.

"Another thing you're doing is advocating for the audience which isn't watching it yet; working out what's clear and what isn't clear, and the difference between clarity and legibility - what is the thing actually saying when it's hitting a person for the first time?"

Prasanna also talks about the need for mediation and "marshalling 20 spirits". I suggest that his medical career - he studied medicine at New College, Oxford, and spent three years as a junior doctor - might help with the process, whether that's in terms of having an analytical mind or simply knowing there's a right or wrong way to go about the whole 'procedure'.

"I think what that previous life brings to this is a fascination with people, and how they behave in the varying circumstances of a life lived. But in terms of the processes of directing, there is a kind of diagnostic, strategic toolbox in play, which is to say, what can we see, what can we observe, what can we find, what might be true, and how do those various possible truths intersect at a unifying reality? In medicine, that would be a diagnosis, and in theatre, that would be like a moment delivered in a story.

"So the processes are not dissimilar, but from a practical point of view, any mistakes could not be more divergent."

As for his decision to swap medicine for acting (and subsequently writing and directing), Prasanna - who spent a season with the National Youth Theatre prior to his medical career - is happy to acknowledge that he simply chose to do what he ultimately enjoyed the most.

"Medicine is something that I found phenomenally challenging as a workplace, and I have huge respect for my friends and colleagues who do it. It's just one of those things that I'm happy to acknowledge - I found that I was happier elsewhere... by some distance.

"It's a long life. If you look back at any life and its journey, there are often places where the road doesn't quite make sense, but I guess that's every life lived. Lives don't really ever make sense."

Which arguably sums up much of Shakespeare's work; he certainly understood the human condition, and from it fashioned all manner of dramatic narratives.

"Absolutely, and this play in particular is about people who don't particularly behave logically - because people don't. They're behaving in the context of their history, and that makes sense. But when you look at it from the outside, it doesn't."

As much as Prasanna likes all the "fascination and wonder and courage and chaos and beauty and wonkiness" that manifests itself in *Twelfth Night* - which he claims is the first Shakespeare play he fully understood - he also believes the show makes for an ultimately heartwarming and fun night out.

"It's a production that's hopefully going to explore the play's life and vitality and farce, as well as its sadness. I think there's something about that at Christmastime which makes sense - the chance to come together with friends and family to absorb one of the great artworks as a way of reflecting the year and the next year to come."

.....

Twelfth Night shows at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, from Thursday 5 December to Saturday 18 January

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Live music from across the region...

Dan Owen

Shrewsbury Abbey,
Tues 17 & Wed 18 December

When Shropshire lad Dan Owen released his debut album, *Stay Awake With Me*, back in 2018, he felt like he'd come to the end of a long journey. "It's what I've been working for since I first picked up a guitar at the age of eight," he said. "A lot has happened since then, and the songs on my album cover some of the high and low points, both for me and for some of those closest to me."

The six years since he released the record have seen him significantly swell his fanbase and work methodically on increasing his output, his winning brand of gritty, blues-infused pop/rock being beautifully served by his arresting and husky vocals.



Sam Ryder

Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 13 December

Sam Ryder is that rarest of 21st-century beasts: a UK Eurovision entrant of whom the nation can actually feel proud. Taking second place in the 2022 edition of the competition with the song *Space Man*, the Essex-born singer-songwriter has since been steadily building on his unexpected but mightily welcome Song Contest success. Sam is visiting the Potteries at the end of what's been an industrious few months for him - as well as working hard on his sophomore album, he also played in excess of 30 festivals across the summer. The Stoke stop-off comes as part of a short winter tour.



Travis

The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton,
Mon 9 December

Across an illustrious career stretching back to 1990, Scottish rock four-piece Travis have won numerous major awards - including Brit and Ivor Novello gongs - and produced 10 studio albums, the latest of which, *LA Times*, was released in the summer to

significant acclaim.

"LA Times is our most personal album since *The Man Who*," says lead singer & lyricist Fran Healy. "There was a lot of big stuff to write about back then; the tectonic plates had shifted in my life. I was 22 when I was writing those songs. They were my therapy. Over 20 years later, the plates have shifted again. There's a lot to talk about."

Brave Revival

KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton,
Sat 14 December

With influences including Aretha Franklin, Fleetwood Mac and Led Zeppelin, the five-piece rock & blues juggernaut that is Brave Revival bring a modern interpretation to classic rock vibes. They're visiting the region this month in support of *Fight Or Flight*, their recently released sophomore album. "Lyrically, just about every song [on the album] can be viewed in different ways," explains lead singer Lindsey Bonnick, who feels the record has a very different energy to their 2022 debut offering, *Life's Machine*. "And there's a strong thread around mental health - whether we were writing about things we'd gone through ourselves or experiences picked up from meeting people on the road."

spent the early-1980s vying for chart positions with fellow ska revival bands Madness, The Specials and The Selecter. Hit albums include *Gosh It's... Bad Manners*, *Loonee Tunes!* and *Ska'n'B*.

The Magpies

The Hive, Shrewsbury, Sun 15 December

Showcasing a unique blend of transatlantic folk music, talented three-piece The Magpies features award-winning guitarist, banjo player & singer Bella Gaffney, acclaimed fiddle player & tunesmith Holly Brandon and gifted Midlands-born singer-songwriter & guitarist Ellie Gowers. The band's debut album, *Tidings* - released in June 2020 to considerable critical acclaim - drew on their experiences as women living in the 21st century. Following up with 2022's equally well-received *Undertow*, they continue to make a real name for themselves as champions of gender equality in the music industry.



Bad Manners

The Underground, Stoke-on-Trent,
Mon 9 December; KK's Steel Mill,
Wolverhampton, Fri 27 December

Long in the tooth they may be, but English 2 Tone ska wizards Bad Manners still command a significant following around the globe. Very much a novelty act, courtesy in the main of the on-stage antics of bald-headed frontman Buster Bloodvessel, they

THE VOICE

**Midge Ure welcomes in December at
Birmingham's Symphony Hall**



This month marks the 40th anniversary of the release of Do They Know It's Christmas? - a song co-written by Midge Ure and Bob Geldof to raise money for famine-stricken Ethiopia. Four decades on, royalties from the now-iconic festive hit are still making a difference - as Midge tells What's On...

It's October when I'm interviewing musician and former Ultravox frontman Midge Ure - and we're already talking Christmas. Mind you, it's unavoidable when chatting to the man who, together with Bob Geldof, co-wrote one of the most famous festive songs ever: Do They Know It's Christmas?

The record, which brought together a host of 1980s singers in a Christmas chart-topper to raise money for famine-stricken Ethiopia - and which went on to engender the international concert Live Aid - this year celebrates its 40th anniversary. And Midge is at the heart of projects to mark the occasion. "There's a megamix that's been done utilising all three versions of that song," he says on screen from Portugal, where he's been touring. "Three different generations of artists, all coming together visually and sonically to perform that song, which is quite incredible. I just saw the video, and it's a real reminder of how important that was - and still is, because this situation hasn't changed a great deal; it just spreads.

"There are radio documentaries being done about that whole thing, and the Live Aid Musical has a run in the West End next year, which is great because it's telling the story to a new generation and is a way of generating income for the cause."

But Midge is quick to quash any rumours of another mass live concert.

"Everyone is saying, could we do another Live Aid, but it's a very different world these days when it comes to using that medium to raise awareness and funds."

Midge and Bob signed over the songwriting royalties to the Band Aid Charitable Trust, and for the past four decades, Do They Know It's Christmas? has been earning money and funding projects in Africa. Both Midge and Bob are closely involved as charity trustees.

"All the trustees who were there on day one, the ones who are still alive, are still there. A six-month project has turned into 40 years. We are responsible not just for collecting that money but overseeing where that money is spent, and that doesn't stop.

"One of the realisations we had after the release of the record was that, because it's a Christmas song, it might get played every Christmas - and every time it's played, it raises money, whether it's used in a movie or a soundtrack for something, or there's a new version of it, or it's included in a compilation of Christmas songs.

"So it's going on and on and on. I've been to Ethiopia a few times, but these days the technology allows you to see what's going on

without going there. We just saw a lovely film sent from Ethiopia showing some of the work we fund - so we're still seeing the results."

Midge isn't divulging whether he will be performing the track as part of his new tour, which comes to Birmingham Symphony Hall on the first day of the month. But Catalogue: The Hits Tour will be drawing on decades of writing, producing and performing with groups including Rich Kids, Thin Lizzy, Visage and Ultravox, as well as his solo career.

"The title of the tour says it all. Rather than just choosing Ultravox and Visage stuff, which is what people know, I thought I'd spread out a little and delve into some of the other parts of my career, so the Rich Kids and Thin Lizzy. [It's a] kind of retrospective, going from the late 70s right up to today, incorporating all the hits, the things people would expect to hear, but throwing in a few oddities that maybe I've not performed live before, or certainly not performed live in this format."

Arguably, Ultravox's most famous song is the atmospheric Vienna, the film-noir video for which saw a mist-shrouded Midge dressed in a beige raincoat and singing on the streets of the Austrian capital.

"The first money I ever made I bought that Burberry raincoat. People thought it was crazy spending £300 on a raincoat, but that raincoat became iconic because it was in the Vienna video. When we shot the video, we didn't know Vienna was going to be the big, huge hit that it was. There are key things in your career and you think 'I'll stick that in a cupboard and the kids will think it's funny one day.' And that raincoat happens to be one of them."

And yet the coat is now in a museum in Liverpool!

"There was an exhibition of Scottish music in a museum in Edinburgh. They were doing a display of various iconic Scottish things and asked if they could include that raincoat. It was amazing. They sent down these removal people who deal with antiquities, and they wrapped it all in tissue paper and put it in boxes and sealed it. They told me that when they take it out of the box, they've got white gloves on! It was the same people who do things such as Mary Queen of Scots' dress! And you're like 'This is crazy - it was in a Sainsbury's bag under the stairs in my house for years!' But they treat these things with absolute reverence. Then the British Music Experience in Liverpool came to me to ask if they could include it, which was lovely."

Midge, now 71, still finds it hard to believe

he's a part of the music aristocracy whose mementoes are in museums.

"I think of the reverence I had for other people's music when I was growing up; you know, a David Bowie track, a Roxy Music track or a T-Rex. That was incredibly important to me. And I still find it strange when people tell me what they've done along to my music; you know, buried their parents or got married - seismic moments in their lives. I find it hard to think that my music has been the soundtrack to those moments.

"And meeting people and realising that they know who you are is so bizarre! You can walk into a room and someone says hello and they've read about you, they know about you, they've bought your records. I find that stuff overwhelming."

But as an avid music fan from as far back as he can remember, Midge also understands the excitement of meeting a singer you love.

"You never stop being a fan of whatever it is you were a fan of, or whoever it was you were a fan of. It never goes away, and thank goodness it doesn't. I remember doing a show in Birmingham and Roy Wood came backstage. Roy Wood is one of the greatest pop-song writers ever - he should be up there with Elton John - and I was just absolutely blown away that he came backstage and said that he liked the song If I Was. I was at primary school listening to Fire Brigade and Flowers In The Rain - wonderful stuff - so that was a real Birmingham moment for me."

And Midge is keen to create plenty more Birmingham moments.

"I love touring, and I'm looking forward to playing Birmingham again. I've been doing this a lot longer than I've ever been making records, and the idea of not touring is abhorrent. I've just come back from America, where I toured with just a keyboard player and one tech guy, and I drove eight-and-a-half thousand miles from venue to venue. No crew, no manager, no tour manager - just doing it all ourselves for the love of doing it. And now, for this UK tour, the bonus is that I get a tour manager and a full crew, and all I have to do is walk onstage and perform! You take the plush with the rough, the edgy with the smooth, and you enjoy every second of it."

Midge Ure: Catalogue. The Hits Tour stops off at Birmingham's Symphony Hall on Sunday 1 December

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CHRISTMAS

Comedy previews from across the region...

Jimmy Carr

The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton, Fri 13 December; The Alexandra, Birmingham, Thurs 23 January; Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Sat 15 March; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Fri 16 May; Utilita Arena Birmingham, Wed 10 December 2025

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

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



Milton Jones

Crewe Lyceum Theatre, Fri 6 December; Stourbridge Town Hall, Sat 7 December; Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Sun 16 February; Swan Theatre, Worcester, Fri 7 March; Malvern Theatres, Sun 9 March; Lichfield Garrick, Wed 12 March; Dudley Town Hall, Fri 14 March; Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Sat 15 March; Palace Theatre, Redditch, Sun 16 March; Birmingham Town Hall, Thurs 27 March

Milton Jones has established himself as one of Britain's most in-demand funnymen. "If my comedy's working well, I put a cartoon in people's heads that surprises them," he explains. "So you start off and they're thinking one thing, then you surprise them by changing the ending as you go along. It's not political or particularly edgy, it's just daft. "I think the better the comic you are, the stronger the flavour you are. I think if you're bland and everyone quite likes you, you're probably just not very good."



Live At Christmas

Birmingham Town Hall, Thurs 12 December; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Fri 13 December

A handful of years back, the seriously posh and admirably self-deprecating Ivo Graham almost won the coveted 'best joke of the Edinburgh Fringe' award with a Christmas-related gag...

"I've got an Eton-themed advent calendar," explained Tokyo-born Oxford alumnus Ivo to the assembled throng, "All the doors are opened for me by my dad's contacts."

Ivo will no doubt have a Santa's-sack-worth of other seasonal material when he stops off in the Midlands to host this touring chuckle fest. Sara Pascoe (pictured), Ivo Graham and Lou Sanders appear in both shows. Rhys James and Jin Hao Li join in the fun at Birmingham Town Hall, with Phil Wang featuring on the bill at Coventry's Warwick Arts Centre.

A Laugh Supreme

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Fri 6 December

Debuting this month, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire's (RBC) A Laugh Supreme is described as 'a series of shows bringing together the best of comedy and jazz in the incredible Eastside Jazz Club'.

The opening line-up features Chelsea Birkby, RBC jazz musicians and headliner Simon Munnery (pictured).



Andy Zaltzman

Huntingdon Hall, Worcester, Sun 8 December; Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Fri 28 February; Birmingham Town Hall, Fri 7 March

Sporting a hairstyle that makes him look like Art Garfunkel on acid, Andy Zaltzman is best known for performing comedy routines with a decidedly political bent.

Jokes include: "Politicians are like God. No

one believes in them, they haven't done anything for ages, and they give jobs to their immediate family." Another gag is: "Sperms are communists. Well, Stalinists, really - only one of them gets to achieve anything, and millions of them die for nothing."

Andy Parsons

Foxlowe Arts Centre, Leek, Staffordshire, Fri 6 December

With complimentary reviews (sort of) including such observations as 'what he lacks in hair, Parsons more than makes up for in

originality,' Andy Parsons is a sharp and topical comedian who's well known from TV shows such as BBC's Mock The Week and Live At The Apollo.

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



BUDDY'S BACK!

The supersized stage production of Elf The Musical is returning to the Midlands this month...



A panto-style musical based on popular festive film Elf returns to the region this Christmas, promising a thrilling spectacle for all the family to enjoy. Actor & comedian Jordan Conway, who plays the title role, gives What's On the lowdown on this year's show...

Playing iconic characters in supersized festive productions is becoming a thing for Jordan Conway. Last year, the comic actor took the title role in Peter Pan The Arena Spectacular - alongside Boy George as Captain Hook - and this Christmas he returns in the lead role of Buddy in Elf The Musical Arena Spectacular (there's a theme developing here).

The production is a new adaptation of the 'arena spectacular' (see what I mean?) version of Elf that last toured in 2022, which in turn was based on the 2003 blockbuster holiday movie starring Will Ferrell. Produced by Jordan's father, John Conway, for the duo's theatre company, The World's Biggest Productions, the show takes elements of traditional panto and adds dance, comedy, an array of circus-style acrobatics, special effects and music (songs are written by Tony Award nominees Matthew Sklar and Chad Beguelin). Oh, and there's also a flying sleigh, an audience snowball fight, an indoor snowstorm, a movie-style backdrop and giant LED screens, just for good measure. It's a heady cocktail that makes for a great night out, according to its leading man/elf. Jordan has been involved in four previous versions of the show - though never in the lead role until now - and believes the latest iteration is the best yet.

"It's a really exciting show that has a lot of the traditional values of pantomime, but with circus-style acrobatics and lots of immersive action for the audience to get involved in, like snowball fights and even a stage on wheels that moves round the arena."

There's more comedy this time around, says Jordan, but the story hasn't changed: "It's still the movie story that everybody knows and loves, but more mystical, I'd say. There are more elements of fantasy and comedy than any version there's ever been. Not necessarily because I'm playing the title character, but you've got to bear in mind that I've been doing the show for five years and seen four different Buddys. There's elements of all of them - their good things and each show's good bits - that we've mixed into a melting pot to make what I think will easily be the best version."

The greater amount of circus-style acrobatics

and other dynamics - including a hoop act and roller-skating duo - are another significant change to previous shows. And they also impact the portrayal, as well as the audience's perception, of the lead character, believes Jordan.

"I'm the only Buddy to do a circus performance in the history of the show, so it kind of adds to his wondrous mystical fantasy qualities. So rather than just be a bumbling idiot, or where some people could perceive him as that, we're trying to make Buddy into this magical personality that transforms everybody's spirit of Christmas to match his own."

For the acrobatics, Jordan and co-star Kelly Benlaki spent time training with the Hungarian International Stage Circus School, developing a circus strap act that he hopes will be one of the show's highlights. But coming from a comedy background, Jordan believes that making people laugh is equally - if not more - important than the spectacle and stunts. He also tries to make it different every night ("I can't even do the same show twice in one day, let alone for a year!"), with jokes and attitudes tailored to the particular audience in front of him.

"Earlier in the year, I did a two-week press tour of the country. I dressed up as Buddy and went to different towns where we're playing. It was good to meet some of the locals, understand their type of humour and see what's relevant from town to town. That's particularly good for me because I can tailor my lines and performance to each venue, because there's a different kind of thought process and demographic to each town."

Jordan also has a quite unique approach to getting laughs, making his fellow on-stage actors his audience, rather than the punters sat in the seats.

"I've always thought - ever since I started in comedy, really - that if you're sharing the stage with other performers, you should always try to make *them* laugh rather than the audience. If you can make the people on stage laugh, the audience can tell something's not quite right or someone's smirking or breaking, and it makes them ease in a bit more.

"So rather than going gung-ho and trying to

make every single person laugh, I start with the building blocks of the people on stage, and once everyone feels at ease, it becomes a lot easier."

Jordan admits his adlibbing impulses will be slightly reined for this show, but believes there's more to improvising than just going off-script in search of a laugh.

"This is a big Broadway musical, so I've got to respect the script, but improvisation doesn't just necessarily mean jokes; it can be looks or movement or even costume. It's things that people don't quite think about or realise."

Another inside joke - or at least anecdote - among the cast is how Jordan and fellow actor Barry Bloxham (who plays Buddy's father, Walter Hobs) have come through the ranks in the show. In the first version five years ago, the pair played the two principle characters with the least lines, and now they're the two leads.

"It's a fantastic story for me and him, and we're incredibly grateful and proud and excited to get to show our versions of the characters." Jordan maintains he's thrilled rather than intimidated to be carrying such a big show as its lead star - *and* to be doing so without the foil of a household name such as Boy George, as was the case last year.

"It's a very different thought process with Elf. Buddy's the star, so I can completely immerse myself in the character, and there's absolutely no stress on me, Jordan Conway, at all.

"I'm very comfortable and extremely grateful to be playing a title character again, but it's not a stress or a burden - it's a fantastic opportunity. It's nice that I've got to set the precedent, the attitude, the tone and the positivity within the company, and I love that responsibility.

"I'm a very positive person, especially in rehearsals, and I love entertaining. I'm just very, very excited!"

.....
Elf The Musical shows at BP Pulse Live Birmingham from Friday 20 to Sunday 22 December



The Book Of Mormon The Alexandra, Birmingham, Tues 3 - Sat 28 December

Devised by South Park creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone in collaboration with Avenue Q co-creator Robert Lopez, *The Book Of Mormon* follows the fortunes of a mismatched pair of Mormon boys. The two young men find themselves entrusted with the not-inconsiderable task of preaching the faith to the people of a remote Ugandan village - a place where war, famine, poverty, female genital mutilation, child molestation and HIV/Aids are of far more concern than religion...
Featuring songs Spooky Mormon Hell Dream, I Am Africa, Baptize

Me, All American Prophet and Tomorrow Is A Latter Day, the show has proved a massive hit on both sides of the Atlantic. "It's specifically a Mormon thing that when you're 18 you get paired with someone who's your sudden 'best friend' and sent somewhere crazy in the world," Trey explains. "So this show is really two kids coming out of high school, basically going out into the world and thinking they've kind of got it and they know it all. And then getting their asses handed to them. And I think everyone around the world can relate to that a little bit."

A Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story

The Rep, Birmingham, until Sun 5 January
Mark Gatiss' retelling of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* comes complete with 'spinetling' special effects, a raft of positive reviews - and comedian Rufus Hound.



"The role they offered me in the show - Jacob Marley - was the role Mark himself had played when it was first staged," says Rufus. "So the idea of being in something written by Mark Gatiss, playing a part which Mark had ostensibly written for himself, was too good an opportunity to miss."
Rufus is joined in the show by Matthew Cottle as Ebenezer Scrooge.

The Red Shoes

Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, until Sun 19 January

Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's dark fairytale about a pair of enchanted shoes that take their wearer to places she doesn't want to go, *The Red Shoes* has here been reimaged by Nancy Harris, who adapted *The Magician's Elephant* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2021. The production is helmed by Kimberley Rampersad, making her RSC debut. "Dance is my first love," says Kimberley, 'so for me, the story is really touching because it's a dance story. I also love a female hero, and the thing I love about this fairytale is that she is imperfect, and I really cherish a hero who can still be imperfect. Like Hamlet, there's something incredibly endearing about a character with imperfections and foibles."



BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET

Sir Peter Wright's
The Nutcracker

Must End
Sat 14 Dec

MY FIRST MUSICAL

THE JINGLELEW

Fri 13 Dec -
Sat 4 Jan
2025

ALISON HAMMOND MATT SLACK
DANNY MAC

Peter Pan
THE HIGH-FLYING PANTO ADVENTURE

Sat 21 Dec -
Sun 2 Feb
2025

10 NIGHTS

Thu 6 -
Sat 8 Feb
2025

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THE DANCE LANDSCAPE FOREVER'

MATTHEW BOURNE'S
SWAN LAKE
THE NEXT GENERATION

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Sat 15 Feb
2025

BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET

Cinderella

Wed 19 Feb -
Sat 1 Mar
2025

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BANG BANG**

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Sun 9 Mar
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CALAMITY JANE

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Culture Whisper

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Wed 26 Mar
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HORSES
THE MUSICAL**

Mon 31 Mar -
Sat 12 Apr
2025

'AN EVENING WITH
SIR TIM RICE IS AN ALL TIME HIGH'

TIM RICE

MY LIFE IN
MUSICALS

I KNOW HIM SO WELL

WITH THE
DUNCAN WAUGH BAND
& WEST END SINGERS

Sun 13 Apr
2025



Peter Pan

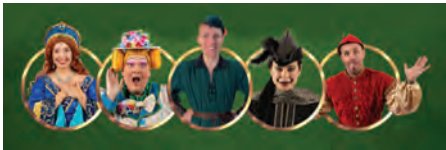
Birmingham Hippodrome,
Sat 21 December - Sun 2 February

A trip to Neverland is on the cards for Hippodrome audiences this Christmas, with the nowadays-near-legendary Matt Slack all set to shiver the timbers as salty seadog Smee, in what will be his 11th consecutive panto at the venue. And, as usual, the show's humour will be aimed at both children *and* adults. "You've got to know where to draw the line and when to push the boundaries," explains Matt. "We are aimed towards a family audience, but we also want to entertain the adults. It's all about double entendre and disguising it - as long as it goes over the kids' heads and the adults are laughing, job done!" Birmingham's very own Alison Hammond will be joining Matt for the second year running, playing the Magical Mermaid. Andrew Ryan and Danny Mac also star.

Robin Hood

Sutton Coldfield Town Hall,
Sat 7 - Tues 31 December

Sherwood Forest's merry men will be making sure the Sheriff of Nottingham has a crushingly calamitous Christmas at Sutton Coldfield Town Hall this month. Presented by TaleGate Theatre, the show is being publicised as 'a traditional pantomime including songs, slapstick and silliness - plus the most dangerous archery competition you ever did see!'



Cinderella

The Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock,
Sat 21 - Sat 28 December

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 pantos. This Prince of Wales Theatre production sees the venue teaming up with Polka Dot Pantomimes. The Peterborough-based company prides itself on producing festive shows bursting at the seams with 'high-energy dance routines, toe-tapping tunes, glittering costumes, spectacular scenery, astounding special effects and a great big dollop of audience participation'.

Dick Whittington

Belgrade Theatre, until Sat 4 January; Artrix, Bromsgrove, Fri 6 - Sun 29 December; Walsall Arena, Sat 7 - Sun 22 December; Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Fri 13 December - Sun 5 January

The story of a young man who heads for London in search of fame and fortune is one of the most popular of all pantomimes - so it's hardly surprising that the intrepid Mr Whittington is turning up in a variety of Midlands venues this Christmas. The Coventry Belgrade version of the terrific tale comes complete with 'breathtaking sets, lavish costumes' and a typically fun-filled script by Iain Lauchlan. At the newly reopened Artrix in Bromsgrove, audiences are being promised 'a hilarious script, spectacular scenery and colourful costumes', while Walsall Arena is hosting a show 'full of singing, dancing and stupendous silliness'. Potteries panto-lovers are in for a real treat too, courtesy of a production that sees Regent stalwarts Jonathan Wilkes, Christian Patterson and Kai Owen once again teaming up to tread the boards.

Goldilocks And The Three Bears

Telford International Centre,
Tues 17 December - Thurs 2 January

The much-loved fairytale, featuring a famously blonde girl who's rather particular about the temperature at which she likes her porridge, seems to have fallen out of favour with panto producers in recent times - so it's

always nice to see a version pop up during the festive season. This one, we're reliably informed, features 'amazing circus acts, great songs, dazzling dance routines, stunning scenery, beautiful costumes and lots and lots of laughs'.

Jack And The Beanstalk

Lichfield Garrick, until Sun 12 January;
Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Fri 6 December - Sun 5 January

Staffordshire is definitely the Midlands county to head for this festive season if you like your Christmas pantomime fun to be of the beanstalk-clambering, ogre-grappling variety. In Lichfield (pictured below, left), Sam Rabone - returning to the Garrick stage as Dame Trott - is once again joined by Ben Thornton (as Billy). Midlands legend Gill Jordan - best known as 'lazy cow' Doreen Tipton - will be donning wings and waving a wand as Fairy Sugarsnap... Over in Stafford, meanwhile, the Gatehouse (pictured below, right) is promising a show packed with 'great jokes, bad jokes, terrible jokes, lots of laughs, music, dancing and magic beans!'



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THE MAGIC OF THE BEE GEES



WED 29 JAN '25
SUPREME QUEEN



FRI 31 JAN '25
QUEENZ – DRAG ME
TO THE DISCO!



SAT 1 FEB '25
RENDEZVOUS



The Smeds and the Smoos

Must end Sun 29 Dec

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Christmas-season productions around the region



Beauty And The Beast

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, until Sunday 5 January; Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, Sat 7 December - Sun 5 January; Ludlow Assembly Rooms, South Shropshire, Thurs 12 - Mon 30 December

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 - now, what about the panto element? Well, it's fair to assume plenty of traditional aspects of pantomime will be in evidence in the three above-listed productions; we're thinking custard pies, double entendres, slapstick comedy and hilariously costumed

Dames... The Grand Theatre version (image left) brings together Gladiator's Giant with Six star Jarneia Richard-Noel and panto favourites Tam Ryan and Ian Adams. And speaking of panto favourites, Sean Dodds (image right) makes a welcome return at Leamington's Royal Spa Centre

Aladdin

Swan Theatre, Worcester, Mon 2 December - Sun 5 January

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



Sleeping Beauty

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, until Sun 12 January; Palace Theatre, Redditch, Mon 9 December - Sun 5 January

The gang is back together at Theatre Severn this Christmas, starring in a panto version of Sleeping Beauty (image left). Writer Paul Hendy has cooked up a storm, delightful Dame Brad Fitt has taken the directorial reins and also stars as Nurse



Nellie, and Tommy J Rollason is wowing the crowds as juggling jester Jangles... There are familiar faces returning at the Palace Theatre in Redditch too (image right), with 'impressionist extraordinaire' Andrew Fleming and 'Redditch's favourite tap-dancing panto Dame', Simon Howe, once again contributing to the venue's festive-season offering. X-Factor 2017 winner Myles Stephenson and Bad Girls and Emmerdale star Nicole Faraday also feature.

The Fairy Godmother of all Pantomimes!



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THOMAS MEEHAN
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Music by
MATTHEW SKLAR

Lyrics by
CHAD BEGUELIN

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Only Fools And Horses

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent,
Mon 2 - Sat 7 December

Become reacquainted with loveable rogue Del Boy in this touring version of the hit West End musical. Based on John Sullivan's classic BBC TV sitcom, the stage show is co-written by comedy legend Paul Whitehouse and John's son, Jim. Much-loved characters Rodney, Cassandra, Grandad, Boycie and Marlene are all present and correct, as are more than 20 'hilarious' songs and a re-worked version of Chas & Dave's iconic theme tune.

A Nightmare Before Christmas

Albany Theatre, Coventry, Sun 15 December

Fancy a spine-tinglingly gruesome Victorian horror story or several for Christmas? If so, then be sure to get along to this festive fear-fest, to hear about the man whose Christmas Morning gift to his daughter was a knife across her throat, and the young girl who burnt herself to death looking up the chimney for Father Christmas. The show is presented by crime historian Adam Wood.

Done To Death By Jove

Bridge House Theatre, Warwick,
Thurs 5 December

A spoof homage to 'the great British detective tradition', Done To Death, By Jove finds a hapless pair of theatrical troupers attempting to perform a show that actually requires the input of not just two but half a dozen thespians...

Problem is, the other four actors are stuck in a broken-down van on the M6...



A Christmas Carol

Stourbridge Town Hall, Tues 10 December;
Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock, Thurs 12 December

Of all Charles Dickens' festive stories, A Christmas Carol reigns supreme. The covetous sinning of the miserly Scrooge, the

eternal hope offered by Tiny Tim, the eerie visions of redemption - visiting Ebenezer in the shape of his long-deceased partner Jacob Marley and three seasonal ghosts - all combine to give the tale a real olde worlde charm...

This Crime And Comedy Theatre Company version of the story is being presented as a live-on-stage radio play and stars one-time Blue Peter presenter Peter Purves and former Doctor Who Colin Baker (pictured).

And speaking of ex-Doctors, Tom Baker makes a 'specially recorded appearance' as Jacob Marley.



The Wizard Of Oz

Old Rep, Birmingham, until Tues 31 December

This classic story from the pen of L Frank Baum has been delighting children for over a century. A marvellous mix of magic, mayhem and munchkins, it tells the story of Dorothy Gale and her unexpected trip over the rainbow to the wonderful land of Oz. There, she meets a scarecrow, a tin man and a cowardly lion, heads off on a journey along the yellow brick road to find the Emerald City, and has more than one unpleasant encounter with the Wicked Witch of the West...

If ever a ruby-slipped girl was in need of a wonderful wizard...

The BOA Group is the company behind the show. The Wizard Of Oz is their ninth Christmas production at the Old Rep Theatre.

Christmas Present & Correct

Lichfield Garrick Fri 6 December -
Sun 5 January

The much-loved New Old Friends make a welcome return with a brand-new Christmas farce - not to mention a solemn promise that all their usual motifs (witty wordplay, theatrical set-pieces and small-cast, multiple-role mayhem) will be present and correct.

The Brothers Grimm: The Night Before, The Night Before Christmas

The Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton upon
Trent, Tues 17 - Tues 24 December

"Two brothers are on a quest to collect all the words in the world," explain the Buxton-based Babbling Vagabonds in talking about their new festive-season show. "But a swirling snow storm stops them in their tracks. As they desperately try to work out how to get home in time for Christmas, the words they have gathered tumble out into magical adventures..."

"So why not join us on a spellbinding journey filled with stories about mischievous goats, clever hedgehogs - and a funny little man who spins straw into gold..."



JINGLE CLAW THE WAY

There's a grumpy monster making mischief at
Birmingham Hippodrome this Christmas...



Birmingham Hippodrome is this Christmas premiering a festive show with a difference. A brand-new musical for young children, The Jingleclaw is the first production commissioned by the venue's New Musical Theatre Department. The monstrous title character is played by Birmingham actress - and one-time SIX Queen - Alexia McIntosh, who caught up with What's On to tell us more...

With a sea of traditional Christmassy fun on offer around the city - not least the legendary panto on the stage next door - Birmingham Hippodrome's Patrick Studio is this year hosting a truly unique festive production which has its roots in old Scandinavian folklore. Recommended for children aged three upwards and billed as 'the perfect first musical', The Jingleclaw features original music, playful puppetry and a mischievous monster (the title character).

The Jingleclaw is played by Birmingham actress Alexia McIntosh, who performed as Anna of Cleves in the first UK tour of hit musical SIX. She's no stranger to the Hippodrome, having appeared in its annual pantomime two years ago, but this year she's a very different character.

"It's a children's musical, a proper musical," says Alexia. "The music's wonderful, the set's amazing, the costumes are amazing, we've got puppetry... Just to be a part of a child's first musical is so magical, especially at this time of year. It's going to be a memory that they'll treasure, and to know that you've been a part of that is just so special - it's a blessing."

The play is the very first musical commissioned by the Hippodrome's in-house New Musical Theatre Department - the first of its kind in the UK. The department has two main aims: to develop musical theatre talent and to produce new musicals on and off the venue's stage.

"I feel really privileged to be doing the first musical here for the department, and making history - in my home town as well! It's a win-win - home for Christmas, and being a part of this special production. The cast are so lovely, the team is so supportive, and we all just want to do a great job."

It's clearly a worthwhile endeavour, especially as musicals are the bread and butter of the Hippodrome's annual programme. But just who is this mysterious title character?

"I'm a monster that has woken up. I hate festive cheer, and festive music makes me

sick! It gives me a rumbly tum, and I don't like children... When I wake up, I've got a crew of bats and they let me know that there's a festival called the Shnootnoot going on."

The Shnootnoot Winter Festival's school-band performance, headed by one Mrs Whimsey, features Astrid, who marches to the beat of a different drum...

"She's fed up of Mrs Whimsy's boring musical structures, and she wants to break out with the band. She plays the drums. It's up to her to save the day - and save the kids from the stomach of Jingleclaw! It's lots of fun."

The musical is composed by Tim Gilvin, with a book by Robyn Grant - two of the creatives responsible for Unfortunate, the X-rated musical inspired by The Little Mermaid's sea witch. The Jingleclaw is firmly family-friendly, however, and Alexia thinks that the Patrick Studio suits the show down to the ground.

"It's so intimate, and I think the children will really be immersed in the world that we're creating. The set is amazing - it's not what you're going to be expecting! I think people expect me to come out in a traditional monster costume, and it's not that. The actor-musos are amazing; the music is just beautiful. The Patrick Studio is really intimate. The audience will feel immersed; they'll feel like they're part of the school band. And we've got lots of puppetry."

Alexia was born, raised and even trained in Birmingham: "I went to the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. I had a great time. I was there for three years and got my BA in acting. My son was about three when I graduated, so he's been on this journey with me. Even in the production of SIX that I was in, I was travelling back and forth every day from Birmingham to London, doing school runs and then playing Cleves in a matinee and evening show! It's been full-on, but I wouldn't change it - being an actor-mommy and being a part of the experience is just wonderful. My son's 15 now - Year 10. He's

been on this journey with me for a long time."

Performing in Birmingham not only makes for a much easier commute, but Alexia has discovered that she's working with a few familiar faces on her return to the Hippodrome.

"I did a show with Chris Sudworth, our creative director, at The Old Rep when he was there. We did The Wind In The Willows as part of a collaboration with BOA (Birmingham Ormiston Academy). It was a massive production company-managed by Hannan Finnegan, so it's come full circle - working with Chris again and having Hannan as company stage manager, it's like a big family reunion!"

A family reunion sounds like something the Jingleclaw would run a mile from - or perhaps gobble up! Does Alexia feel the same way about the festive season?

"Not at all! I love this time of year. You never know what the year's going to bring, but I think the thing we all feel towards the end is - tired! We need that break. We need that togetherness and that recharge of family, love and giving. It's just a special time of the year. I'm very much for the festive cheer, the music, the eating, the cooking and the presents... Having a child myself, Christmas is always a highlight of the year."

This show is also all about the children, and Alexia is sure that there are plenty of treats in store for young audience members - even though she's playing a fearsome creature...

"I think they'll love the live music. When they see the puppetry and the bats - it's like the Muppets! There are so many elements that I think they're going to like - and then the monstrosity of Jingleclaw! She's like a cross between Mrs Trunchbull and the Grinch. I think they're going to love me and hate me at the same time."

.....

The Jingleclaw shows at Birmingham Hippodrome from Friday 13 December until Saturday 4 January.

Dear Santa Live

Stourbridge Town Hall, Sun 8 December; Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Sat 21 December; Dudley Town Hall, Mon 23 & Tues 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...

The Owl Who Came For Christmas

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Wed 11 - Tues 24 December

With toe-tapping songs and captivating puppetry to recommend it - not to mention plenty of audience participation - this heartwarming yuletide yarn focuses on a family's festive-season attempts to help a little owl find her way back home to the forest. The show is followed by a meet & greet with the cast.



The Smeds And The Smoos

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, until Sun 29 December

Another Tall Stories adaptation of a picture book by award-winning collaborators Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, The Smeds And The Smoos tells the intergalactic tale of a young Smed and a young Smoo who fall hopelessly in love. Problem is... the red-coloured Smeds and the blue-coloured Smoos never mix, causing Romeo & Juliet-style complications for the star-crossed lovers... Created for children aged three-plus, this theatrical presentation of Donaldson & Scheffler's delightful space romance comes complete with a powerful but gently conveyed message about difference and tolerance.

A promotional poster for the play 'Finding Santa' by Little Angel Theatre. The background is a dark blue night sky with falling snow. In the foreground, two children dressed as elves are looking at each other. The child on the left is wearing a red hat and a white shirt with a red scarf. The child on the right is wearing a red hat and a white shirt with a red scarf. They are holding a red bag with 'EXPRESS ELF MAIL' written on it. In the top left corner, the Little Angel Theatre logo is visible. In the top right corner, the title 'Finding Santa' is written in large white letters. In the bottom left corner, there is a 'Book now' button with a QR code. In the bottom right corner, there are logos for the Arts Council England, Mac Midlands Arts Centre, and the People's Postcode Lottery. Two inset images show a child holding a reindeer puppet and a child holding a white mouse puppet.

Little Angel Theatre

Finding Santa

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Wed 20 Nov - Sun 29 Dec | Ages 4+

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The Jingleclaw

Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome, Fri 13 December - Sat 4 January

Set in a cosy village in the snowy mountains, Birmingham Hippodrome's brand-new musical, *The Jingleclaw*, tells the story of a young musician named Astrid and the mischievous forest creature of the title. Created with three- to seven-year-olds in mind, the show stars Birmingham's very own Alexia McIntosh (*SIX The Musical*) in the title role and is directed by Anthony Lau. "Nurturing the next generation of theatre makers and goers is so important," says Anthony. "And it's brilliant that Birmingham Hippodrome recognise this and see the value in investing in great work made especially for them. With *The Jingleclaw*, we're setting out to make a new musical for the whole family, and we can't wait to share the magic of that musical with them! With bats. And a power ballad. And a naughty, cuddly monster who can't stand festive cheer."

The Snowflake

The Rep, Birmingham, Thurs 5 December - Sun 12 January

Birmingham Rep here teams up with Polka Theatre and Little Angel Theatre for a stage adaptation of Benji Davies' enchanting and timeless wintertime tale. Presented in the venue's Door studio, the show tells the story of a snowflake, a little girl and her Pappie - all longing for their own special place in the world...

Finding Santa

Midlands Arts Centre (mac), Birmingham, until Sun 29 December

An interactive production for young audiences performed by the highly acclaimed Little Angel Theatre, *Finding Santa* presents a heartwarming Choose Your Own Adventure story that answers the age-old question of how letters get to Father Christmas at the North Pole - and what happens when things don't go quite according to plan!



The Tiger Who Came To Tea

Birmingham Town Hall, Fri 27 December - Sun 5 January

Everybody's favourite tea-guzzling tiger is back in town, dropping in on Sophie and her mum just as they're settling down for an afternoon cuppa...

Adapted by David Wood from the late Judith Kerr's 1968 book of the same name, this 55-minute show features singalong songs and plenty of magic - not to mention a big, stripey tiger, of course!



The Father Christmas Show

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, Wed 11 - Sun 15 December

Songs, magic and festive cheer are here thoughtfully combined in a show that sees Father Christmas deciding to give his beloved wife a well-earned rest. But with a to-do list as long as his arm, the big fella and his elves need some extra help in preparing for Christmas - which is where the younger

members of the audience may well come in handy...

Santa's Christmas Cracker

Mitchell Arts Centre, Stoke-on-Trent, Sat 7 - Sun 8 December; Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock, Tues 10 December; Festival Drayton, Market Drayton, North Shropshire, Fri 13 December

A family show that's particularly suitable for children between the ages of two and seven, *Santa's Christmas Cracker* features the adventures of Dotty the Elf and Pompo the Penguin, much-loved festive songs including *Jingle Bells*, *Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer* and *The Twelve Days Of Christmas*, and the chance for youngsters to say a big hello to the man himself.

Father Christmas

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Thurs 5 - Sun 29 December

Raymond Briggs is best known for his story about a little boy who makes friends with a snowman - but talented theatre company Pins And Needles (in collaboration with Lyric Hammersmith Theatre) are this month promoting one of the author's other, equally charming festive tales...

Suitable for children younger than six years of age, *Father Christmas* features songs, live music, playful puppetry, secret doors, hidden hatches and plenty of trademark Briggs humour. Expect your youngsters to be suitably impressed.



WINTER WONDERLAND

Join Alice on a journey down the rabbit hole
at Coventry's Albany Theatre this Christmas!

After staging adaptations of Charles Dickens tales for its last three festive shows, Coventry's Albany Theatre is taking a 'hole' new approach this year, with a seasonal version of Alice In Wonderland. Chief Executive & Artistic Director Kevin Shaw tells What's On about the theatre's recent refit, and explains why he was attracted to the challenge of tackling Lewis Carroll's seminal children's book...

After a busy year overseeing the completion of the theatre's £3million redevelopment, Kevin Shaw, the Albany Theatre's chief executive and artistic director, is finally getting back to his first love - working with actors and directing stage plays.

It's something he's largely had to put on the back burner during the protracted work, but he's clearly happy with the result, which has seen the venue's impressive Art Deco main house joined by a new studio space as well as a dramatically (no pun intended) improved foyer area. The new elements were officially launched in October, just in time for Kevin to switch back into director mode for the rest of the year, as he takes the reins of the all-important festive production. There's a definite sense of excitement, as well as relief, in his voice.

"It's great now we've got it all, but it's been a struggle - that's what capital programmes are like. Now we're gradually ramping up what we do in our new spaces, developing more links into community groups, making sure it's all accessible and so on."

The community aspect is all-important on a number of levels, not least because the theatre has been run as a charity ever since it reopened in 2013 and owes a huge debt to the army of volunteers that work alongside its core professional team. Kevin is under no illusions about how much they contribute to the success of the venue - and particularly its in-house productions (the sets for which are all created by volunteers) - and believes community spirit is key.

"If they have ownership of the theatre - which they clearly do because they are volunteers who give their labour for no money - they will always go the extra mile to make it the best it can be."

And that goes for this year's festive show, Alice In Wonderland, which sees a change of tack for both director and venue after three years of Charles Dickens' adaptations. The Albany productions of A Christmas Carol (2021 and 2022) and Oliver Twist (2023) earned plenty of acclaim - as well as guaranteed secondary school interest courtesy of the GCSE syllabus - but Kevin says he was always keen to expand the palette.

"We want to get to a point where the title doesn't matter; it's the Albany Christmas

show which is important, and that's why people come. I know the Old Vic in London does A Christmas Carol every year, but I just think that, creatively, for all of my regular collaborators, and myself, the idea of doing the same show every year would start to get quite stilted.

"The rationale for Alice In Wonderland is that I wanted to aim at a slightly younger audience - obviously a family audience, but families with younger children. It's paying real dividends with the primary schools, as we're doing very well with bookings, which is terrific."

Targeting a younger audience also means the show's run will continue during the lucrative period between Christmas and New Year for the first time. There's a good reason - "It's an absolute seller of a week because everyone's on holiday and looking for things to do with the children" - but Kevin's having none of it when I suggest the show will be lighter fare for youngsters compared to the darkness inherent in the Dickens material.

"Oooh, I might take issue with you on that! Alice is quite a dark story, especially when you think of the Duchess' 'speak roughly to your little child and hurt him when he sneezes' line, or the insane world where it takes place. We won't be going down the Disney route; think more Tim Burton. It won't be as dark as his film version - it is Christmas, after all - but we won't shy away from some of it."

Kevin also hasn't shied away from what he feels is the theatre's responsibility to invest in what he calls the "local arts ecology", particularly actors that reflect the diverse population of Coventry.

"Everybody needs to be able to say 'there's someone like me on that stage' - that's really important to me. Where possible, I try to employ creatives and actors who are based in Coventry or the broader West Midlands. It's important for people to know that, because it's all about ownership, and the audience can say that the people on the stage are our neighbours. I think that creates much more of a sense of ownership of the theatre and the product - which is part of what theatre should be about."

This year's seven-strong cast, all of whom will play more than one role ("We can't afford to have every character represented by a

separate actor"), is made up of four newcomers and three returnees from previous shows. Kevin likes an element of continuity but is excited by the new blood, too.

"It's really helpful in the rehearsal room if people understand how I work, but at the same time I don't want it to become a clique - I want to offer opportunities across the piece, which is why there's some new and some old hands."

Knowing the number and make-up of the cast also gave him an added focus when adapting Lewis Carroll's book for the stage: "I don't want my actors to spend time in the dressing room, because what's the point of paying them to sit there? I'd much rather have them all on stage as much as I possibly can."

And like the last three festive shows, the staging - created by those volunteers we mentioned earlier - is likely to play almost as big a role as the actors.

"I'm not going to give too many spoilers away about the design, but I can say that this year we're aiming to use state-of-the-art technology and old theatrical techniques. It's going to be a mixture of the two that I think will make for a visually stimulating evening and really exciting staging."

He also accepts that those old-school skills will particularly appeal to younger members of the audience.

"If you go to the theatre, you have to suspend your disbelief and invest your imagination in the show. I'm particularly interested in young children who really do that, and I want to make sure there's something for them to get absolutely engaged with."

"It's an absorbing story in the first place - I used to read it to my children as a bedtime story, and I'm sure generations have done that. But we're going to find the humour in it and present it in a way that's visually stimulating and asks everybody to engage their imagination."

.....
Alice In Wonderland shows at the Albany Theatre, Coventry, from Saturday 7 to Sunday 29 December



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Christmas With Anton Du Beke

Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Thurs 5 December; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Sun 15 December; Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Tues 17 December

An evening of cherished Christmas songs and captivating dances is Anton Du Beke's yuletide gift to his legion of Midlands-based fans this month.

The much-loved Strictly Come Dancing judge is joining forces with critically acclaimed vocalist Lance Ellington, a 'dynamic' live band and a troupe of 'extraordinary' dancers to present a production in which he's promising to take audiences on 'a dazzling journey into a festive wonderland'.

If his previous shows are anything to go by, this really should be a fab-u-lous experience!

Michael Marouli Christmas Roast

Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton, Wed 4 December; The Glee Club, Birmingham, Sun 8 December

RuPaul's Drag Race UK contestant Michael Marouli makes two Midlands stop-offs this month with a brand-new show.

Michael describes the Roast as very much 'in the spirit of camp, filthy, festive fun' - but also warns that it's most definitely not for the fainthearted!



The Rat Pack - A Swingin' Christmas At The Sands

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Thurs 5 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 and White Christmas.

Murder Before Midnight: A New Year's Eve Whodunit

Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham, Tues 31 December

If you've not yet finalised your plans for New Year's Eve, how about signing up for the Old Joint Stock's murder-mystery evening? Kick off the night with a two- or three-course meal, then dive into 'a thrilling whodunnit' presented by the critically acclaimed Murder In Mind ensemble. The event wraps up before midnight, ensuring there's plenty of time to enjoy the big countdown to 2025!

Step Into Christmas

Birmingham Town Hall, Tues 10 December; Dudley Town Hall, Thurs 12 December

Warm-hearted family spectacular Step Into Christmas is the ideal show for anybody who fancies spending a relaxing evening enjoying a jukebox-worth of festive-season hits. Expect all the favourites, including Last Christmas, Let It Snow, A Winter's Tale, Merry Xmas Everybody and White Christmas.



Fairytale Of New York

Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Sun 15 December

Fairytale Of New York visits the Midlands 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 production that should well and truly put you in the Christmas spirit.



The Snowman

Birmingham Town Hall, Sun 15 December

Multi-award-winning Carrot Productions' Christmas family favourite sees a screening of Raymond Briggs' 1982 animated classic being accompanied by a live professional orchestra.

There are two Town Hall showings of the film on the 15th - at 1.30pm and then again at 4pm. The earlier presentation also features a screening of The Snowman And The Snowdog; the later one, The Bear, The Piano, The Dog And The Fiddle. Both of these additional films will be accompanied by the orchestra. A visit from the Snowman himself further adds to the festive fun.

DOWN T'PIT!

Royal Ballet Sinfonia's mesmerising music is helping to bring Birmingham Royal Ballet's The Nutcracker to life...



Birmingham Royal Ballet's enchanting production of The Nutcracker remains a firm festive favourite with Midlands audiences. But whilst eyes are fixed on what's happening on stage, there's another kind of magic being conjured up in the orchestra pit below. What's On recently caught up with the company's music director, Paul Murphy, to find out more...

Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* has some of the best known and most loved music of any ballet. From the Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy to the Dance Of The Mirlitons, the ballet's tunes have enchanted audiences for generations.

The music is an integral reason why *The Nutcracker* remains so popular today - and for Birmingham Royal Ballet's (BRB) production, a great deal of work goes into ensuring that every note is perfect.

Music Director Paul Murphy certainly knows a thing or two about *The Nutcracker*, having been involved in numerous performances since he joined BRB in 1992, just two years after Sir Peter Wright created the company's iconic production. And Paul says it is one of the most popular scores for a very good reason.

"Tchaikovsky wrote three ballet scores, *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. *The Nutcracker* is the third chronologically, and I don't think a lot of people would dispute that it's also the best. It's more concise than the other two, but it's like a jewel; a pearl in an oyster shell.

"It's perfection musically - quite symphonic in Act One, whereas Act Two follows the classic 19th-century ballet tradition of divertissements, which are short, characterful, balletic episodes. Every one of these is astounding in terms of scoring and orchestral colours."

The Nutcracker score is performed by the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, the company's permanent orchestra. The musicians initially rehearse the work in London and come to Birmingham Hippodrome for final rehearsals ahead of opening night.

The orchestra needs fewer rehearsals for *The Nutcracker* than most other works because the musicians are largely familiar with it - but it still has its challenges.

"It's not an easy score to play, even though we've been performing it since 1990," says Paul, who studied conducting at the Royal Academy of Music. "It poses technical challenges for every section of the orchestra, but Tchaikovsky also allows each solo instrument to shine.

"It's also difficult for the conductor, particularly in Act One. There are many

pitfalls where we must be ultra careful with the pacing, clarity and the shaping. It needs to feel that we are building the drama, leading towards the battle with the rats and the soldiers, as well as navigating the rhythmically tricky *Waltz Of The Snowflakes*, complete with children's choir!"

But the results are there for all to hear.

"A lot of the distinct beauty of the music is down to Tchaikovsky's instrumentation. For example, he introduced the celeste - a keyboard instrument invented only six years before the ballet's premiere - for the very first time into symphonic repertoire in *The Nutcracker*.

"Legend has it that he smuggled the instrument into Russia so that his colleagues Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov wouldn't get hold of it before he did! Can you imagine a more perfect sound for the Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy?"

"Then there are other instrumental choices, such as the three flutes for the Dance Of The Mirlitons, the plaintive oboe and cor anglais in the Arabian Dance, the tambourine in the Trepak and the luscious cellos in the Grand Pas de Deux. Sheer genius."

Paul became BRB's principal conductor in 1997 and took over as music director earlier this year. Over the years, he has conducted countless BRB ballets, as well as performing as guest conductor with numerous companies across the globe, including New York City Ballet, The National Ballet of Japan, Tokyo Ballet, Acosta Danza and BalletBoyz. He admits to having a soft spot for BRB's *The Nutcracker*.

"Even though I've been conducting it since 1992, I've never tired of it. Every performance feels like a fresh start to me, and of course the piece's appeal is obvious because it reaches out to families.

"Children of all ages can be captivated by the Sugar Plum Fairy, by the spectacle of having the fireplace transform, by the huge goose flying across the stage, by Drosselmeyer with all his magic tricks, and of course the amazing Christmas tree. And especially by the wonderment of Clara, who represents the child in all of us.

"It's a very special piece both visually and aurally. I don't think it will ever lose its

appeal. That's why it has remained in the repertory of most ballet companies around the world. It is the most unique ballet ever created."

As music director, Paul is responsible for musical standards across the company, including its trailblazing Constant Lambert Conducting Fellowship, which offers a young conductor two years of intensive mentoring with BRB and Royal Ballet.

"The Constant Lambert Fellowship is special. No-one else around the world is doing this for ballet. We are leading the way in Birmingham and London by creating conducting opportunities in ballet for young conductors.

"So far, we have been so lucky, not just in the quality of the conductors but also in the fact that they've wanted to remain with us after the process. So we've built up a very fine pool of guest conductors because of the Fellowship."

This year's Constant Lambert Fellow, Yi Wei from China, will be conducting some performances of *The Nutcracker*, as well as the company's upcoming production of *Cinderella* - which tours the UK between February and April - and one work in the Ashton Classics programme, which plays at the city's Symphony Hall on Saturday 15 February.

Birmingham Royal Ballet's *The Nutcracker* underwent a major rebuild two years ago, with new sets and costumes, and Paul says the results are amazing.

"My goodness, the opening scene when the curtain goes up is what we call the Red Room, and it was only when it was refurbished that we were able to remember the vividness of the red. The designer, John Macfarlane, had clearly envisioned a room which was beautifully opulent. This is now very apparent, as well as many other restorations to sets and costumes that have greatly enhanced the production."

.....
Birmingham Royal Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker* shows at Birmingham Hippodrome until Sat 14 December

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Film highlights in December...

Mufasa: The Lion King

CERT PG (120 mins)

With the voices of **Aaron Pierre, Kelvin Harrison Jr, Seth Rogen, Billy Eichner, John Kani, Thandiwe Newton**
Directed by **Barry Jenkins**

The prequel to Disney's 2019 photorealistic CG animation remake of 1994's *The Lion King*, *Mufasa* tells the story of a lost-and-alone cub who meets a sympathetic lion named Taka - the heir to a royal bloodline.

The chance encounter sets in motion an expansive journey for an extraordinary group of misfits. As they search for their destiny, the companions must also work together to evade a threatening and deadly foe... The 2019 remake of *The Lion King* didn't play too well with the critics, being accused of lacking the charm of the original, so it will be interesting to see how *Mufasa* is received. That said, Disney is unlikely to be overly concerned by negative reviews if the film manages to match its predecessor's performance at the box office: the 2019 movie brought in a staggering \$1.6billion worldwide! **Released Fri 20 December**



Kraven The Hunter

CERT 18 (127 mins)

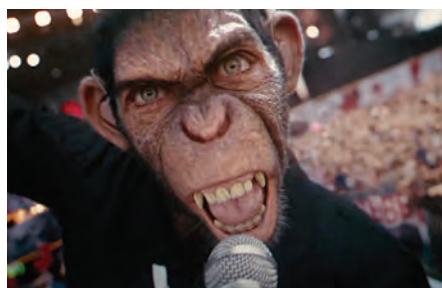
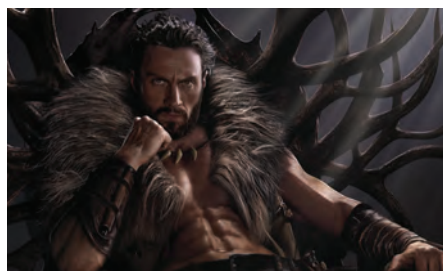
Starring **Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Russell Crowe, Ariana DeBose, Christopher Abbott, Fred Hechinger, Alessandro Nivola**
Directed by **JC Chandor**

In the wake of relatively poor box-office returns for many of the more recent blockbuster superhero movies, Hollywood filmmakers have been left wondering if cinemagoers are, finally, tired of the genre. If they are, it's unlikely that *Kraven The Hunter* will be able to shift the dial all that much.

The sixth entry in Sony's *Spider-Man* Universe series, the film tells the visceral, action-packed origin story of one of Marvel's most iconic villains.

Aaron Taylor-Johnson stars as Kraven, a man whose complex relationship with his ruthless father, here played by Russell Crowe, sets him on a path of vengeance - one that will ultimately motivate him to become not only the *greatest* hunter in the world, but also the most feared.

Released Fri 13 December



Better Man

CERT tbc (134 mins)
Starring **Robbie Williams, Damon Herriman, Steve Pemberton, Alison Steadman, Kate Mulvany, Jonno Davies**
Directed by **Michael Gracey**

As biopics go, *Better Man* is a bit different, not least because the subject of the film - Midlands-born pop superstar Robbie Williams - is represented by a CGI monkey. Making the Angels singer a chimpanzee was the brainchild of the film's director, Michael Gracey (*The Greatest Showman*), who pitched Robbie the idea of having his spirit animal tell his story.

"I wanted to be a lion," Stoke-on-Trent Live reports Robbie as saying, "but [Michael] was like, 'Erm, no. We see you more as a monkey.' So yeah, everyone in the film is human except for me... But I loved the idea. I'm a performing monkey!"

Telling the story of Robbie's meteoric rise, dramatic fall and remarkable resurgence, the film has been receiving plenty of praise on the festival circuit.

Released Thurs 26 December

Sonic The Hedgehog 3

CERT tbc (109 mins)

With the voices of **Ben Schwartz, Colleen O'Shaughnessey, Idris Elba, Keanu Reeves** and starring **Jim Carrey** and **James Marsden**
Directed by **Jeff Fowler**

There's no stopping *Sonic The Hedgehog*, who is here appearing in a second sequel movie to the 2020 box-office blockbuster. Having not so long ago celebrated the 30th anniversary of his first-ever appearance, everybody's favourite blue-coloured high-speed hedgehog hits the ground running in this latest film, which sees him and his pals, Tails and Knuckles, facing a powerful and mysterious new adversary: Shadow the Hedgehog...

Released Fri 27 December





SEEING SCENTS

Birmingham's Barber Institute presents a sweet-smelling treat



This winter, explore a remarkable free exhibition in the newly refurbished gallery at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts. The final show before the University of Birmingham venue once again closes for further exciting redevelopments, Scent and the Art of the Pre-Raphaelites engages both the eyes and nose!

The latest exhibition at The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, *Scent and the Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, boasts both a self-explanatory title and a cutting-edge technological surprise.

Featuring works by well-known artists like John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, presented alongside masterpieces by less-celebrated names, such as Evelyn de Morgan and Simeon Solomon, the display explores the ways in which Pre-Raphaelite artists depicted scent in their works.

The exploration is enhanced by a scent machine, located in the gallery, which dispenses fragrances, inspired by the paintings, to individual visitors.

The Barber, located on campus at the University of Birmingham, has begun a process of significant refurbishment in the last 12 months, with more extensive building improvement works beginning in February. This exhibition not only offers an opportunity to explore Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces in a completely new way, but also marks one of the last chances to appreciate the venue's beautiful building and collections before the start of the next wave of redevelopment, which is scheduled to continue until 2026.

Scent and the Art of the Pre-Raphaelites was born from the research of exhibition curator Dr Christina Bradstreet, whose book, *Scented Visions*, explores the subject. The exhibition demonstrates the ways in which artists portrayed scent and hinted at the meaning behind the depicted smells. In years gone by, the idea of accompanying those works with a bespoke sensory experience, to enhance the viewing of individual paintings, would have been pie-in-the-sky - but this exhibition has a sweet-smelling surprise in store.

Secluded from the gallery entrance stands the scent machine, which delivers three distinctly different perfumes to partaking visitors. The scents have been specially created and are inspired by paintings on the wall opposite. The machine has been provided by Spanish fashion and fragrance house Puig, after their development of AirParfum - a means of dispensing the perfect puff of scented air to a single visitor, at the push of a button.

The system doesn't over-saturate the nose and works without filling the room with aroma or launching perfume particles into the atmosphere, which might damage the surface of nearby paintings. Unless you are

the person using the machine, it's impossible to catch the dispensed aroma. It's worth exploring the masterpieces on display for their own sake, but this olfactory offering brings a new dimension to a traditionally visual-only experience.

The Pre-Raphaelite movement, originally a seven-member brotherhood formed in 1848, inspired artists and followers until the end of the 19th century. Each work in the gallery has an accompanying panel with fascinating insights into the painting and its depictions of scent - informative without being overwhelming or wordy. There are also links to more in-depth essays by Dr Bradstreet.

Scent had surprising implications in the Victorian period, with some smells linked to good or ill health, and even morality.

In the summer of 1858, a phenomenon known as the Great Stink occurred in London, as heat intensified the smell of sewage and industrial run-off into the Thames. Increasing populations in cities spread disease, and the cause was said to be Miasma - bad air and smells actually believed to induce illness.

One picture in the exhibition - *Thoughts Of The Past*, painted in 1859 by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope - shows a sex-worker in her tiny room, with the Thames visible through the window. She has planted flowers in pots - perhaps, as the title suggests, preserving a memory of a happier and sweeter-smelling time in her youth. The painting alludes to multiple Victorian opinions about smell - including its perceived links to disease and morality.

Thankfully, given that there's a scent machine in the mix, the exhibition doesn't just focus on unpleasant smells! The paintings also portray the intoxicating aromas of incense, potions and perfumes. The era's opium-taking epidemic - which would have produced its own pungent aromas - is alluded to with the portrayal of blowsy purple poppies, while the opulence and exoticism of heavy flowers was linked to excess and sensual pleasure - having the time, money and freedom to stop and smell the flowers was a luxury not everybody could afford.

The exhibition's scent machine contains three distinctly different aromas. Two were inspired by John Everett Millais' famous painting, *The Blind Girl*, the third by Simeon Solomon's *A Saint of the Eastern Church*. Both paintings might be familiar to art lovers

in the region - they have been lent for inclusion in the exhibition by Birmingham Museums Trust.

The Blind Girl features a pastoral scene topped by a double rainbow, with two girls: one, the titular *Blind Girl*, breathing in the scent of her surroundings, while her younger sister shelters under the safety of her sibling's woollen shawl, which she holds close to her face. Some Victorians believed that rainbows had a fragrance, associated with the fresh smell after rainfall, and this inspires the first scent in the gallery - green, earthy and faintly floral. The second aroma represents the comforting smell of the blind girl's shawl. This is a gently musky scent, creating a surprisingly different impression of the painting.

The Blind Girl is a sensory scene in full view, with all the faculties represented in the painting - from the sound of birds and livestock, to the feeling of damp grass and mud beneath her hand, and the smell distributed across the landscape by the rainbow.

In contrast, Solomon's work contains layers of hidden meaning behind the first glimpse. *A Saint of the Eastern Church* depicts a figure holding incense and a bough of myrtle flowers. At the time of painting, the use of incense in Anglican churches had recently been criminalised. Myrtle was said to have diverse symbolic meanings, including shame and God's love - it was often presented to a bridegroom on his wedding night, as an aphrodisiac and symbol of virility. Solomon himself was homosexual, and the painting's layered meanings, combining love and illegality, must hint at the way he perceived Victorian ideas of sexuality. The curated scent associated with this painting is sharp and bright, inspired by the myrtle, incense and ecclesiastical setting.

Scent and the Art of the Pre-Raphaelites remains at the Barber until the end of January - after which the building will close for its next wave of exciting redevelopments. The exhibition is carefully curated, informative and thought-provoking, offering the opportunity to view - and smell - these wonderful works of art in an imaginative new way.

.....

Scent And The Art Of The Pre-Raphaelites shows at Birmingham's Barber Institute of Fine Arts until Sunday 26 January

Visual Arts previews from around the region



Image credit: Jason Guller

Wildlife Photographer Of The Year

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, until Sunday Sun 20 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 prestigious competition.

“As we celebrate 60 years of Wildlife Photographer Of The Year,” adds Dr Gurr, “we also celebrate the generations of visitors who have been inspired by the beauty and majesty of its images, and the millions of connections made with nature.”

Visiting Birmingham as part of an extensive national and international tour, the exhibition features a host of awe-inspiring images capturing fascinating animal behaviour and breathtaking landscapes.



CHRISTMAS AT IKON


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Ikon is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, and Birmingham City Council. Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon. Registered charity no. 528892. Image: Ikon Gallery. Photo by Tegen Kimbley.

Image credit: Chila Kumari Singh Burman © Compton Verney/Amie Woodley



Chila Kumari Singh Burman: Spectacular Diversions

Compton Verney, Warwickshire, until Sun 26 January

Highly rated contemporary artist Chila Kumari Singh Burman works in multiple media, with drawings, prints, collage and sculpture all featuring in her output. An installation of her famous neons will

light up the façade of Compton Verney, with Hindu deities and mythological creatures mingling with animals and ice creams in a glowing display.

Pop, Print, Protest

Wolverhampton Art Gallery, until Sun 11 May

Featuring artwork created in the mid-20th century, this fascinating show explores how Pop Artists used mixed-media collage and combined text and image in order to protest against capitalism, racism and conflict. In the process of doing so, the artists were responding to some of the biggest social and political issues of the time, including the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War... The exhibition has been curated by Sophie Hatchwell, who is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Birmingham.



Image credit: Bela Lugosi Journal (1964) Joe Tilson, © DACs



Rubbish Redesigned

Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham, until Sun 2 March

This group exhibition reflects and celebrates the imaginative approaches which are being taken to circular design and waste innovation across the West Midlands.

The showcase highlights the creative uses of common waste materials, such as orange peel and cow manure, and addresses the pressing need to reconsider how the planet's resources are utilised and recycled... Rubbish Redesigned forms part of MAC's sustainability season.

Unstill Life

The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, until Sun 26 January

Unstill Life takes a look at a crucial aspect of the history of still-life painting: the expansion of empire, global trade and consumerism. The emergence of Dutch still lifes coincided with the maritime transportation of colonial 'rarities' which were collected by the elite. These included gemstones and precious metals, silks and spices, animals, shells and 'exotic' fruits. But celebratory paintings of this wealth and abundance obscured the brutal conquest of territory and suppression of local populations that was also taking place as global trade expanded... Subtitled Global Mobility And Consumerism In Still Life Paintings, this fascinating exhibition challenges the viewer to reconsider the still-life genre, prompting the question 'At what cost did the objects in these images get here?'



Jan Davidz de Heem (1606 - 1684/6). Still Life with a Nautilus Cup, Leiden, 1632. Oil on panel

Reflector

New Art Gallery, Walsall, until Sun 9 March

Reflector is the culmination of an intensive professional development programme for emerging photographers, artists and curators from diverse backgrounds across the country. The exhibition both celebrates the participants' achievements to date and also provides an important step towards their future creative and professional development.



Image credit: Nicholas Oluwarinmi, 'yebeye'

LOVELY JUBBLY!

Only Fools And Horses The Musical heads to the Regent Theatre



The critically acclaimed touring production of hit West End musical Only Fools And Horses stops off in The Potteries this month. Based on John Sullivan's iconic 1980s TV series, the stage version is co-written by comedy legend Paul Whitehouse and John's son, Jim. Here, the duo chat about the origins of the stage show, using nostalgia as social commentary, and working with the late, great Chas Hodges of Chas & Dave fame...

As writers of the stage musical version of hit BBC sitcom Only Fools And Horses, Paul Whitehouse and Jim Sullivan have taken Jim's dad John's 64 television adventures with Del and Rodney Trotter and blended them into one critically acclaimed night out at the theatre.

Paul's CV more than prepared him to co-write the musical. He's been entertaining the nation for decades via his arsenal of impeccable character creations, gracing our TV screens in frequent comedy collaborations with Harry Enfield and making hugely memorable contributions to award-winning series such as The Fast Show.

Joining Paul in the writing hotseat is Jim Sullivan. Since the death of his father, Only Fools' creator John, Jim has been looking after the world of the Trotters both on-screen (via two much-loved spin-off series) and in print (via bestselling books).

Jim, rumours of a musical based on Only Fools were circulating for years before it opened in the West End. Did you start from scratch when you began your collaboration, or is any of the musical based upon earlier developments?

Jim: My dad had been toying with the possibility of bringing it to the stage but sadly never got to fully commit to it. When we began developing the idea back in 2015, the first thing I did was to search my dad's notes. I discovered snippets of thoughts and ideas he'd scribbled down, and I knew from talking with him that he wanted to focus on the Dates episode (his personal favourite), where Del and Raquel first met. I also found a two-page opening scene, which our staging is based on.

About six months later, I was helping my mum clear out the garage when I came across an old audio cassette tape with the words 'This Time Next Year' written on it. We played the tape, and there was Chas & Dave (as Del and Rodney) singing "We're gonna be alright, the good times are on their way!" Mum recalled that back in the late 1990s, dad had gone to Chas' studio to work on a song, and this was obviously the result. So we had the

beginning of an opening scene, and what I felt would make a great and uplifting final song. This was around the time that Paul came on board, and it really took off from there.

Paul, how did you become involved with co-writing the musical?

Paul: I was asked to write and adapt it, and had worked with CJ [Caroline Jay Ranger, the director] and the production team on the Legends tour with Harry Enfield. She'd enjoyed working with me and thought I had the wherewithal to do it. I didn't, as I'd never written a musical before - so it was a gradual process.

I met Jim, and I was very conscious of how precious the legacy was to him and his family - and for me, too, as someone who loved the series. But the fact that Chas Hodges and John Sullivan had already written a song together for it struck me as a positive element. It was amazing to see the musical so well received during its four years in the West End. I'm made up that it's out on the road and audiences all over the UK get the chance to see it.



Only Fools is such a cherished series. Was it a little daunting to take on characters and events that generations of viewers knew so well? Did you feel that there were some things you could have artistic license with but others not?

Jim: In this case, it was an especially tricky challenge. When my dad wrote the first series back in 1981, he wasn't sure it would get a second series. When he wrote the second series, it looked as though there wouldn't be

a third. When he wrote the final episode in 2003, there were, all told, 64 episodes - approximately 44 hours of viewing material. The story of the Trotters of Peckham spanned two decades and included births, deaths and marriages. Our job was to boil that down into a single two-hour story... with songs! Obviously we couldn't include everything, and while we've tried to remain faithful to the original scripts, we've also used a bit of creative license with the timeline. Ultimately, we're not trying to reinvent the series but rather to pay homage to it. What we've ended up with is something that captures and celebrates the heart and spirit of what the series was all about.

Is the decision to set the story at a particular point in the character's lives key to the plot? Was it ever tempting to go back to the beginning of the series?

Jim: I followed my dad's cue here. The series and the characters developed over the decades, and it was important to include all the key characters at key moments. We were focusing on the Dates episode, by which time a lot was changing in the lives of the Trotters. This timing also helped to inspire other ideas.

Paul: I thought that we shouldn't just revisit Only Fools And Horses. It might sound a bit pretentious, but I thought one of the unsung stars of the show was London itself. I came up with the idea for a song called 'Where Have All The Cockneys Gone?' It was a phrase I'd heard around, and it struck me as something that Grandad could empathise with and give voice to. The late 80s was a time when London was developing and the gentrification of the yuppies was beginning, and I wanted to make a point about how much has changed.

I also had the idea that Trigger could look into the future in his granny's crystal ball and see the London we live in now. Seeing artisan bakers and vintage clothiers, it will hit home with people how much has changed. Obviously with musical theatre you can do some very creative things like that, and the audience goes with it. And you can

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make a point in song. It's been a lovely exercise, even if it's resulted in a few sleepless nights!
So those two things in a weird way are nothing to do with the TV series but are to do with London and Peckham, and almost made me think: right I could bring something to it, rather than just reimagining the TV series. It's using nostalgia as social commentary, having a little look at London, and Only Fools gives you the opportunity.

The television series features a very rich array of secondary characters. How much of a challenge was it to find enough stage time to do them all justice in the musical?

Jim: That was another big challenge. Again, we couldn't include everyone, but we've tried to give all the main characters a fair shout.

Paul, do you think that any of your previous work was ever inspired by Only Fools? There seems to be a bit of a gentle Lennard Pearce/Grandad quality to The Fast Show's Archie the pub bore and Unlucky Alf, for example.

Paul: This is something that has never ever crossed my mind, but I think certainly in the look and demeanour of Unlucky Alf there are similarities, aren't there? The voice of Archie is slimier, but he was actually based on a guy from my fishing club called Archie! Looking back, you could say that Loadsamoney was not far off Del Boy - that whole larger-than-life, in-your-face character - although he was a lot more boorish than Del.

Jim, as a writer experienced with creating comedy for the screen, did you find it a little restrictive not having the luxury of writing exterior VT scenes - as often seen in the series - to expand the canvas of the story?

Jim: Yes and no. This whole experience has been a big learning curve for me. To begin with, you're thinking like a television camera, which can pick up small and subtle things - something that theatre doesn't afford you. The upside to that is that it forces you to rethink and be more imaginative.

Paul, back in the 90s, you would have been filming at Television Centre at the same time as Only Fools. Did you ever cross paths with John, David, Nick and the gang?

Paul: I never did meet John, but I met David and Nick at a couple of BBC do's, and they were both lovely. Because The Fast Show was really at its height when I met them and they really liked it, they were doing my characters back to me!



As far as casting Del and Rodney was concerned, was it a case of auditioning Sam Lupton and Tom Major together, to see if they had the right kind of chemistry?

Jim: They are both demanding roles to play, notwithstanding the fact that they've already been played so well before. We had many auditions and it wasn't easy, but Sam and Tom were, and are, fantastic! All the cast have been amazing, and it's been a genuine privilege to work with them.

Was it tricky to weave the songs into the traditional Only Fools scripted sequences?

Jim: To begin with, yes. But it's all been very organic. We focused on the beats of the story first, and the songs came out of that.

What was the process like in terms of writing songs for the musical with the late Chas Hodges?

Paul: I'd never met Chas before, but weirdly I got on really well with him. Because of his work, he was one of those blokes you felt you'd known for ages. I knew he was a fan of my stuff, we had fishing in common, and along with Dave Peacock, we were from the same area, so we had a strong connection.

Finally, can we expect to see the old man of the sea and ancient mariner himself, Uncle Albert, make an appearance in the musical?!

Paul: Well, you never know. Uncle Albert might pop up in the show when things get tricky!

.....
Only Fools And Horses The Musical shows at the Regent Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent from Monday 2 to Saturday 7 December

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SMEE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

What's On speaks to Matt Slack as he sets sail on his second decade as a star of Birmingham Hippodrome's beloved pantomime...

Festive favourite Matt Slack returns to Birmingham Hippodrome this Christmas, clocking up his 11th consecutive year as the city's pantomime funnyman. Matt stars as Pirate Smee in seafaring panto adventure Peter Pan, appearing alongside Brummie legend Alison Hammond - who returns for a second year - resident 'Dame' Andrew Ryan, and Danny Mac as Captain Hook.

The Hippodrome hosts the largest regional panto production in the UK, and each year has to meet - or exceed - the audience's stellar expectations.

"This is one of the biggest shows outside of the London Palladium," Matt explains, "and when you see what they've got in their show... There is a lot of pressure. I give as much as I possibly can, there's always the support around, and as long as the audience wants me - and as far as I'm aware, the majority do..."

"People like familiarity. When they see someone they know, they feel comfortable. It's tough, but I'm very privileged and very happy."

Panto season is one of the most popular times in the theatre's calendar, and there are plenty of performances to meet demand. However, with multiple shows in a day, a long theatrical run, and all that festive excitement, there's always the chance that a show might go off the rails!...

"We've had so many moments that have been hilarious. I've got to say, as it's Peter Pan, one of the funniest moments was when Darren Day played Captain Hook. At the end, the crocodile's jaws come out of the orchestra pit, he steps in and goes 'Goodbye, World...' He got stuck! He'd pressed the panic button inside by mistake, and he couldn't get out. The crocodile's jaws just clamped shut - it didn't move! We must've been on stage laughing for a good five minutes. It was hilarious! Eventually he got out, and he just legged it off stage. It was very funny - the audience were in on it, so we all had a good laugh."

Mid-show mishaps are something of an inevitability - but whenever chaos reigns, as one of the most experienced performers on stage, Matt is well equipped to improvise away from the script.

"The key with ad-libbing is to make it look

like it's ad-libbing. In any professional, slick production - as these shows are - there's a massive village of people making the production work, so it has to be quite precise. I have free reign if something does happen. We try to do the prep work - the hard graft goes in before... and people love it when things go down a different route."

With his first decade in Birmingham panto now under his belt, Matt knows how to pitch comedy perfectly to a mixed audience of adults and children.

"It's an instinct that comes naturally, and it always has with me. You've got to know where to draw the line, and where to push the boundaries... We are aimed towards a family audience, but we also want to entertain the adults. It's all about double entendre and disguising it - as long as it goes over the kids' heads and adults are laughing, that's a job done. It's a tricky area, and I try very hard to nail it. It's not an easy line to walk."

Matt, like many of the biggest stars in panto, gets involved in creating the show before even setting a foot on stage. Plans for next year's production sometimes start brewing more than a year in advance. "I start thinking about it as I'm doing it. Last year, in Jack And The Beanstalk, I was thinking 'We're doing Peter Pan next - what can we do?'"

"When I finish, I collapse for a month. I literally switch off - my body, my mind, they shut down - because it's so intense. I have to switch off, and then to get going again is quite difficult. I get a lot of ideas early on, and then I can play with stuff through the year, so I'm ready."

There's a while to go before he can put his feet up this season - and a lot more fun to be had in the meantime! One of the highlights of any panto production is comic banter between the cast - and in more than half of Matt's Hippodrome panto appearances, Andrew Ryan has also appeared as the Dame.

"A wonderful Dame! He knows me and I know him... I'm not sure how many years we've done. It's nice because if I'm gonna go off on one, there's mutual respect there. He's a fantastic Dame in his own right, and I do my stuff. I like working with other people. We allow each other to have our moments. If you stand on someone's toes, you've got to be



able to take your foot off and allow them to have their time and share the stage - it's a big stage."

There's plenty of panto silliness to enjoy (Oh, no there isn't!) but does Matt have a favourite slapstick moment?

"Oh blimey! Well... there's the If I Were Not routine - 'If I were not in Neverland...' That's a classic, with the sound effects. There's only so many slapstick routines you do. We're doing a new one this year - it's a bit of a twist on the 12 Days of Christmas; this year it's A Sailor Went To Sea Sea Sea."

Fully prepped for anything which might happen on stage (and, as it's panto, that's a long list) there's only one vital piece of the puzzle missing: the audience. And there must surely be something special about Midlands audiences as far as Matt is concerned, given that he's enticed back to Birmingham year after year...

"They're just the best. They're so warm, they've welcomed me like one of their own. I think they are a very unique type of person - very positive, very upbeat, nice, friendly and welcoming. And they like to have a laugh, which helps! What else have we got at the minute? Let's have a laugh! Don't worry about it - relax, and let's just have a bit of fun!"

.....
Peter Pan shows at Birmingham Hippodrome from Saturday 21 December to Sunday 2 February



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



THE POLAR EXPRESS™ Train Ride

Birmingham Moor Street Station, on selected dates until Mon 23 December

Much-loved 2004 film THE POLAR EXPRESS™ is being theatrically recreated this festive season to provide families with a memorable Christmas experience. Departing from Birmingham Moor Street, passengers will be fully immersed in the sights, sounds and intrigue of the classic

children's tale. Families are encouraged to wear their pyjamas onboard, as they tuck into a hot chocolate and cookie while the magic unfolds around them. And as you might expect, there'll be the not-to-be-missed chance to say a big hello to Santa Claus!

Ice Skate Birmingham

Centenary Square, Birmingham, until Sun 5 January

Ice Skate Birmingham and the Big Wheel have made a welcome return to Centenary Square for the festive period. 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. 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.



Winter Funland

NEC, Birmingham, Sat 7 December - Wed 1 January

Described as a 'full-on festive extravaganza', Winter Funland is home to the UK's largest indoor Christmas funfair. Attractions include a giant ice rink, a 1,200-seater circus, a motorbike stunt show, the chance to enjoy unlimited funfair rides and a mouthwatering selection of festive food & drink.

Christmas Celebration Weekends

Cadbury World, Bournville, weekends until Sun 22 December, plus Mon 23 & Tues 24 December

Just as you'd expect, festive celebrations are in full swing at Cadbury World this month. The popular visitor attraction is presenting a whole host of seasonal activities for families to enjoy, all of which come complete with that ever-important chocolately twist. Among the highlights are daily performances of the Santa Show (included in the ticket price), during which super-helpful elf Jingle will be handing out a chocolate treat to little ones. Then, before heading home, be sure to swing by the world's biggest Cadbury shop to pick up some handmade Christmas treats.



Glad Tidings

Black Country Living Museum, Dudley, Fri 13 & Sat 14, Fri 20 - Mon 23 December

Kickstart your Christmas celebrations by getting along to one of the Black Country Living Museum's after-hours Glad Tidings events. Visitors can gather around open fires, sing along to familiar carols, meet costumed characters, enjoy performances by talented street entertainers and sample traditional Christmas treats.





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



Visit Santa: Vintage Sleigh Experience

Coventry Transport Museum, until Mon 23 December

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



Santa Trains Severn Valley Railway, Kidderminster, until Tues 24 December

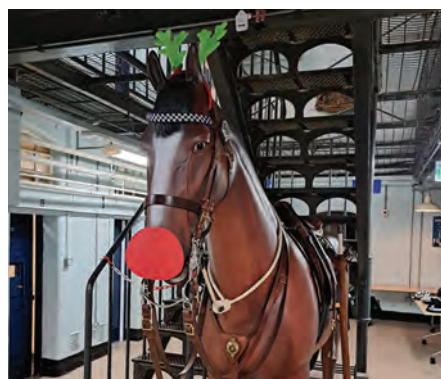
Enjoy a magical rail experience courtesy of Severn Valley Railway's Santa Trains. After walking through a winter wonderland at Kidderminster station, board the steam train for a journey to Arley station. Once there, enjoy a live panto stage show, featuring a host of festive characters appearing alongside Father Christmas as he

prepares for the biggest night of the year. The train journey back to Kidderminster comes complete with a 'present-shaped surprise' for every child. New for 2024, selected trains will offer the chance to break the return journey with a stop-off at Bewdley, to enjoy all that the riverside town has to offer.

A Family Christmas

Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire, Sat 7 & Sun 8 December

Hartlebury Castle's family Christmas weekend makes a welcome return this month. Jam-packed with festive activities, the event offers visitors the chance to get stuck into Christmas crafts, sing carols with Mother Christmas and Mr Jingle, write a letter to Santa Claus, and check out the Nutcracker-themed trail around the castle grounds.



Festive fun at the Police Museum Lock-up

West Midlands Police Museum, Birmingham, Sat 14 & Sun 15 December

For one weekend only, the lock-up at West Midlands Police Museum is being given a festive makeover. Visitors can follow a family-friendly trail and discover what the naughty elves have been up to, take part in some festive crafts, write a letter to Father Christmas and then meet the great man himself in his festive grotto.

Weston Park Christmas Market

Weston Park, nr Shifnal, Shropshire, Sat 30 November & Sun 1 December and Sat 7 & Sun 8 December

If you want to get ahead with your festive shopping, Weston Park's Christmas Market could well be the destination to head for. The event features a wide selection of gifts created by talented crafters, a range of artisan food & drink, live music, and the chance to take a ride on a miniature railway.



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Chila Kumari Singh Burman, Mermaid, 2022, glass neon. Courtesy the artist



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



Christmas at Compton Verney

Compton Verney, Warwickshire, throughout December

Compton Verney is hosting a variety of seasonal events in the lead-up to Christmas. An illuminated Christmas Present Trail takes over the galleries and grounds (from Saturday 14 December to Sunday 5 January), with a sweet-treat reward available for any visitors who successfully find all the lost presents.

Then, from Friday the 20th to Sunday the 22nd, Kate's Storytree will be on-site with solstice-themed tales and family-focused crafts.

And come Christmas Eve, Santa will be having some fun by hiding in places around the grounds - but will your youngster(s) be able to spot him?

Christmas at Thinktank

Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum

Located in Birmingham city centre, Thinktank offers a great day out for visitors of all ages.

From steam engines and talking robots through to gurgling guts and a chocolate-wrapping machine, the venue features more than 200 hands-on science & technology displays. Highlights include MiniBrum - an interactive mini city for under-eights - a 4k planetarium and a science garden.

This month, visitors can help find the elves who've escaped from Santa's workshop and are hiding somewhere along the Elf Trail...



Christmas on the Farm

Cotswold Farm Park, Cheltenham, Fri 29 November - Sun 1 December, Fri 6 - Sun 8, Fri 13 - Sun 15 & Wed 18 - Mon 23 December

Cotswold Farm Park is hosting two festive events this year, with Father Christmas experiences taking place by day and families being invited to check out an enchanted (and for the first time ever, dog-friendly) light trail by night.

Daytime visitors can attend a Make-A-Bear workshop with the elves, decorate gingerbread, meet the farmyard animals and receive a special gift from Father Christmas in his cosy grotto.



Elf Cadets

Royal Air Force Museum Midlands, Cosford, Sat 30 November & Sun 1 December and Sat 7 & Sun 8 December

Have you always wondered how Santa delivers all those presents in a single night? Well, we'll let you into a little secret... he brings in the experts: the RAF!

This Christmas, little ones can train to become an RAF Elf Cadet. Learn how to load the sleigh, pick the right aircraft for the job, and map out a route for Santa.

Suitable for all the family to enjoy, Elf Cadet Training combines the best of the RAF with a great big dollop of festive fun... The event takes place inside the museum's hangars.



Winterland Wolverhampton

Market Square, Wolverhampton, until Sun 5 January

Wolverhampton's Market Square has been transformed into a magical Christmas experience for the duration of the festive season.

Winterland Wolverhampton features a real full-sized ice rink, a winter-themed funfair and European food & drink stalls, including a German-style sausage swing grill.

Admission is free, but ice skating time slots need to be booked online for a fee.



Oz BOUND

**Follow the Yellow Brick Road with Birmingham
Ormiston Academy this Christmas**



The Wizard Of Oz has been delighting children and adults alike for more than a century. This Christmas, Birmingham Ormiston Academy are presenting a West Midlands-orientated stage version of the much-loved story, directed by Doctors and Coronation Street actor Lorna Laidlaw. What's On takes a trip over the rainbow to find out more...



Birmingham actor Lorna Laidlaw (pictured) is taking us along the Yellow Brick Road this Christmas as she directs a new pantomime version of The Wizard Of Oz.

Lorna, whose acting career has included the roles of Aggie Bailey in Coronation Street and Mrs Tembe in Doctors, is directing the BOA Group production of L Frank Baum's much-loved story, which opened at the city's Old Rep Theatre in late November. She worked with fellow Birmingham actor & comedian Janice Connolly on the show's script, which she says will be recognisable to all fans of the classic tale - but with a few added extras.

"This one is a very Birmingham-orientated Wizard Of Oz," she explains. "Obviously it's set in Kansas, but there are references to the Witch being from the West Midlands, and the Crooked House is mentioned - all those sort of lovely things. When Oz is revealed, he has this fantastic American accent, but then it's revealed he's actually from Cradley Heath!

"It's all lovely things that people can identify with, so it will feel like *their* panto; it will feel like it's been grown in Birmingham. It's good to have that for a production like this, especially when you've got young people in it - so their parents and grandparents will be coming - and people identify places that they know.

"I think for the older people who come to see it, it's another level of enjoyment - it feels like you own it. I've been to loads of pantos where you've thought it was fantastic and lovely, but it didn't feel like it was written in Birmingham."

Although the production takes inspiration from the much-loved 1939 Hollywood film classic, it features different music.

"A lot of the songs people will recognise from The Wiz, and there are a lot of other songs that have been specially adapted for it," explains Lorna. "So, for example, there are a lot of popular-culture songs, like Miley Cyrus and even Baby Shark. It will hit all levels because there are songs people will recognise, especially the teenagers. It's making sure we have enough for everybody.

"I think one of the biggest things with panto is that it's a time when all the family, no matter how old you are, can get together and

laugh, sing, maybe even cry a bit. There are very few places like that. When you can all go to the theatre, sit down and watch something that you're all going to enjoy, that's something quite special."

Lorna, who recently played the grandmother in The Company Of Wolves at the New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme, says audiences should head to the Old Rep this month prepared for a spectacle.

"I think one of the great things about this is that we've built a set that's like a Transformer set - so things move into different spaces, and the house in Kansas unfolds like one of those Transformer cars. It's fantastic and very clever.

"I hope audiences go away skipping and laughing, with everyone having the best time they've ever had and saying 'It was worth every single penny, and I'm coming back next year.'"

The production brings together professionals - in the lead roles - and students from BOA Group, who form the ensemble and undertake many of the technical roles, from stage management and lighting, to costumes and props.

"I've had the most amazing time on this," Lorna says. "It's been really amazing being at BOA. When I saw the costumes... they are absolutely incredible! You don't always have people on hand when you're working on a show, so to be in a building where you can call on all their skills - they've got technical people and a wig & make-up department as well - is a real bonus.

"As a director, especially when you're working with young people, you're constantly leading by example. There's a very quick turnaround on this show, and it's a good experience for the students - the pressure of this is what it's like in the outside world."

One of those young people is 17-year-old BOA student Sophia Scarrott, from Handsworth Wood, who is costume supervisor on the show.

"I basically oversee the makings of most of the costumes, especially the ones done in college," she says. "We're making a lot of the big, very stylised pieces, which have been

designed and made by hand, such as Glinda's great big pink dress - which is really beautiful - and Oz's robe.

"I also cover a lot of the sourcing for costumes - so, for example, for Auntie Em and Uncle Henry - and that includes me going through measurements and going to see what we've got and making orders if things need to be ordered. But even with the farm costumes, we're breaking them down and adding mud and tears - so everything is being worked on to be really specific for this show."

Sophia, who is also responsible for making the costume for Scarecrow and being a dresser during performances, is part of a team creating the outfits for the production.

"We've had to give a lot of time to it, but we all enjoy it. You really bond with the people you work with and become like a close family because you are spending so many hours together. In our costume team, even when we have busy days and are rushing to get stuff done, we're doing it all together.

"It's nice that we have each other's backs and support each other. When we have the funny moments, they are really funny, but when we have the sad moments, then we can support each other. It's nice to have that environment around you."

And Sophia says audience members will love this new panto version of The Wizard Of Oz.

"Lorna has a unique vision that is really fun. It's a very exciting show - you don't know what's going to happen in the next moment because there are so many quips and fun visuals thrown in. You're on the edge of your seat.

"It's a bit eccentric, and you don't get that at all times of year and on big productions. I think you can bring your loved ones and have a really fun night out and a good laugh - that's why I would recommend it."

.....

The Wizard Of Oz shows at Birmingham's Old Rep Theatre until Tuesday 31 December. Visit oldrep.co.uk for tickets.

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Your week-
by-week
listings guide
December 2024

the list

Festive Winter Gardens - Telford Town Park - Fri 13 - Sun 15 & Thurs 19 - Sat 21 December

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

What's On

Sun 1 - Sun 8 December



Dear Santa Live -
Stourbridge Town Hall
Sun 8 December

Mon 9 - Sun 15 December



Fairytale of New York -
Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent
Sun 15 December

Mon 16 - Sun 22 December



Festive Nights - Biddulph
Grange Gardens, Staffordshire
Fri 20 - Sun 29 December

Mon 23 - Tues 31 December



ABBA Revival -
The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury
Fri 27 December

VISUAL ARTS IN THE MIDLANDS

Barber Institute of Fine Arts

SCENT AND THE ART OF THE PRE-RAPHAELITES Exhibition exploring scent as a key motif in paintings by the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic movements. Visitors can participate in an optional experience to enliven the scents suggested in certain paintings, until Sun 26 Jan

PEACE AND NOISE: SOUNDS OF THE LANDSCAPE Exploring the elements of implied sound evident in historical landscapes from the Barber's prints and drawings collection, until Sun 26 Jan

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

DEVIANCE & DIFFERENCE Exhibition curated by internationally acclaimed artist Osman Yousefzada, featuring artworks by graduates from Birmingham City University's (BCU) School of Art, along with pieces from Birmingham's art collection, until Sun 8 Dec

MODERN MUSE BY ARPITA SHAH A series of photographic portraits celebrating the identities and experiences of young South Asian women from Birmingham and the West Midlands.

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham

FRIENDS IN LOVE AND WAR – L'ÉLOGE DES MEILLEUR-ES ENNEMI-ES Curated collaboratively, the exhibition interrogates friendship as a fundamental human relationship essential to individual wellbeing and society, until Sun 23 Feb

New Art Gallery, Walsall

EQUAL + ABLE = NOT A LABEL Exhibition exploring ableism through the New Art Gallery Walsall Collections, until Sun 18 May

EARTHBOUND A major group exhibition, set within the context of global anxiety about the climate crisis and planetary health research, until Sun 8 June

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

MAURICE WADE: A PAINTER FROM NO.57 Local artist Maurice Wade was inspired by the stark beauty and atmospheric melancholy of the various landscapes of North Staffordshire. This exhibition includes over 90 paintings highlighting his enduring fascination with the region, until Sun 26 Jan

THE SOCIETY OF STAFFORDSHIRE ARTISTS Exhibition celebrating 100 years of Stoke-on-Trent as a city and a centre for artistic creativity, until Sun 23 Feb

NO GOING BACK Display of photographs and memorabilia by

North Staffs Miners Wives marking the 40th anniversary of the Miners' Strike, until Sun 2 March 2025

Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery

SUN & FIRE: LIFE AND DEATH AT THE DAWN OF HISTORY Step into the ancient Shropshire landscape in an interactive exhibition exploring the lives of the people who lived there before written records, until Wed 30 April

Wolverhampton Art Gallery

A PERFECT SENTENCE Oliver Frank Chanarin's new exhibition interrogates the photographic image in the age of the algorithm. At the centre of the installation are two machines made by the artist in collaboration with Tom Cecil and Ruairi Glynn, until Sun 23 Feb

PAINTED DREAMS: THE ART OF EVELYN DE MORGAN Exhibition revisiting the gallery's historic 1907 show, and reuniting several of De Morgan's most significant works in Wolverhampton. The show features 30 artworks from one of the most impressive artists of the late Victorian era, until Sun 9 March

Elsewhere:

ANTIQUE MAGIC TRICKS Exhibition from a private collection that takes a look at antique magic tricks from the last 100 years, with some examples rarely seen today, until Sun 29 Dec, Bantock House Museum, Wolverhampton

THE REFLECTED SELF A 'sumptuous' exhibition diving into the fascinating history of portrait miniatures, until Sun 23 Feb, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

THE HALLS YOUNG ARTIST COMPETITION Exhibition of shortlisted entries by young artists from local schools and further education institutions, this year taking the theme of 'Gold', Sun 1 Dec - Fri 31 Jan, The Rose Paterson Art Gallery, Weston Park, Nr Shifnal

BEAR STEPS GALLERY: SOLO EXHIBITION Featuring works by Gill Stokes, Sun 8 - Sat 21 Dec, Bear Steps Gallery, Shrewsbury

IRONBRIDGE FINE ARTS WINTER 2024 Featuring works by Su France, John Pedder, Graeme Storey, Ali Wright, Vic Sayers & Rob Pountney, Sun 8 Dec - Tues 25 Feb, Ironbridge Fine Arts Gallery, Ironbridge, Shrops

FOLLOW THE STAR St Chad's Church will be full of decorated and illuminated stars of all sizes and colours, all created by villagers and their supporters from Pattingham, Fri 13 - Sun 15 Dec, St Chad's Church, Pattingham



UB40 Feat Ali Campbell - The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

Gigs

HEJIRA: CELEBRATING JONI MITCHELL Sun 1 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

CHRIS CLEVERLEY & FRIENDS Sun 1 Dec, Hare & Hounds, B'ham

TAXI FOR JESUS Sun 1 Dec, Actress & Bishop, Birmingham

PA SHEEHY Sun 1 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

MARTIN BURCH BAND Sun 1 Dec, The Brasshouse, B'ham

MIDGE URE Sun 1 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

THE GARRY ALLCOCK TRIO Sun 1 Dec, Tower Of Song, Birmingham

ABBA ALIKE Sun 1 Dec, Joe Joe Jims, B'ham

MARTIN HARLEY Sun 1 Dec, Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

JERSEY BOYS TRIO Sun 1 Dec, The Rhodehouse, Sutton Coldfield

SEVI Sun 1 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

HENSHAW Sun 1 Dec, Katie Fitzgerald's, Stourbridge

GRIEF RITUAL + GODEATER Sun 1 Dec, The Giffard Arms, Wolverhampton

TEACHERS PET Sun 1 Dec, The Station, Cannock

JASON ALLAN Sun 1 Dec, The Buttermarket,

Shrewsbury

LEONIDEN Mon 2 Dec, The Sunflower Lounge, Birmingham

STICK IN THE WHEEL Mon 2 Dec, Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

AOIFE NÍ HUIGINN Mon 2 Dec, Bill's Kitchen, Ludlow Assembly Rooms, South Shrops

GETDOWN SERVICES Tues 3 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

DYING FETUS + CHELSEA GRIN + DESPISED ICON + VITRIOL Tues 3 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

IDLES Tues 3 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS CROONERS Tues 3 Dec, Brierley Hill Civic, Dudley

THE CHATS + THE PRIZE + RIFLE Tues 3 Dec, The Wulfrun at The Halls Wolverhampton

JACK LUKEMAN Tues 3 Dec, The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield

JARROD LAWSON Wed 4 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall



VISION VIDEO Wed 4 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

CONFIDENCE MAN Wed 4 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

LOST NOTES + MARIANNE MILLS Wed 4 Dec, Red Lion Folk Club, B'ham

ATTILA THE STOCKBROKER Wed 4 Dec, Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

THE SPIRIT OF RUSH Wed 4 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

PAUL HEATON + THE ZUTONS Wed 4 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

JOEL FOSTER Wed 4 Dec, Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton upon Trent

TENNESSEE COUNTRY CHRISTMAS Wed 4 Dec, Crewe Lyceum

THE DEEP BLUE Thurs 5 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

OUR GIRL Thurs 5 Dec, Hare & Hounds, B'ham

REIGNMAKER Thurs 5 Dec, The Sunflower Lounge, Birmingham

KATY J PEARSON Thurs 5 Dec, Castle & Falcon, Birmingham

KOZA MOSTRA Thurs 5 Dec, Dead Wax, Digbeth, Birmingham

ROSS HARDING BAND + RIOT ON SUNSET Thurs 5 Dec, The Flapper, Birmingham

THE BOOTLEG BEATLES IN CONCERT Thurs 5 Dec, Symphony Hall, B'ham

FALLING IN REVERSE + HOLLYWOOD UNDEAD + TECH 9N9E Thurs 5 Dec, bp pulse LIVE, B'ham

CHARLIE DORE Thurs 5 Dec, Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

UPBEAT BEATLES Thurs 5 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

GUN + KIRA MAC + COLLATERAL Thurs 5 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

DEL AMITRI + MANDRAKE HANDSHAKE Thurs 5 Dec, The Wulfrun at The Halls W'hampton

UB40 FEAT. ALI CAMPBELL Thurs 5 Dec, The Civic at The Halls W'hampton

CHERIE CURRIE Thurs 5 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

THE DEBORAH CAREW SWING TRIO Thurs 5 Dec, The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield

MADAM + DRAVE Thurs 5 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

WE ARE (NOT) DEVO Fri 6 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

SUDDEN LIGHTS Fri 6 Dec, The Sunflower Lounge, Birmingham

THE KINX Fri 6 Dec, The Night Owl, Birmingham

CRAWLERS Fri 6 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

EVERYTHING EVERYTHING Fri 6 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

PURE REASON REVOLUTION Fri 6 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

ENTER SHIKARI + TEENAGE WRIST Fri 6 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

SISTERS OF MURPHY Fri 6 Dec, Castle & Falcon, Birmingham

SHADER Fri 6 Dec, Dead Wax, Digbeth, B'ham

PAUL RYAN + NICHOLAS ROUS + SUPERNOVA Fri 6 Dec, The Flapper, Birmingham

CHANGE Fri 6 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

DJABBIC 3 Fri 6 Dec, Tower Of Song, B'ham

LOVE THE BEATLES Fri 6 Dec, Joe Joe Jims, Birmingham

GUNS N' ROSES EXPERIENCE Fri 6 Dec, The River Rooms,

Stourbridge

FLASH - QUEEN TRIBUTE Fri 6 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

JESS SILK + JOE SOLO Fri 6 Dec, Katie Fitzgerald's, Stourbridge

ME FIRST AND THE GIMME GIMMES + THE BRIEFS + THE BLACK TONES Fri 6 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, W'hampton

VAMPIRE WEEKEND Fri 6 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

VICKY JACKSON AS PINK Fri 6 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

THE SHAKIN' STEVENS STORY Fri 6 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

ALEX OHM'S NEW SOUNDS Fri 6 Dec, The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield

THE LET'S PRETENDERS Fri 6 Dec, The Feathers Inn, Lichfield

BEANS ON TOAST Fri 6 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

TOUCH TOO MUCH Fri 6 Dec, Albert's Shed, Southwater, Telford

GREY WOLF Fri 6 Dec, SpArC Theatre, Bishops Castle, South Shrops

DREADZONE Sat 7 Dec, Hare & Hounds, B'ham

LANDSLIDE - FLEETWOOD MAC TRIBUTE Sat 7 Dec, The Night Owl, B'ham

DEAD PONY Sat 7 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

DAYSEEKER + RAIN CITY DRIVE + HEART OF GOLD Sat 7 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

RESTLESS ROAD + ERIN KINSEY Sat 7 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

SHED SEVEN + THE SHERLOCKS Sat 7 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

THE HUMAN LEAGUE + SOPHIE ELLIS-BEXTOR + T'PAU Sat 7 Dec, Utilita Arena Birmingham

DECADENCE Sat 7 Dec, XOYO, Birmingham

CERI JUSTICE + THE JURY Sat 7 Dec, Tower Of Song, Birmingham

THE DRIFTERS Sat 7 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

SWEDE DREAMZ - ABBA TRIBUTE Sat 7 Dec, The

River Rooms, Stourbridge

T.REXTASY Sat 7 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

BLACK COUNTRY ROCK AGAINST RACISM Sat 7 Dec, Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton

FAT FREDDY'S DROP + LOUIS BAKER Sat 7 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

PIP BLOM + VANITY FAIRY Sat 7 Dec, The Sugarmill, Stoke-on-Trent

THE CHICAGO BLUES BROTHERS Sat 7 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

FROM THE JAM Sat 7 Dec, Keele University, Stoke-on-Trent

SACK SABBATH Sat 7 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

KING KURT Sat 7 Dec, The Underground, Stoke-on-Trent

THE MADCHESTER EXPERIENCE Sat 7 Dec, The Station, Cannock

BEANS ON TOAST Sat 7 Dec, Lichfield Guildhall

BLACK HEART ANGELS Sat 7 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

THE WEEKENDERS Sat 7 Dec, Albert's Shed, Southwater, Telford

WHEN RIVERS MEET + THE COMMONERS + PISTOL DAISYS Sun 8 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

LEXIE CARROLL + LYDIA MAY Sun 8 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

NIKO B Sun 8 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

OBITUARY Sun 8 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

BAD BOY CHILLER CREW Sun 8 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

DAWN AFTER DARK + GHOST DANCE + TURNING BLACK LIKE LIZARDS Sun 8 Dec, Castle & Falcon, B'ham

MY DARLING CLEMENTINE Sun 8 Dec, Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

QUILL FEATURING BEV BEVAN Sun 8 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

TALON Sun 8 Dec, The Prince Of Wales Theatre, Cannock

Classical Music

THE HIGHLY STRUNG QUARTET: SEASONAL STRINGS An evening of classic Christmas music, Sun 1 Dec, The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield

UNIVERSITY CHORUS AND THE ELGAR SCHOLARS: VERDI'S REQUIEM Featuring Julian Wilkins (conductor), Emily Beech (soprano), Maya Colwell (mezzo-soprano), Alex Aldren (tenor) & Matthew Pandya (bass), Sun 1 Dec, Elgar Concert Hall, Bramall Music Building, University of Birmingham

TOSCANA STRINGS: THE SNOWMAN AND THE NUTCRACKER Featuring Laura Tye (dancer) & Sophie Price (narrator), Sun 1 Dec, Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

EX CATHEDRA: BACH MASS IN B MINOR Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Margaret Lingas, Imogen Russell, Katie Trethewey, & Clover Willis (sopranos), Martha McLorinan & Elena Stamp (altos), Daniel Marles (tenor), Thomas Lowen & Lawrence White (bass), Sun 1 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

PAUL CARR ORGAN CONCERT Programme includes works by Carter, J.S. Bach, Waldteufel & more..., Sun 1 Dec, Holy Trinity Church, Wordsley

LICHFIELD SINFONIA: WINTER CONCERT Featuring Sara Birchall (conductor) & Joanne Dodds (leader). Programme includes works by Humperdinck, Tchaikovsky, Suppé & more..., Sun 1 Dec, Lichfield Guildhall

THOMAS TROTTER LUNCHTIME CHRISTMAS CONCERT WITH GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR Featuring Adrian Partington (conductor), Mon 2 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

STRINGS CONCERT Featuring BEST, Apollo Strings, Phoenix Strings & Senior Strings, Tues 3 Dec, Walsall Arena

CBSO: RUSH HOUR CONCERT Featuring Kazuki Yamada (conductor) & Eugene Tzikindelean (violin). Programme comprises Elgar's Violin Concerto, Tues 3 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

VIOLIN & PIANO RECITAL Featuring Alex Postlethwaite (violin) & John Moore (piano), Tues 3 Dec, St Alkmund's Church, Shrewsbury

CBSO: KAZUKI CONDUCTS WALTON & ELGAR Featuring Kazuki Yamada (conductor) & Eugene Tzikindelean (violin). Programme includes works by Elgar & Walton, Wed 4 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDELIGHT Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor), Wed 4 Dec, St John the Baptist Church, Hagley, Birmingham

SENIOR CITIZENS ORCHESTRA CONCERT Programme comprises a range of popular classics and favourite show tunes, Thurs 5 Dec, Walsall Arena

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM CHOIR & CBSO: HANDEL'S MESSIAH Featuring Adrian Lucas (conductor), Sophie Bevan (soprano), Jess Dandy (alto), Bradley Smith (tenor), James Cleverton (bass) & Thomas Trotter (harpichord), Fri 6 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDELIGHT Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor). Programme includes works by Tavener, Weir, Gould & more..., Fri 6 Dec, St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury

CHETHAM'S SCHOOL OF MUSIC RECITAL Fri 6 Dec, St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury

BBC PHILHARMONIC Featuring Christian Tetzlaff (soloist) & John Storgårds (conductor). Programme includes works by Sibelius & Elgar, Fri 6 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

BRITISH POLICE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA PROMS NIGHT SPECTACULAR: HEAR THE PEOPLE SING! Programme includes works by Schonberg, Puccini, Elgar & more..., Sat 7 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM CATHEDRAL CHOIR: HANDEL'S MESSIAH Featuring David Hardie (conductor), Beth Stirling, Celia Butterfield, Tom Hawkey-Soar & Isaac Boulter (soloists), Sat 7 Dec, St Philip's Cathedral, B'ham

LICHFIELD FESTIVAL CHRISTMAS CONCERT: BLACK DYKE BAND Programme comprises brass band classics and Christmas favourites, Sat 7 Dec, Lichfield Cathedral

A GERMAN CHRISTMAS: BAROQUE MUSIC FOR THE NATIVITY Featuring Ludlow Choral Society, The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble, Nicola Starkie (conductor), Margaret Lingas, Ellie Stamp, Daniel Marles & Samuel Oram (soloists). Programme includes works by Schütz, Praetorius & more..., Sat 7 Dec, St Laurence's Church, Ludlow, South Shropshire

SHREWSBURY CHORAL: THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS CONCERT Featuring Shrewsbury Brass Band, Sat 7 Dec, Shrewsbury Abbey

PHOENIX SINGERS & MIDLANDS HOSPITALS' CHOIR: A CHRISTMAS FANTASY Featuring James Llewelyn Jones (musical director), Charles Matthews (organ), Gemini Brass & RGS Dodderhill School Choir.

Programme features a selection of seasonal music, Sun 8 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

THE CITY OF LICHFIELD CONCERT BAND: CHRISTMAS CONCERT Sun 8 Dec, Lichfield Cathedral

Comedy

FRANK SKINNER Sun 1 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton



CARL HUTCHINSON, FREDDIE QUINNE, GBEMI OLADIPO & KATE LUCAS Wed 4 Dec, Herbert's Yard, Birmingham

THE ALTER COMEDY CLUB Wed 4 Dec, The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield

CARL HUTCHINSON, FREDDIE QUINNE, GBEMI OLADIPO & ROB MORIARTY Thurs 5 Dec, Hockley Social Club, B'ham

ALEX BOARDMAN, MATT STELLINGWERF, LEE HUDSON, CALEB JAMES & DAVE TWENTYMAN Thurs 5 Dec, Foxlowe Arts Centre, Leek, Staffs

MATT PRICE, KATE ROBB, SAM SERRANO & DAN SMITH Thurs 5 Dec, Stourbridge Town Hall

HATTY PRESTON, MICK FERRY, SOL BERNSTEIN & BRUCE DEVLIN Thurs 5 - Sat 7 Dec, The Glee Club, B'ham

LINDSEY SANTORO, VLAD LICH, SIMON WOZNIAK & DAVE LONGLEY Fri 6 Dec, Rosies Nightclub, Birmingham

MILTON JONES Fri 6 Dec, Crewe Lyceum Theatre

ANDY PARSONS Fri 6 Dec, Foxlowe Arts Centre, Leek, Staffs

MILTON JONES Sat 7 Dec, Stourbridge Town Hall

SUZI RUFFELL, TEZ ILYAS, ALUN COCHRANE & WAYNE BEESE Sat 7 Dec, Katie Fitzgerald's, Stourbridge

Theatre

ALADDIN Family favourite panto filled with magic, romance and comedy, until Sun 8 Dec, Blue Orange Theatre, Birmingham

ERIC'S FULL MONTY 2024 The New Vic's favourite entertainer is back! Expect 60s music and laughter aplenty as Eric reluctantly embarks on a 'get rich quick' adventure - Chippendales style! until Tues 10 Dec, New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme

THE WIZARD OF OZ Journey to the Emerald City in BOA's festive show, until Tues 31 Dec, The Old Rep, Birmingham

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: A GHOST STORY Mark Gattis' acclaimed retelling of Dickens' festive classic. Matthew Cottle stars as Scrooge, with Rufus Hound as Jacob Marley, until Sun 5 Jan, The Rep, Birmingham

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK A giant family pantomime starring Sam Rabone, Ben Thornton and Gill Jordan, until Sun 12 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

THE RED SHOES New production based on Hans Christian Andersen's dark fairytale about a young woman and a beautiful pair of red shoes that take her to places she doesn't wish to go..., until Sun 19 Jan, The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

THE THREE MUSKETEERS Innovative and fast-paced adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' classic adventure. Adapted and directed by Theresa Heskins, until Sat 25 Jan, New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme

MOTHER GOOSE PANTOMIME An excellent festive production for all the family, Thurs 28 Nov - Sun 1 Dec, Festival Drayton, Market Drayton, North Shropshire

SLEEPING BEAUTY Fun-filled family pantomime starring Brad Fitt, Tommy J Rollason (Britain's Got Talent), Dionne Ward-Anderson (Six The Musical) and Gemma Sutton (Strictly Ballroom), Fri 29 Nov - Sun 12 Jan, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM A new all-female production presented by The Whole Pack Theatre, Sat 30 Nov - Sun 1 Dec, Soultown Hall, Wem, North Shropshire

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Festive family fun. Casting includes panto favourites Tam Ryan and Ian Adams, Gladiator's Giant, SIX actor Jarneia Richard-Noel, Blood Brothers' Timothy Lucas and Waitress star Olivia Mitchell. Tom Lowe, who recently starred as King Triton in Unfortunate, also features, Sat 30 Nov - Sun 5 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

BAH HUBBUB! Liz Grand and Katherine Parker-Jones star in a bitter-sweet comedy that brings a modern twist to the Scrooge experience, Sun 1 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

ONLY FOOLS AND HORSES THE MUSICAL Record-breaking musical comedy based on John Sullivan's much-loved TV sitcom and featuring a script and original score written by John's son Jim and comedy legend Paul Whitehouse, Mon 2 - Sat 7 Dec, Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent

THE BOOK OF MORMON Outrageous musical comedy following the misadventures of a mismatched pair of missionaries, Tues 3 - Sat 28 Dec, The Alexandra, Birmingham

TREASURE ISLAND - THE PANTO! Presented by Stone Revellers Musical

Theatre, Wed 4 - Sat 7 Dec, Crown Wharf Theatre, Stone, Staffs

ELF THE MUSICAL CWGAMS present an amateur version of the modern-day holiday classic, Wed 4 - Sat 7 Dec, Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock

ZANNA DON'T! A MUSICAL FAIRYTALE A heartwarming and whimsical journey about 'love, acceptance, and the magic of being yourself', Wed 4 - Sun 15 Dec, Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

TWELFTH NIGHT Samuel West stars as Malvolio, Gwyneth Keyworth as Viola, Freema Agyeman as Olivia, and Bally Gill as Orsino in Shakespeare's bittersweet winter masterpiece, Thurs 5 Dec - Sat 18 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

GREAT EXPECTATIONS Two Score Theatre Co present a reading of the RSC's version of Charles Dickens' classic story, Fri 6 Dec, St Laurence's Church, Ludlow, South Shropshire

CHRISTMAS PRESENT & CORRECT New Old Friends present a brand-new Christmas farce complete with witty wordplay and small-cast, multiple-role mayhem, Fri 6 Dec - Sun 5 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

DICK WHITTINGTON A globe-trotting adventure in which Dick and his trusted cat battle the Royal Rat, Sat 7 - Sun 22 Dec, Walsall Arena

ROBIN HOOD Get ready for the merriest panto in the land as TaleGate Theatre transport audiences into the heart of Sherwood Forest, where Robin and his band of Merry Men reside, Sat 7 - Tues 31 Dec, Sutton Coldfield Town Hall

Kid's Theatre

FINDING SANTA Little Angel Theatre present a funny and heartwarming Christmas show that invites the audience to decide how the story unfolds, until Sun 29 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

HANSEL & GRETEL The Brothers Grimm fairytale is brought to life in a 50-minute-long production for younger audiences. Various dates between Tues 3 - Sat 14 Dec, Ludlow Assembly Rooms, South Shropshire

THE SNOWFLAKE The tale of a snowflake, a little girl and her pappie - all longing for their own special place in the world. Suitable for children aged between three and six, Thurs 5 - Sun 12 Jan, The Rep, Birmingham

SANTA'S CHRISTMAS CRACKER Hit festive show for younger audiences, with every child receiving a present from Santa, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Mitchell Arts Centre, Stoke-on-Trent

THE TOYMAKER Infamous Community Arts present a festive family show

inspired by various traditional stories from around the world, Sun 8 Dec, Dorothy Parkes Centre, Smethwick

DEAR SANTA LIVE Stage adaptation of Rod Campbell's popular children's book. There's also an opportunity to meet Santa in his grotto post-show, where every child will receive 'an extra special gift', Sun 8 Dec, Stourbridge Town Hall

Dance

THE NUTCRACKER Birmingham Royal Ballet present Sir Peter Wright's iconic version of the festive classic, until Sat 14 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome



SLEEPING BEAUTY Traditional ballet presented by Stephanie Parrott School of Dance, Sat 7 Dec, The Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton upon Trent

Light Entertainment

A GOOD NEET AHT A nostalgic one-man show using various performance forms to explore class, identity and belonging, Sun 1 Dec, Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton

THE RAT PACK AT CHRISTMAS An evening of festive classics, including White Christmas, Baby It's Cold Outside, Let It Snow and more... Mon 2 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham



STORIES FOR CHRISTMAS Join professional storyteller Maria Credali for a nostalgic walk down a snowy memory lane as she shares a selection of Christmas-themed stories from around the world..., Mon 2 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

NEIL SANDS: CHRISTMAS MEMORIES 2024 Heartwarming afternoon of festive nostalgia, Tues 3 Dec, The Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton upon Trent

THE RAT PACK CHRISTMAS IN VEGAS Direct from London's West End and featuring three talented performers as Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and

Sunday 1 - Sunday 8 December

Sammy Davis Jnr, Tues 3 Dec, Theatre On The Steps, Bridgnorth, South Shropshire

MICHAEL MAROULI CHRISTMAS ROAST Expect camp, filthy festive fun as Michael delivers a seasonal comedy roast to those unlucky enough to have made his annual 'naughty list', Wed 4 Dec, Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton

IN CONVERSATION WITH DAME PRUE LEITH Join the British Bake Off judge as she chats to broadcaster Satnam Rana about her new book, *Life's Too Short To Stuff A Mushroom*, Wed 4 Dec, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

AN EVENING OF BURLESQUE Featuring fun, feathers and fabulous costumes, courtesy of performances by the finest selection of speciality artistes, cabaret and circus stars, Thurs 5 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

CHRISTMAS WITH ANTON DU BEKE An evening of music, dance and laughter in which the 'Ballroom King' is joined by vocalist Lance Ellington, a live band and troupe of dancers, Thurs 5 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

DRAG ME TO THE 80S Join a cast of 80s divas for 'a fusion of nostalgia, empowerment and a celebration of the extraordinary', Fri 6 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

MASSAOKE CHRISTMAS SINGALONG LIVE The 'ultimate live Christmas party', Fri 6 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

BOLLYWOOD TIME MACHINE An evening filled with laughter, dance and timeless melodies, Sat 7 Dec, Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome

TEASE - THE ULTIMATE BURLESQUE & CABARET EXPERIENCE The promise of 'an unforgettable evening of sensuality and unadulterated fun', Sat 7 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

PRIMARY SCHOOL BANGERS LIVE An evening of pure nostalgia featuring 'joyous singalong tunes to take you straight back to your primary school days', Sat 7 Dec, Festival Drayton, Market Drayton, North Shropshire

Events

THE BACK TO BACKS BY CANDLELIGHT CHRISTMAS TOUR See the houses - decorated for Christmas - by the glow of candlelight, until Thurs 12 Dec, Birmingham Back to Backs

CHRISTMAS IN CATHEDRAL SQUARE CRAFT MARKET Offering visitors an alternative to the usual shopping experience, until Sun 22 Dec, Cathedral Square, Birmingham

THE POLAR EXPRESS™ TRAIN RIDE Christmas experience in which visitors become fully immersed in the sights, sounds and intrigue of the classic festive tale, until Mon 23 Dec, Birmingham Moor Street Station

THE CHRISTMAS GROTTTO Wander through a Christmas village, where there's a surprise around every corner, until Tues 24 Dec, Webbs at West Hagley, Stourbridge

FRANKFURT CHRISTMAS MARKET BIRMINGHAM The largest authentic German Christmas market outside of Germany or Austria, until Tues 24 Dec, Birmingham City Centre

LUMINATE 2024 Mile-long trail featuring 'stunning lighting elements and fabulous light play, all set to music', until Wed 1 Jan, Birmingham Botanical Gardens

THE CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL A collection of real Christmas trees, decorated by local businesses, schools and charities, until Sun 5 Jan, Lichfield Cathedral

ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM The big wheel and weatherproof ice rink are back!, until Sun 5 Jan, Centenary Square, Birmingham

BRUM'S CHRISTMAS REINDEER TRAIL Santa's nine reindeer are visiting Birmingham as part of a 'magical sculpture trail', until Mon 6 Jan, Birmingham City Centre

MCM COMIC CON Featuring all things comics, gaming, anime and more, Fri 29 Nov - Sun 1 Dec, NEC, B'ham

CLASSIC ANTIQUE FAIRS Featuring up to 100 specialist dealers offering a wide variety of high-quality pieces, Fri 29 Nov - Sun 1 Dec, NEC, B'ham

SANTA HUNTS Can you and your little ones find Santa?, Sat 30 Nov - Sun 1 Dec, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

SANTA TRAINS Take a 'magical' journey to Arley to see the new Christmas show, Sat 30 Nov - Sun 1 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

ELF CADETS Learn how to load the sleigh, pick the right aircraft for the job and map a route for Santa, Sat 30 Nov - Sun 1 Dec, Royal Air Force Museum Midlands, Cosford

ENCHANTED EXPRESS Meet Father Christmas on a steam train, Sat 30 Nov - Sun 1 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

JINGLE BELLS Celebrate the wonder of Christmas by getting up close and personal with Crumpet the elf and Blitsen the reindeer, Sun 1 Dec, The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

STORY TIME WITH MRS CLAUDIA Mon 2 - Sun 22 Dec, Love2Stay, Shrewsbury

CHRISTMAS WREATH WORKSHOP Make your own Christmas wreath with foliage from the garden, Tues 3 - Thurs 5 Dec, Biddulph Grange Gardens, Staffordshire

CHRISTMAS AT THE LOCKSMITHS Check out the Edwardian home and lock-making workshops of the Hodson family, Fri 6 Dec, Black Country Living

Museum, Dudley

FESTIVE NIGHTS Explore the garden after hours, beautifully lit with Christmas lights, Fri 6 - Sun 8 Dec, Biddulph Grange Gardens, Staffordshire

CHRISTMAS MARKET Packed with festive fun, seasonal treats and holiday shopping, Fri 6 - Sun 8 Dec, Love Plants, Shrewsbury

ILLUMINATED ARBORETUM Experience a kaleidoscope of colour on this mile-long route, Fri 6 - Sun 22 Dec, National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire

SANTA'S GROTTTO Visit Santa in his grotto, set within the walls of the 11th-century castle, Fri 6 - Tues 24 Dec, Dudley Zoo

OSWESTRY CHRISTMAS PARADE A procession throughout the town centre, featuring 'everything from vintage trucks to the biggest Christmas-themed floats', Sat 7 Dec, Oswestry Town Centre, Shropshire

SANTA'S BAUBLE WORKSHOP Decorate a frosty bauble, Sat 7 Dec, Stourbridge Glass Museum

CHRISTMAS LUNCHES WITH A SWING A three-course Christmas lunch and live entertainment, Sat 7 Dec, National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire

SLOW FOOD CHRISTMAS FIESTA Featuring Kate Humble, food and artisan makers stalls, free demos, tastings and talks, hot food and licensed bars, Sat 7 Dec, Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings

ANIMAL NATIVITY Bring the Nativity to life by paying a visit to the Christmas animals from *The Farm On Wheels*, Sat 7 Dec, Gladstone Pottery Museum, Stoke-on-Trent

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION WEEKENDS Enjoy the Santa Show and more, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Cadbury World, Bournville, Birmingham

VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS WEEKENDS Victorian Christmas traditions come to life, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Blists Hill Victorian town, Ironbridge, Shropshire

'A CHRISTMAS CAROL' TOURS Join expert guides for a tour around the historic town of Shrewsbury, re-visiting some of the film locations featured in the 1984 film adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* starring George C Scott, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery

NORTH POLE ADVENTURE Take part in 'a magical adventure' and find Father Christmas, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, National Forest Adventure Farm, Staffordshire

ELF CADETS Learn how to load the sleigh, pick the right aircraft for the job and map a route for Santa, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Royal Air Force Museum Midlands, Cosford

MEET FATHER CHRISTMAS Father Christmas will be waiting for youngsters in the Drawing Room, ready to hear all their Christmas wishes, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Biddulph Grange Garden, Staffordshire

VISIT FATHER CHRISTMAS Father Christmas is making his annual appearance at the venue, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Wightwick Manor, W'hampton

SKATE WITH PRINCESSES Magical festive experience, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Telford Ice Rink, Telford Town Park

WESTON'S CHRISTMAS MARKET Find that special gift made by talented crafters, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Weston Park, Shropshire

STORYTIME IN SANTA'S GROTTTO Interactive storytime experience featuring a selection of enchanting tales narrated by Santa, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, World of Wedgwood, Stoke-on-Trent

THE SANTA EXPERIENCE Head to the farm to see Santa and his elves, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Park Hall Farm, Oswestry, North Shropshire

SANTA HUNTS Find the magic keys for Santa's new Black Country grotto, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

SANTA TRAIN Travel on a steam train to see Santa in a pantomime, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

THE ENCHANTED EXPRESS A train journey inspired by the classic poem 'Twas The Night Before Christmas, Sat 7 - Sun 8 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

MEET FATHER CHRISTMAS Experience 'a magical meeting' with Father Christmas in his grotto in the atmospheric ruins of Ludlow Castle, Sat 7 - Tues 24 Dec, Ludlow Castle, South Shropshire

WINTER FUNLAND The UK's largest indoor fairground, 'filled with festive fun', Sat 7 Dec - Wed 1 Jan, NEC, Birmingham



TOP OF THE FROCKS - A 1980S CHRISTMAS Join History Wardrobe to revisit 'the amazing 80s', Sun 8 Dec, The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

CHRISTMAS MAKE DO AND MEND Special craft workshop - make a beautiful Christmas decoration for your home, Sun 8 Dec, National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire

Unlock The Festive Fun!

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SANTA'S
GROTTO**
14TH & 15TH DEC

West Midlands Police
MUSEUM MUSEUM.WEST-MIDLANDS.POLICE.UK

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SELECTED DATES FROM 30 NOVEMBER

Gigs

LOLA YOUNG Mon 9 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

THE UNTHANKS Mon 9 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

BOURNVILLE VOICES Mon 9 Dec, Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

PP ARNOLD Mon 9 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

TRAVIS + HAMISH HAWK Mon 9 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

THE NORTHERN SOUL CLASSICS ORCHESTRA Mon 9 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

HARDWICKE CIRCUS Tues 10 Dec, The Sunflower Lounge, Birmingham

THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN + CIEL Tues 10 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

CONFESSIONS OF A TRAITOR Tues 10 Dec, Dead Wax, Digbeth, Birmingham

DYLAN LEBLANC Tues 10 Dec, Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

FIVE STAR SWING Tues 10 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

GRADE 2 Tues 10 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

THE DAMNED Tues 10 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

WHILE SHE SLEEPS + CURRENTS + THROWN + RESOLVE Wed 11 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

THE HOME TEAM + ANDRÉS + THIS CITY IS OURS Wed 11 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

MIK ARTISTIK'S EGO TRIP Wed 11 Dec, Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

THE SONGS OF LEONARD COHEN Wed 11 Dec, Newhampton Arts Centre, W'hampton

THE GUILTY MEN + ROB PETERS Thurs 12 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

TOM MEIGHAN + THE

MASSES Thurs 12 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

PETE TONG PRESENTS IBIZA CLASSICS Thurs 12 Dec, Utilita Arena Birmingham

SIMPLY ROD STEWART Thurs 12 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

CATS IN SPACE + WILLIE DOWLING & THE INVISIBLE BAND Thurs 12 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

CHARLES MINGUS/JONI MITCHELL SONGBOOK Thurs 12 Dec, Newhampton Arts Centre, W'hampton

THE OVERTONES Thurs 12 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

SMOOVE + TURRELL Thurs 12 Dec, St Mary's Church, Shrewsbury

DAN BUDD - ROBBIE WILLIAMS TRIBUTE Thurs 12 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

UTAH SAINTS Fri 13 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

IONA SKY + GENEVIEVE MILES + HEIDI ELDEST Fri 13 Dec, The Night Owl, Birmingham

THE CLAUSE + SEB LOW + TOM A. SMITH Fri 13 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

KAMERON MARLOWE + LACI KAYE BOOTH Fri 13 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

LAICOSITNA + FIGSO Fri 13 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

SPACE Fri 13 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

THE WONDER STUFF Fri 13 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

SAM FENDER + WUNDERHORSE Fri 13 Dec, Utilita Arena Birmingham

UNDER THE COVERS Fri 13 Dec, Joe Joe Jims, Birmingham

SYSTEM EIGHTIES Fri 13 Dec, The Rhodehouse, Sutton Coldfield

ICONIC 80S V 90S Fri



A Winter Union - Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton

13 Dec, The River Rooms, Stourbridge

SWEETS Fri 13 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

CARNIWHORE + DEAD TIDES + GAWING HUNGER Fri 13 Dec, The Sugarmill, Stoke-on-Trent

SAM RYDER Fri 13 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

MILES KANE Fri 13 Dec, Keele University, Stoke-on-Trent

THE KILLERZ Fri 13 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

DISCHARGE + THE SKEPTIX + ZIPSTYLE Fri 13 Dec, The Underground, Stoke-on-Trent

ALICE JONES & BRYONY GRIFFITH Fri 13 Dec, Burton Folk Club, Stoke-on-Trent

TIM EDEY'S CELTIC CHRISTMAS Fri 13 Dec, The Cafe, Fenton Town Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

THE ROY ORBISON STORY Fri 13 Dec, The Prince Of Wales Theatre, Cannock

THE DELRAY ROCKETS Fri 13 Dec, The Station, Cannock

LADY NADE SINGS NINA SIMONE Fri 13 Dec, Lichfield Guildhall

THE KING'S VOICE - GORDON HENDRICKS Fri 13 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

SONIC BOOM BAND Fri 13 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

BLACK BEAR KISS + KOTONIC Fri 13 Dec, Albert's Shed,

Southwater, Telford

THE SMITHS UTD Fri 13 Dec, Theatre On The Steps, Bridgnorth, South Shropshire

NAMESBLISS Sat 14 Dec, The Sunflower Lounge, Birmingham

ANDY BENNETT Sat 14 Dec, Actress & Bishop, Birmingham

OXLADE Sat 14 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

HE SAID SHE SAID + THE ROYALS + PLAINCLOTHES CUPID + ØBELISK + LUKE JONES Sat 14 Dec, O2 Institute, B'ham

THE DUALERS Sat 14 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

ULTIMATE COLDPLAY + EDUCATABLE Sat 14 Dec, O2 Academy, Birmingham

KATE RUSBY Sat 14 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

CULTURE CLUB + TONY HADLEY + HEAVEN 17 Sat 14 Dec, bp pulse LIVE, Birmingham

THE STARVING DOGS Sat 14 Dec, Tower Of Song, Birmingham

MARBLEHEAD JOHNSON Sat 14 Dec, Joe Joe Jims, B'ham

KILLERSTREAM Sat 14 Dec, The River Rooms, Stourbridge

GO WEST Sat 14 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

HEADSHRINKERS Sat 14 Dec, Katie Fitzgerald's, Stourbridge

BRAVE RIVAL Sat 14 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

A WINTER UNION Sat

14 Dec, Newhampton Arts Centre, W'hampton

LIGHTNING SEEDS + GORSTEY LEA Sat 14 Dec, The Wulfrun at The Halls Wolverhampton

RICK ASTLEY Sat 14 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

SHADER + LIZARD LORDS + GENIUS OF THE CROWD + KOALA Sat 14 Dec, Keele University, Stoke-on-Trent

ULTIMATE LEPPARD Sat 14 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

GORDON HENDRICKS IS ELVIS Sat 14 Dec, The Kings Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

JEAN GENIE - DAVID BOWIE TRIBUTE Sat 14 Dec, Lichfield Guildhall

FLEETWOOD MAD Sat 14 Dec, The Station, Cannock

EMO FEST Sat 14 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

THE VERTIGO BAND Sat 14 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

AURIE STYLA Sun 15 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

ASKING ALEXANDRIA Sun 15 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

ORQUILA + ODV + GREEN EYED GHOST Sun 15 Dec, The Station, Cannock

THE MAGPIES Sun 15 Dec, The Hive, Shrewsbury

THE LEGENDS OF MOTOWN Sun 15 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

Classical Music

A CHRISTMAS CRACKER Featuring In Sound Company Community Choir & Amblecote Primary School Choir. Programme comprises festive music, traditional & modern, Mon 9 Dec, Stourbridge Town Hall

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor) & Rupert Jeffcoat (organ), Tues 10 Dec, Lichfield Cathedral

JAZZ BIG BAND & SENIOR WIND BAND Tues 10 Dec, Walsall Arena

JILL CROSSLAND PIANO RECITAL Tues 10 Dec, St Alkmund's Church, Shrewsbury

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT Programme includes works by Weir, Mathais, Roth & more..., Wed 11 Dec, St Mary's Church, Moseley, Birmingham

MARCHES CHOIR: A BIG CHRISTMAS SING! Featuring Alistair Auld (conductor), Wed 11 Dec, St John's Church, Bishops Castle, South Shropshire

LONDON CONCERTANTE: BEETHOVEN'S MOONLIGHT SONATA BY CANDLELIGHT Programme also features works by Chopin & Liszt, Wed 11 Dec, Shrewsbury Abbey (5.30pm)

LONDON CONCERTANTE: VIENNESE CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT Programme features works by Strauss, Tchaikovsky & Brahms, Wed 11 Dec, Shrewsbury Abbey (7.30pm)

PAPAGENA BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Lizzie Drury, Imogen Ram-Prasad, Sarah Tenant-Flowers, Shivani Rattan & Suzzie Vango (voices). Programme includes a collection of songs for winter, Thurs 12 Dec, Keele University Chapel, Newcastle-under-Lyme

PRE-CONCERT PERFORMANCE: RBC SHOWCASE Featuring musicians from Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Programme includes works by Schubert, Bach & Chopin, Thurs 12 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

CBSO: KAZUKI CONDUCTS BRUCKNER 9 Featuring Kazuki Yamada (conductor) & Martin Helmchen (piano). Programme includes works by Mozart & Bruckner, Thurs 12 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THE PHOENIX SINGERS: A BABE IS BORN Featuring Tony Pinel (organ) & David Thomas (conductor). Programme includes works by Gibbons, Handel, Rutter & more..., Thurs 12 Dec, Bicton Church, Shrewsbury

THE PHOENIX SINGERS: A BABE IS BORN Featuring Tony Pinel (organ) & David Thomas (conductor).

Programme includes works by Gibbons, Handel, Rutter & more..., Fri 13 Dec, St Alkmund's Church, Shrewsbury

MARK SWINTON ORGAN RECITAL Fri 13 Dec, St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury

THE MARCHINGTON SINGERS: A CONCERT OF CHRISTMAS PEACE Sat 14 Dec, St Mary's Church, Uttoxeter

WOMBOURNE & DISTRICT CHORAL SOCIETY'S CHRISTMAS CONCERT Featuring Dr Edward Caine (conductor) & Johnathan Clarke (accompanist). Programme includes works by C MacDowell alongside traditional carols, Sat 14 Dec, Beckminster Methodist Church, Wolverhampton

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor). Programme includes works by Weir, Tavener, Gould & more..., Sat 14 Dec, St Peter's Church, Wolverhampton

HALESOWEN ORCHESTRA: TWO GREAT SYMPHONIES Featuring Lee Armstrong (conductor). Programme includes works by Schubert & Glazunov, Sat 14 Dec, Halesowen Town Hall

WOMBOURNE & DISTRICT CHORAL SOCIETY: A WINTER'S NIGHT Featuring Edward Caine (conductor), Sat 14 Dec, Beckminster Methodist Church, Wolverhampton

THE PICCADILLY SINFONIETTA: VIVALDI'S FOUR SEASONS BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Warren Mailley-Smith (piano) & Victoria Lyon (violin). Programme also includes works by Rachmaninov, Sat 14 Dec, Shrewsbury Abbey

WHITCHURCH BRASS BAND AND THE FAULS SINGERS CHOIR: CHARITY CHRISTMAS CONCERT Sat 14 Dec, Festive Drayton Centre, Market Drayton, North Shropshire

DONALD MACKENZIE ORGAN RECITAL Also featuring Phillida Bannister (alto). Programme includes works by Daquin, Tchaikovsky, Warlock & more..., Sat 14 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

TOSCANA STRINGS: THE SNOWMAN AND THE NUTCRACKER Featuring Elize Layton (dancer), Sun 15 Dec, The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield

BIRMINGHAM BACH CHOIR: NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS SERVICE Featuring Paul Spicer (conductor) & Paul Carr (organ), Sun 15 Dec, St Alban's Church, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT Programme includes carols old and new, and Winter from Vivaldi's Four Seasons, Sun 15 Dec, Ludlow Assembly Rooms, South Shropshire

KEELE CHAPEL SINGERS WINTER CONCERT Sun 15 Dec, Keele Chapel, Newcastle-under-Lyme

Comedy

DANA ALEXANDER, ANDY ROBINSON, MC HAMMERSMITH & COMIC TBC Wed 11 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

PETER RETHINASAMAY, SOL BERNSTEIN & DANNY MCLOUGHLIN Wed 11 Dec, Morris Hall, Shrewsbury

SARA PASCOE, LOU SANDERS, RHYS JAMES, IVO GRAHAM & MORE Thurs 12 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

PAUL SINHA, DAN NIGHTINGALE, ANDREW MENSAH & FREDDIE QUINNE Thurs 12 Dec, Hockley Social Club, Birmingham

DANA ALEXANDER, ANDY ROBINSON, CARL HUTCHINSON & MC HAMMERSMITH Thurs 12 - Sat 14 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

JIMMY CARR Fri 13 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

QUINCY, LOUISE YOUNG, KAZEEM JAMAL & DAVE LONGLEY Fri 13 - Sat 14 Dec, Rosies Nightclub, Birmingham

DANA ALEXANDER, ANDY ROBINSON, CARL HUTCHINSON & MC HAMMERSMITH Sun 15 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

Theatre

ERIC'S FULL MONTY 2024 The New Vic's favourite entertainer is back! Expect 60s music and laughter aplenty as Eric reluctantly embarks on a 'get rich quick' adventure - Chippendales style!, until Tues 10 Dec, New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme

ZANNA DON'T! A MUSICAL FAIRYTALE A heartwarming and whimsical journey about 'love, acceptance, and the magic of being yourself', until Sun 15 Dec, Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

DICK WHITTINGTON A globe-trotting adventure in which Dick and his trusted cat battle the Royal Rat, until Sun 22 Dec, Walsall Arena

THE BOOK OF MORMON Outrageous musical comedy following the misadventures of a mismatched pair of missionaries, until Sat 28 Dec, The Alexandra, Birmingham

THE WIZARD OF OZ Journey to the Emerald City in Birmingham Ormiston Academy's festive show, until Tues 31 Dec, The Old Rep, Birmingham

ROBIN HOOD Get ready for the merriest panto in the land as TaleGate Theatre transport audiences into the heart of Sherwood Forest, where Robin and his band of Merry Men reside, until Tues 31 Dec, Sutton Coldfield Town Hall

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: A GHOST STORY Mark Gattis' acclaimed retelling of Dickens' festive classic. Matthew Cottle stars as Scrooge, with Rufus

Hound as Jacob Marley, until Sun 5 Jan, The Rep, Birmingham

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Festive family fun. Casting includes panto favourites Tam Ryan and Ian Adams, Gladiator's Giant, SIX actor Jarneia Richard-Noel, Blood Brothers' Timothy Lucas and Waitress star Olivia Mitchell. Tom Lowe, who recently starred as King Triton in Unfortunate, also features, until Sun 5 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK Wink, Wendy and Theo star in a giant of a panto that promises plenty of festive family fun, until Sun 5 Jan, Stafford Gatehouse Theatre

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK A giant family pantomime starring Sam Rabone, Ben Thornton and Gill Jordan, until Sun 12 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

SLEEPING BEAUTY Fun-filled family pantomime starring Brad Fitt, Tommy J Rollason (Britain's Got Talent), Dionne Ward-Anderson (Six The Musical) and Gemma Sutton (Strictly Ballroom), until Sun 12 Jan, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury

TWELFTH NIGHT Samuel West stars as Malvolio, Gwyneth Keyworth as Viola, Freema Agyeman as Olivia, and Bally Gill as Orsino in Shakespeare's bittersweet winter masterpiece, until Sat 18 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

THE RED SHOES New production based on Hans Christian Andersen's dark fairytale about a young woman and a beautiful pair of red shoes that take her to places she doesn't wish to go..., until Sun 19 Jan, The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

THE THREE MUSKETEERS Innovative and fast-paced adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' classic adventure. Adapted and directed by Theresa Heskins, until Sat 25 Jan, New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme

A CHRISTMAS CAROL One-man performance starring Jonathan Goodwin as Charles Dickens, Mon 9 Dec, Biddulph Grange Garden, Staffordshire

A CHRISTMAS CAROL - LIVE ON STAGE TV favourites Colin Baker and Peter Purves lead the cast in a radio-play version of Dickens' Christmas classic, Tues 10 Dec, Stourbridge Town Hall

DISNEY FROZEN JR Amateur version of the much-loved story of true love and acceptance, Tues 10 Dec, The Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton upon Trent

ABSURD PERSON SINGULAR Stoke Rep Players present an amateur version of Alan Ayckbourn's scathing satire of social climbing and suburban snobbery, Tues 10 - Sat 14 Dec, Stoke Rep Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent

ROBIN HOOD Amateur production featuring song, dance, archery and

adventure, Wed 11 - Sat 15 Dec, Dormston Mill Theatre, Sedgley

A CHRISTMAS CAROL - LIVE ON STAGE TV favourites Colin Baker and Peter Purves lead the cast in a radio-play version of Dickens' Christmas classic, Thurs 12 Dec, Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Ludwig Theatre Arts bring the classic fairytale to life with 'musical numbers, panto comedy, glittering costumes and audience participation', Thurs 12 - Mon 30 Dec, Ludlow Assembly Rooms, South Shropshire

THE LAST 5 YEARS Amateur version of Jason Robert Brown's story, focusing on the relationship between a rising novelist and struggling actress, Fri 13 - Sat 14 Dec, Crown Wharf Theatre, Stone, Staffordshire

DICK WHITTINGTON Jonathan Wilkes takes the title role in his 20th Potteries panto. He's joined by Christian Patterson as Sarah the Cook and Kai Owen as King Rat. Gina Murray (Spirit of the Bells) and Samara Casteallo (Alice Fitzwarren) also star, Fri 13 Dec - Sun 5 Jan, Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Family pantomime starring Jenny Ryan (The Chase) as The Enchantress. Malcolm Lord and Ste Johnston also star, Fri 13 Dec - Sun 5 Jan, Crewe Lyceum Theatre

UNCLE HOLLY Don't Go Into The Cellar present an original ghost story for Christmas, co-written and performed by Jonathan Goodwin, Sat 14 Dec, Wightwick Manor & Gardens, Wolverhampton

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE TWELVE CRIMES OF CHRISTMAS Presented by Kidderminster Rose Young People's Theatre, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, The Rose Theatre, Kidderminster

Kids Theatre

HANSEL & GRETEL The Brothers Grimm fairytale is brought to life in a 50-minute-long production for younger audiences. Various dates between until Sat 14 Dec, Ludlow Assembly Rooms, South Shropshire

FINDING SANTA Little Angel Theatre present a funny and heartwarming Christmas show that invites the audience to decide how the story unfolds, until Sun 29 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

THE SNOWFLAKE The tale of a snowflake, a little girl and her pappie - all longing for their own special place in the world. Suitable for children aged between three and six, until Sun 12 Jan, The Rep, B'ham

SANTA'S CHRISTMAS CRACKER Hit festive show for younger audiences, with every child receiving a present from Santa, Tues 10 Dec, Prince of

Wales Theatre, Cannock

A WINTER'S TALE A fun and gentle introduction to theatre, featuring play-along storytelling, original music, puppetry, theatre games, movement and lots of imaginative play, Wed 11 Dec, Brasshouse Community Centre, Smethwick

THE FATHER CHRISTMAS SHOW Festive panto adventure, during which young members of the audience will need to help Santa and his elves get through an ever-growing to-do list, Wed 11 - Sat 15 Dec, Stafford Gatehouse Theatre

THE OWL THAT CAME FOR CHRISTMAS Heartwarming festive tale for younger audiences, 'celebrating the power of love, kindness and the magic of Christmas'. A post-show meet & greet with cast members also features, Wed 11 - Tues 24 Dec, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury

THE MAGICAL ELVES Follow elves Gerald and Wallace as they attempt to get their presents ready in time for Christmas - including the circus equipment they've been asked to wrap, Fri 13 Dec, Brasshouse Community Centre, Smethwick

SANTA'S CHRISTMAS CRACKER Hit festive show for younger audiences, with every child receiving a present from Santa, Fri 13 Dec, Festival Drayton, Market Drayton, North Shropshire

THE JINGLECLAW Brand-new musical for younger audiences filled with original songs, festive magic 'and a little bit of naughtiness', Fri 13 Dec - Sat 4 Jan, Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome

THE TOYMAKER Infamous Community Arts present a festive family show inspired by various traditional stories from around the world, Sat 14 Dec, Bromwich Hall, West Bromwich

STORYTIME WITH SANTA Featuring festive fun, Christmas songs, and enchanting stories narrated by Santa himself, Sat 14 Dec, Lichfield Garrick



JOLLY BOLLY ELF BHANGRA JINGLES Get ready to join in with Bhangra Jingles, Bollywood Glitz and lots of festive cheer!, Sat 14 Dec, Wolverhampton Central Library

Dance

THE NUTCRACKER Birmingham Royal Ballet present Sir Peter Wright's iconic version of the festive classic, until Sat 14 Dec, Birmingham Hippodrome

Light Entertainment

HOME ALONE IN CONCERT A new way to discover a festive classic, with a full live orchestra, Mon 9 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THAT'LL BE THE DAY CHRISTMAS SHOW Evening of music and comedy sketches, presented alongside renditions of favourite Christmas songs, Mon 9 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

STEP INTO CHRISTMAS A 'warm-hearted family spectacular' featuring favourite festive songs, Tues 10 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

BIG BAND AT CHRISTMAS Featuring Five Star Swing, Tues 10 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

SHOWTIME: THE CHRISTMAS VARIETY SHOW All-singing, all-dancing musical extravaganza, Tues 10 - Wed 11 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

COUNT ARTHUR STRONG: A CHRISTMAS CAROL A one-man interpretation of Dickens' festive classic, Wed 11 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

WINTER TALES Theatre Cats present a showcase of Christmas songs and carols, Wed 11 - Thurs 12 Dec, Brewhouse Arts Centre, Burton upon Trent

STEP INTO CHRISTMAS A 'warm-hearted family spectacular' featuring favourite festive songs, Thurs 12 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

CHRISTMAS MAKE DO AND MEND Special craft workshop - make a beautiful Christmas decoration for your home, Wed 11 Dec, National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire

DISNEY'S THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL CONCERT LIVE TO FILM Fri 13 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THE SNOWMAN FILM WITH LIVE ORCHESTRA Special screening of the iconic festive film plus - as a special bonus - the screening of an additional short film, again accompanied by the live orchestra. Choose from *The Snowman And The Snowdog* (1.30pm) or *The Bear, The Piano, The Dog And The Fiddle* (4pm), Sun 15 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring a 'fresh take' on classic Christmas songs, Sun 15 Dec, Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock

CHRISTMAS CAROL SINGALONG Featuring Jonathan Cohen and Louise Dearman, Sun 15 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THE D-DAY DARLINGS: A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER Brand-new, high-energy Christmas show, complete with 'a sprinkling of romance and reflection' and 'plenty of festive fun', Sun 15 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

STORY BAZAAR: FESTIVE Expect a heady mixture of storytelling, poetry, music and more..., Sun 15 Dec, Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton

FAIRYTALE OF NEW YORK Immerse yourself in the rich tapestry of Irish culture as a cast of talented singers, musicians and dancers perform festive favourites, Sun 15 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

Events

THE POLAR EXPRESS™ TRAIN RIDE Christmas experience in which visitors become fully immersed in the sights, sounds and intrigue of the classic festive tale, until Mon 23 Dec, Birmingham Moor Street Station

ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM The big wheel and weatherproof ice rink are back!, until Sun 5 Jan, Centenary Square, Birmingham

ENCHANTED AFTERNOON TEA Savour treats and fine tea as you journey through the picturesque landscape of the Severn Valley, Tues 10 - Thurs 12 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

GLAD TIDINGS Featuring costumed characters and street entertainers, Fri 13 - Sat 14 Dec, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

FESTIVE NIGHTS Explore the garden after hours, beautifully lit with Christmas lights, Fri 13 - Sun 15 Dec, Biddulph Grange Gardens, Staffordshire

FESTIVE WINTER GARDENS Step into the world of cinema magic as the Chelsea and Maxell Gardens are transformed with dazzling lights and festive movie projections, creating a captivating 'night at the movies' experience, Fri 13 - Sun 15 Dec, Telford Town Park, Shropshire



JINGLE VILLE Explore the enchanted town of Jingle Ville, complete with hidden treasures and delightful characters, Fri 13 - Tues 17 Dec, Lower Drayton Farm, Stafford

CHRISTMAS COURTYARD ILLUMINATIONS See Powis Castle come alive in 'a dazzling display of mesmerising lights, illuminating its grand exterior', Fri 13 - Mon 23 Dec, Powis Castle, Welshpool

ANIMAL EXPERIENCE WITH 'THE ANIMAL FAMILY' Immersive experience showcasing furry friends and creepy crawlies, Sat 14 Dec, British Ironwork Centre, Oswestry, North Shropshire

SINGING SANTA Featuring songs, child-friendly interactions - and Santa!, Sat 14 Dec, Castle Bromwich Historic Gardens, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS MAKERS' MARKET Featuring 35 local makers and craftspeople, Sat 14 Dec, The New Art Gallery Walsall

FESTIVE EVENING Featuring festive fun, carol singers, Christmas crafts, mulled wine and mince pies, Sat 14 Dec, West Midlands Police Museum, Birmingham

ULTIMATE 80S CHRISTMAS PARTY Dig out those day-glow tops and get practising those 80s dance moves!, Sat 14 Dec, Millennium Point, B'ham

CHRISTMAS GROTTO & FESTIVE FUN Meet Father Christmas, take part in craft activities and explore a family-friendly trail, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, West Midlands Police Museum, Birmingham

SANTA'S CHRISTMAS CASTLE Tour the beautifully decorated castle, looking for clues to lead you to Santa, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, Tamworth Castle

CHRISTMAS JUMPER WEEKEND Including live music on the ice, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, Telford Ice Rink, Telford Town Park

SANTA TRAIN Travel on a steam train to see Santa in a pantomime, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

THE ENCHANTED EXPRESS Steam-train journey inspired by the classic poem 'Twas The Night Before Christmas, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

SANTA HUNTS Find the magic keys for Santa's new Black Country grotto, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS WEEKENDS Victorian Christmas traditions are brought to life, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, Blists Hill Victorian town, Ironbridge

'A CHRISTMAS CAROL' TOURS Join expert guides for a tour around the historic town of Shrewsbury, re-visiting some of the film locations featured in the 1984 film adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* starring George C Scott, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery

NORTH POLE ADVENTURE Take part in 'a magical adventure' and find Father Christmas, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, National Forest Adventure Farm, Staffordshire

THE SANTA EXPERIENCE Head to the farm to meet Santa and his elves, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, Park Hall Farm, Oswestry, North Shropshire

STORYTIME IN SANTA'S GROTTO Interactive storytime experience featuring a selection of enchanting tales narrated by Santa, Sat 14 - Sun 15 Dec, World of Wedgwood, Stoke-on-Trent

Gigs

AND SO I WATCH YOU FROM AFAR + DELTA SLEEP + SLOW CRUSH Mon 16 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

VICTORIES AT SEA + MANZONI GARDENS Tues 17 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

NORDIC GIANTS Tues 17 Dec, The Asylum, Birmingham

VINNIE CARUANA + RUSSO Tues 17 Dec, The Flapper, B'ham

MADDY PRIOR AND THE CARNIVAL BAND Tues 17 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

JAMES YORKSTON + VIKING MOSES Tues 17 Dec, Kitchen Garden, Birmingham

THE PRODIGY + JAGUAR SKILLS Tues 17 Dec, The Civic at The Halls Wolverhampton

DAN OWEN Tues 17 - Wed 18 Dec, Shrewsbury Abbey

DAVEY MACMANUS Wed 18 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

MAD JOCKS & ENGLISHMEN Wed 18 Dec, Red Lion Folk Club, Birmingham

THE AMY WINEHOUSE BAND Wed 18 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

SLIPKNOT Wed 18 Dec, Utilita Arena Birmingham

THE ICICLE WORKS Wed 18 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

EYEHATEGOD + GOATWHORE + FLESH CREEP Wed 18 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

THE ALBION CHRISTMAS BAND Wed 18 Dec, New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme

STEVE AJAO BLUES GIANTS + THE FRENZIES Thurs 19 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

BIG JOANIE + THE NONE + FLESH CREEP Thurs 19 Dec, Castle

& Falcon, B'ham

EAST 17 Thurs 19 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

DIZZY LIZZY Thurs 19 Dec, Katie Fitzgerald's, Stourbridge

CHRISTMAS JAZZ Thurs 19 Dec, St Anne's Church, Chasetown, Lichfield

GORDON HENDRICKS IS ELVIS Thurs 19 Dec, The

Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

KIOKO + THE DELTONES Fri 20 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

SEAN REEVES Fri 20 Dec, Actress & Bishop, Birmingham

A TRIBUTE TO SHANE MACGOWAN WITH IMELDA MAY AND MANY MORE Fri 20 Dec, O2 Institute, Birmingham

FLEETWOOD SHACK Fri 20 Dec, Castle & Falcon, Birmingham

TERROR + NASTY + COMBUST Fri 20 Dec, The Asylum, B'ham

THE BRAND NEW HEAVIES Fri 20 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

SWEETPOOL Fri 20 Dec, Tower Of Song, Birmingham

THE 3 SIXTIES Fri 20 Dec, Joe Joe Jims, Birmingham

OASIS Fri 20 Dec, The Rhodehouse, Sutton Coldfield

JAKI GRAHAM Fri 20 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

BORN IN THE 80S Fri 20 Dec, The River Rooms, Stourbridge

ROB LAMBERTI AS GEORGE MICHAEL Fri 20 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

SPACEHOPPERS Fri 20 Dec, Katie Fitzgerald's, Stourbridge

LOVEBREAKERS + BAUDELAIRE + SWSWOTGRRRL Fri 20 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

ROCKY OSTRICH + SAINT CLAIR Fri 20



The Brand New Heavies - Birmingham Town Hall

Dec, The Sugarmill, Stoke-on-Trent

BON GIOVI Fri 20 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

SKABUCKS Fri 20 Dec, The Station, Cannock

KD AND THE DOGS Fri 20 Dec, The Feathers Inn, Lichfield

SHOWADDYADDY Fri 20 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

THE RONALDOS Fri 20 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

SKABURST Fri 20 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

CALL OF THE KRAKEN Fri 20 Dec, Albert's Shed, Southwater, Telford

GREENMATTHEWS Fri 20 Dec, Wem Town Hall, North Shropshire

DEAF BALLOONS + TRUST CLUB Sat 21 Dec, The Sunflower Lounge, Birmingham

LEVI WASHINGTON Sat 21 Dec, Actress & Bishop, Birmingham

THE SMALL FAKERS Sat 21 Dec, The Night Owl, B'ham

THE TWANG + PASTEL + SHORTSTRAW Sat 21 Dec, O2 Academy, B'ham

REM BY STIPE Sat 21 Dec, Castle &

Falcon, Birmingham

TALON Sat 21 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

THE MAJOR TOMS Sat 21 Dec, Tower Of Song, Birmingham

THE FATHER TEDS Sat 21 Dec, The Rhodehouse, Sutton Coldfield

KICK UP THE 80'S Sat 21 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

STARVING RASCALS Sat 21 Dec, Katie Fitzgerald's, Stourbridge

FINNEY Sat 21 Dec, The Sugarmill, Stoke-on-Trent

MAET LIVE & THE NEVERLAND EXPRESS Sat 21 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

ELECTROMANTICS Sat 21 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

BOOTLEG ABBA Sat 21 Dec, The Station, Cannock

MERCURY - QUEEN TRIBUTE Sat 21 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

AUDIO THIEVES Sat 21 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

DOMINO SUGAR Sat 21 Dec, Albert's Shed, Southwater, Telford

THE REVIVALS AND DUSTY GROOVES Sat 21 Dec, Memorial Hall Hinstock, Market

Drayton, North Shropshire

D:REAM + AL MACKENZIE + ALEX HAMMOND Sun 22 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

JACK GOODALL Sun 22 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

VINCENT FLATTS FINAL DRIVE Sun 22 Dec, Actress & Bishop, Birmingham

MOSTLY AUTUMN Sun 22 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

BIGGER THAN SEATTLE + GIANT AND THE GEORGES Sun 22 Dec, Katie Fitzgerald's, Stourbridge

TOYAH AND ROBERT CHRISTMAS PARTY Sun 22 Dec, The Wulfrun at The Halls Wolverhampton

THE WEST COAST EAGLES Sun 22 Dec, The Station, Cannock

RICH PARSONS Sun 22 Dec, The Feathers Inn, Lichfield

ROB LAMBERTI - PERFECTLY GEORGE MICHAEL Sun 22 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

COPICATS Sun 22 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

DIRTY ROCKIN' SCOUNDRELS Sun 22 Dec, Albert's Shed, Southwater, Telford

Classical Music

THOMAS TROTTER ORGAN CONCERT: SING CAROLS WITH THE CITY ORGANIST Featuring Lichfield Cathedral Choir, Ben Lamb (conductor) & Jeremy Nicholas (presenter), Mon 16 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

GAUDEATE! Annual festival of Christmas music and readings, including music for brass, organ and guest vocalist, Mon 16 Dec, St Alkmund's Church, Shrewsbury

STAFFORD CHORAL: HANDEL'S MESSIAH Mon 16 Dec, St Mary's Church, Stafford

HAPPY CHRISTMAS BREWOOD Featuring Telford Concert Band, Thurs 19 Dec, St Mary & St Chad Church, Brewood

CBSO: CHORAL CHRISTMAS WITH JESS GILLAM Featuring Simon Halsey CBE (conductor) & CBDO Choruses, Thurs 19 - Fri 20 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

EX CATHEDRA: CHRISTMAS MUSIC BY CANDLELIGHT Featuring Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor) & Nicholas Wearne (organ). Programme includes works by Tavener, Weir, Mathias & more..., Thurs 19 - Sat 21 Dec, St Paul's Church, Birmingham

QUINTESSENTIAL Featuring Jane Povey, Katy Rink, Sally Oak, John James & Chris Long. Programme includes seasonal music for wind quintet, Fri 20 Dec, St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury

CBSO CHRISTMAS PARTY Featuring Tim Redmond (conductor), Tom Redmond (presenter) & Louise Dearman (singer). Programme includes works by Tchaikovsky, Silvestri & festive favourites, Sat 21 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

TELFORD ARTS CENTRE CAROL CONCERT Sat 21 Dec, St Alkmund's Church, Shrewsbury

CHRISTMAS WITH THE CERAMIC CITY CHOIR Featuring Anthony Rose (conductor). An evening of festive favourites & lesser known works, Sat 21 Dec, King's Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

THE FRONCSYLLTE MALE VOICE CHOIR Sat 21 Dec, New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme

CHRISTMAS WITH THE JOHN RUTTER ENSEMBLE Programme comprises works by John Rutter, Sun 22 Dec, The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield

SHREWSBURY CANTATA CHOIR: CAROLS FOR CHRISTMAS Featuring Anthony Coupe (conductor), Catrina Lapage (organ) & The Brass Buttons Quartet, Sun 22 Dec, United Reform Church, Shrewsbury

Comedy

ANDREW BIRD, PHIL NICHOL, SUSIE MCCABE & CARL DONNELLY Wed 18 - Sat 21 Dec, The Glee Club, B'ham

JONNY AWSUM, FREDDY QUINNE, JACK SKIPPER & DAVE LONGLEY Thurs 19 Dec, Hockley Social Club, B'ham

BARBARA NICE'S CHRISTMAS CRACKER Fri 20 - Sat 21 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

ALISTAIR WILLIAMS, LUKE CHILTON, MARLON DAVIS & DAVE LONGLEY Sat 21 Dec, Rosies Nightclub, Birmingham

Theatre

THE BOOK OF MORMON Outrageous musical comedy following the misadventures of a mismatched pair of missionaries, until Sat 28 Dec, The Alexandra, Birmingham

THE WIZARD OF OZ Journey to the Emerald City in Birmingham Ormiston Academy's festive show, until Tues 31 Dec, The Old Rep, Birmingham

ROBIN HOOD Get ready for the merriest panto in the land as TaleGate Theatre transport audiences into the heart of Sherwood Forest, where Robin and his band of Merry Men reside, until Tues 31 Dec, Sutton Coldfield Town Hall

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: A GHOST STORY Mark Gattis' acclaimed retelling of Dickens' festive classic. Matthew Cottle stars as Scrooge, with Rufus Hound as Jacob Marley, until Sun 5 Jan, The Rep, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS PRESENT & CORRECT New Old Friends present a brand-new Christmas farce complete with witty wordplay and small-cast, multiple-role mayhem, until Sun 5 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Festive family fun. Casting includes panto favourites Tam Ryan and Ian Adams, Gladiator's Giant, SIX actor Jarneía Richard-Noel, Blood Brothers' Timothy Lucas and Waitress star Olivia Mitchell. Tom Lowe, who recently starred as King Triton in Unfortunate, also features, until Sun 5 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK A giant family pantomime starring Sam Rabone, Ben Thornton and Gill Jordan, until Sun 12 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

TWELFTH NIGHT Samuel West stars as Malvolio, Gwyneth Keyworth as Viola, Freema Agyeman as Olivia, and Bally Gill as Orsino in Shakespeare's bittersweet winter masterpiece, until Sat 18 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

THE RED SHOES New production based on Hans Christian Andersen's dark fairytale about a young woman

and a beautiful pair of red shoes that take her to places she doesn't wish to go..., until Sun 19 Jan, The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

SHERLOCK CHRISTMAS CASEBOOK

Jonathan Goodwin's one-man adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's The Adventure Of The Blue Carbuncle, Mon 16 Dec, Theatre On The Steps, Bridgnorth, South Shropshire

THE NIGHT BEFORE, THE NIGHT BEFORE

CHRISTMAS The Babbling Vagabonds present a spellbinding tale told via storytelling, puppetry, shadow play and pop-ups, Tues 17 - Tues 24 Dec, The Brewhouse Theatre, Burton upon Trent

GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BEARS

Family pantomime featuring circus acts and laughs aplenty, Tues 17 Dec - Thurs 2 Jan, Telford International Centre, Shropshire

NUMBER 13 Dark Tales In Winter present a contemporary version of MR James' ghost story, Wed 18 - Fri 20 Dec, Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton

NATIVITY! THE MUSICAL Shrewsbury Musical Theatre Company present an amateur version of Debbie Isitt's festive hit, Wed 18 - Sun 22 Dec, Barnes Theatre, Shrewsbury School

SCROOGE IN ROUGE An 'audacious and bawdy spin' on Dickens' Christmas classic, Wed 18 - Mon 30 Dec, The Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

ALADDIN Magical festive show for all the family, Thurs 19 - Tues 31 Dec, Mitchell Arts Centre, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent

UNCLE HOLLY Don't Go Into The Cellar present an original ghost story for Christmas, co-written and performed by Jonathan Goodwin, Fri 20 Dec, The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

ELF THE MUSICAL Arena spectacular featuring Santa's magical flying sleigh, an audience snowball fight, a giant candy-cane journey from the North Pole and other spectacular scenes, all set against video-film backdrops on a large LED screen. Jordan Conway stars, Fri 20 - Sun 22 Dec, bp pulse Live (formerly Resorts World Arena), Birmingham

ALADDIN Family pantomime full of laughs, songs and dance..., Fri 20 - Mon 23 Dec, Sandwell Valley Visitor Centre, West Bromwich

UNCLE HOLLY Don't Go Into The Cellar present an original ghost story for Christmas, co-written and performed by Jonathan Goodwin, Sat 21 Dec, Lightwoods House, Smethwick

CINDERELLA Much-loved rags-to-riches story filled with magic, laughter, audience participation and a happy-ever-after ending, Sat 21 - Sat 28 Dec, Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock

PETER PAN High-flying panto featuring Alison Hammond as the Magical Mermaid, Matt Slack as Smee, Danny Mac as Captain Hook, Rhiannon Chesterman as Wendy and Noah Harrison as Peter Pan. Resident 'Dame' Andrew Ryan and Billie-Kay (Tink) also star, Sat 21 Dec - Sun 2 Feb, Birmingham Hippodrome

GLORY - THE STORY OF SISTER ROSETTA THARPE Simmer Down Arts presents a musical play set in a black community radio station, Sun 22 Dec, The Bradshaw Hall, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

Kid's Theatre

FINDING SANTA Little Angel Theatre present a funny and heartwarming Christmas show that invites the audience to decide how the story unfolds, until Sun 29 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

THE JINGLECLAW Brand-new musical for younger audiences filled with original songs, festive magic 'and a little bit of naughtiness', until Sat 4 Jan, Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome

THE SNOWFLAKE The tale of a snowflake, a little girl and her pappie - all longing for their own special place in the world. Suitable for children aged between three and six, until Sun 12 Jan, The Rep, B'ham

THE FATHER CHRISTMAS SHOW Festive panto adventure, during which young members of the audience will need to help Santa and his elves get through an ever-growing to-do list, Thurs 19 - Sat 21 Dec, Tamworth Assembly Rooms

THE WITCH AND THE EGG One performer and a flock of shadow puppets tell an engaging and heartwarming story about friendship, laughter and flying the nest, Fri 20 Dec, Foxlow Arts Centre, Leek, Staffordshire

DEAR SANTA LIVE Stage adaptation of Rod Campbell's popular children's

book. There's also an opportunity to meet Santa in his grotto post-show, where every child will receive 'an extra-special gift', Sat 21 Dec, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

Light Entertainment

LOVE ACTUALLY IN CONCERT: FILM WITH LIVE ORCHESTRA Mon 16 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS WITH ANTON DU BEKE An evening of music, dance and laughter in which the 'Ballroom King' is joined by vocalist Lance Ellington, a live band and troupe of dancers, Tues 17 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THE RAT PACK CHRISTMAS IN VEGAS Direct from London's West End and featuring three talented performers as Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr, Wed 18 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

THE HOLIDAY: FILM WITH LIVE ORCHESTRA Wed 18 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THE BIG CHRISTMAS ASSEMBLY Join James B Partridge (Primary School Assembly Bangers Live) for an evening of pure nostalgia, stepping back in time with joyous singalong tunes from Christmases past, Thurs 19 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

A CHRISTMAS WASSAIL A festival of choral music, solo songs, spoken word and comedy, Sat 21 Dec, Middleton Hall, Nr Tamworth

TRÈS TRÈS CABARET 'A silly and saucy night to remember', Sat 21 Dec, The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield

THE BIG CHRISTMAS PARTY 'A spectacular blend of festive pop hits and traditional favourites, featuring a dazzling live ensemble band, four headline singers and incredible live music', Sun 22 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THE D-DAY DARLINGS: A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER Brand-new, high-energy



Elf The Musical - bp pulse Live (formerly Resorts World Arena) Birmingham

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Jack the Beanstalk

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BRAD FITT

Sleeping Beauty

TONNY J ROLLASON DOHNE WOOD-ANDERSON LAUREN LANE GENOVA SUTTON

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THE POLAR EXPRESS™ Train Ride - Telford Railway

Christmas show, complete with 'a sprinkling of romance and reflection' and 'plenty of festive fun', Sun 22 Dec, Halesowen Town Hall

DANA AND GRIMETHORPE COLLIERY BAND: A DANA GOOD CHRISTMAS! Also featuring The Choir of St Mary's the Mount RC Primary School, Walsall, and host & guest singer Bob Broolly, Sun 22 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

Events

THE POLAR EXPRESS™ TRAIN RIDE Christmas experience in which visitors become fully immersed in the sights, sounds and intrigue of the classic festive tale, until Mon 23 Dec, Telford Steam Railway, Shropshire

THE POLAR EXPRESS™ TRAIN RIDE Christmas experience in which visitors become fully immersed in the sights, sounds and intrigue of the classic festive tale, until Mon 23 Dec, Birmingham Moor Street Station

THE CHRISTMAS GROTTO Wander through a Christmas village, where there's a surprise around every corner, until Tues 24 Dec, Webbs at West Hagley, Stourbridge

WINTER FUNLAND The UK's largest indoor fairground, 'filled with festive fun', until Wed 1 Jan, NEC, Birmingham

THE CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL A collection of real Christmas trees, decorated by local businesses, schools and charities, until Sun 5 Jan, Lichfield Cathedral

ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM The big wheel and weatherproof ice rink are back!, until Sun 5 Jan, Centenary Square, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS LIGHT SHOW Enjoy a spectacular light show from Illuminos, Mon 16 - Wed 18 Dec, Lichfield Cathedral

ENCHANTED AFTERNOON TEA Savour treats and fine tea as you journey through the picturesque landscape of the Severn Valley, Tues 17 - Thurs 19

Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

CHRISTMAS PARTY AND FILM: FINDING YOUR FEET Screening of the feelgood film about a suburban snob who's forced to muck in with her bohemian sister, Wed 18 Dec, Hermon Chapel, Oswestry, North Shropshire

CHRISTMAS LATES Take an after-hours journey back in time to experience a magical Christmas evening, Wed 18 - Thurs 19 Dec, Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge

FESTIVE WINTER GARDENS Step into the world of cinema magic as the Chelsea and Maxell Gardens are transformed with dazzling lights and festive movie projections, creating a captivating 'night at the movies' experience, Fri 19 - Sun 21 Dec, Telford Town Park, Shropshire

JINGLE VILLE Explore the enchanted town of Jingle Ville, complete with hidden treasures and delightful characters, Thurs 19 - Tues 24 Dec, Lower Drayton Farm, Stafford

SCHOOL'S OUT FOR CHRISTMAS DISCO Fri 20 Dec, Telford Ice Rink, Telford Town Park

CHRISTMAS LIGHT SHOW Enjoy a spectacular light show from Illuminos, Fri 20 - Sun 22 Dec, Lichfield Cathedral

GLAD TIDINGS Featuring costumed characters and street entertainers, Fri 20 - Mon 23 Dec, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

STORYTIME IN SANTA'S GROTTO Interactive storytime experience featuring a selection of enchanting tales narrated by Santa, Fri 20 - Tues 24 Dec, World of Wedgwood, Stoke-on-Trent

FESTIVE NIGHTS Explore the garden after hours, beautifully lit with Christmas lights, Fri 20 - Sun 29 Dec, Biddulph Grange Gardens, Staffordshire

SINGING SANTA Featuring songs, child-friendly interactions - and Santa!, Sat 21 Dec, Castle Bromwich

Historic Gardens, Birmingham
SHREWSBURY FESTIVE FAIR Check out a range of handmade gifts and unique presents, Sat 21 Dec, St Mary's Church, Shrewsbury

CHRISTMAS PARTY NIGHT Featuring a three-course sit-down meal followed by a DJ and dancing, Sat 21 Dec, Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms, South Shropshire

SANTA PAWS Take along your four-legged friends for a meeting with Santa in the stables, Sat 21 Dec, Tamworth Castle

CHRISTMAS FAYRE Featuring stalls, food and drink in celebration of TACT's end of term, Sat 21 Dec, The Arts Centre Telford, Ketley Community Centre, Telford

WINTER SOLSTICE SUNRISE SWIM Embrace the beauty of the shortest day of the year via this 'unforgettable experience', Sat 21 Dec, Alderford Lake, Shrewsbury

BREAKFAST WITH SANTA Combine breakfast with the chance to meet Father Christmas, Sat 21 - Sun 22 Dec, The Furnace Kitchen, Coalbrookdale, Shropshire

VISIT FATHER CHRISTMAS Father Christmas makes his annual

appearance, Sat 21 - Sun 22 Dec, Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton
THE ENCHANTED EXPRESS Steam-train journey inspired by the classic poem 'Twas The Night Before Christmas, Sat 21 - Sun 22 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

SKATE WITH PRINCESSES Festive fun on the ice, Sat 21 & Sun 22 Dec, Telford Ice Rink, Telford Town Park

SANTA TRAIN Travel on a steam train to see Santa in a pantomime, Sat 21 - Sun 22 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION WEEKENDS Enjoy the Santa Show and more, Sat 21 - Tues 24 Dec, Cadbury World, Bournville, Birmingham

NORTH POLE ADVENTURE Take part in 'a magical adventure' and find Father Christmas, Sat 21 - Tues 24 Dec, National Forest Adventure Farm, Staffordshire

SANTA HUNTS Find the magic keys for Santa's new Black Country grotto, Sat 21 - Tues 24 Dec, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

THE SANTA EXPERIENCE Head to the farm and meet Santa and his elves, Sat 21 - Tues 24 Dec, Park Hall Farm, Oswestry, North Shropshire

Polka Dot Pantomimes in association with the Prince of Wales Theatre present

Starring **PIOTR GREENWOOD** as Aliza and **KEITH DeWINTER** as Sir

From the hit BBC series 'The Trainers' featuring **THEO MAYNE** as Bandini and **HOLLY ELLE MARTIN** as Cinderella

Introducing **DANI JAE-YOUNG** as Fairy Theatrical and **MICHAEL McGEOUGH** as Buttons

Introducing **BEN FEATHERSTONE** as Prince Charming and **EMILY OAKES** as Fairy Superior

Cinderella

The Family Pantomime Where Dreams Come True

21 - 28 DECEMBER 2024

Prince of Wales Theatre, Church Street, Cannock, WS11 1DE
Box Office: 01543 578762 | www.princeofwales.live

Gigs

THE GLENN MILLER ORCHESTRA Mon 23 Dec, Birmingham Town Hall

DIRTY ROCKIN' SCOUNDRELS Mon 23 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

RADIO RUMOURS Mon 23 Dec, Albert's Shed, Southwater, Telford

SUPERSONIC - OASIS TRIBUTE Thurs 26 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

THE GABBIDON BAND Fri 27 Dec, The Jam House, Birmingham

OCEAN COVER SCENE Fri 27 Dec, The Night Owl, Birmingham

MARQUEE SQUARE HEROES Fri 27 Dec, Castle & Falcon, Birmingham

FRED ZEPPELIN Fri 27 Dec, The Flapper,

Birmingham
THE BOY GEORGE EXPERIENCE Fri 27 Dec, The Rhodehouse, Sutton Coldfield

MOSHTALGIA Fri 27 Dec, The River Rooms, Stourbridge

BOOTLEG ABBA Fri 27 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

BAD MANNERS + MAX SPODGE + THE SOUND A.K.A Fri 27 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

THE FREDDIE & QUEEN CHRISTMAS EXTRAVAGANZA Fri 27 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

DEFINITELY MIGHTBE + ADORED Fri 27 Dec, The Station, Cannock

ABBA REVIVAL Fri 27 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

ETERNITY ROAD Fri 27

Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

RUFFNECKS Fri 27 Dec, Albert's Shed, Southwater, Telford

GBH + DRONGOS FOR EUROPE + THE SAMPLES + THEE ACID TONGUE + KICKED IN THE TEETH Sat 28 Dec, Castle & Falcon, Birmingham

KATIE & THE BAD SIGN + VINCENT FLATTS FINAL DRIVE Sat 28 Dec, Joe Joe Jims, Birmingham

THE QUAD ROX Sat 28 Dec, The Rhodehouse, Sutton Coldfield

AUDIORAGE + NIRVARNA Sat 28 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

DIRTY DC + SEX PISSED DOLLS + FAUX FIGHTERS UK Sat 28 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

THE ROUGH KUTZ Sat

28 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

FOARN Sat 28 Dec, The Underground, Stoke-on-Trent

UNFORGIVEN Sat 28 Dec, The Feathers Inn, Lichfield

ERASURED + PET SHOP BOYS, ACTUALLY Sat 28 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

GOOD TO GO Sat 28 Dec, Albert's Shed, Southwater, Telford

BRIAN LIGHTNING + OLLIE COOK + LOBBY Sun 29 Dec, Hare & Hounds, Birmingham

FLASH: A TRIBUTE TO QUEEN Sun 29 Dec, The River Rooms, Stourbridge

AC/DSHE + WIZARDS OF OZ Sun 29 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

OASIS FOREVER + ABSOLUTE STONE ROSES + THE JONESES Sun 29 Dec,

KK's Steel Mill, Wolverhampton

CHRIS BEVINGTON ORGANISATION Sun 29 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

GUTTERSNIPE Sun 29 Dec, Albert's Shed, Shrewsbury

THE FOOZ - FOO FIGHTERS TRIBUTE Sun 29 Dec, Albert's Shed, Southwater, Telford

COZY POWELL BIRTHDAY BASH IV Mon 30 Dec, KK's Steel Mill, Wolves

SUNSHINE FRISBEE LASERBEAM Tues 31 Dec, The Victoria, Birmingham

BON GIOVI Tues 31 Dec, The Robin, Bilston

THUNDER HAMMER Tues 31 Dec, Eleven, Stoke-on-Trent

FRN Tues 31 Dec, The Station, Cannock

Comedy

ANDY ROBINSON, COLIN HOULT & MICKEY D Fri 27 - Sat 28 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

FAMILY COMEDY SHOW - MICHAEL LEGGE, BARBARA NICE & FOXDOG STUDIOS Sun 29 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

AXEL BLAKE, RICHARD BLACKWOOD, NABIL ABDULRASHID & CURTIS WALKER Sun 29 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

MARLON DAVIS, VLAD ILICH, MATT REES & TOM TOAL Tues 31 Dec, Rosies Nightclub, Birmingham

ANDY ROBINSON, LINDSEY SANTORO, KAZEEM JAMAL & COMIC TBC Tues 31 Dec, The Glee Club, Birmingham

Theatre

THE BOOK OF MORMON Outrageous musical comedy following the misadventures of a mismatched pair of missionaries, until Sat 28 Dec, The Alexandra, Birmingham

SCROOGE IN ROUGE An 'audacious and bawdy spin' on Dickens' Christmas classic, until Mon 30 Dec,



ROYAL SUTTON COLDFIELD TOWN HALL



ROBIN HOOD

THE MERRIEST PANTO IN THE LAND



SCAN TO BOOK



7th - 31st December 2024 | 0121 296 9543 | www.suttoncoldfieldtownhall.com

Monday 23 - Tuesday 31 December

The Old Joint Stock Theatre, B'ham
THE WIZARD OF OZ Journey to the Emerald City in Birmingham Ormiston Academy's festive show, until Tues 31 Dec, The Old Rep, Birmingham

ROBIN HOOD Get ready for the merriest panto in the land as TaleGate Theatre transport audiences into the heart of Sherwood Forest, where Robin and his band of Merry Men reside, until Tues 31 Dec, Sutton Coldfield Town Hall

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: A GHOST STORY Mark Gattis' acclaimed retelling of Dickens' festive classic. Matthew Cottle stars as Scrooge, with Rufus Hound as Jacob Marley, until Sun 5 Jan, The Rep, Birmingham

CHRISTMAS PRESENT & CORRECT New Old Friends present a brand-new Christmas farce complete with witty wordplay and small-cast, multiple-role mayhem, until Sun 5 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Festive family fun. Casting includes panto favourites Tam Ryan and Ian Adams, Gladiator's Giant, SIX actor Jarnéia Richard-Noel, Blood Brothers' Timothy Lucas and Waitress star Olivia Mitchell. Tom Lowe, who recently starred as King Triton in Unfortunate, also features, until Sun 5 Jan, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK A giant family pantomime starring Sam Rabone, Ben Thornton and Gill Jordan, until Sun 12 Jan, Lichfield Garrick

TWELFTH NIGHT Samuel West stars as Malvolio, Gwyneth Keyworth as Viola, Freema Agyeman as Olivia, and Bally Gill as Orsino in Shakespeare's bittersweet winter masterpiece, until Sat 18 Jan, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

THE RED SHOES New production based on Hans Christian Andersen's dark fairytale about a young woman and a beautiful pair of red shoes that take her to places she doesn't wish to go..., until Sun 19 Jan, The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

PETER PAN High-flying panto featuring Alison Hammond as the Magical Mermaid, Matt Slack as Smee, Danny Mac as Captain Hook, Rhiannon Chesterman as Wendy and Noah Harrison as Peter Pan. Resident 'Dame' Andrew Ryan and Billie-Kay (Tink) also star, until Sun 2 Feb, Birmingham Hippodrome

Kid's Theatre

FINDING SANTA Little Angel Theatre present a funny and heartwarming Christmas show that invites the audience to decide how the story unfolds, until Sun 29 Dec, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham

THE JINGLECLAW Brand-new musical for younger audiences filled with original songs, festive magic 'and a little bit of naughtiness', until Sat 4 Jan, Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome

THE SNOWFLAKE The tale of a snowflake, a little girl and her pappie - all longing for their own special place in the world. Suitable for children aged between three and six, until Sun 12 Jan, The Rep, B'ham

DEAR SANTA LIVE Stage adaptation of Rod Campbell's popular children's book. There's also an opportunity to meet Santa in his grotto post-show, where every child will receive 'an extra-special gift', Mon 23 & Tues 24 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

THE TIGER WHO CAME TO TEA Join the tea-guzzling tiger in this delightful family show, featuring oodles of magic, a selection of singalong songs and plenty of clumsy chaos, Fri 27 Dec - Sun 5 Jan, Birmingham Town Hall

Light Entertainment

MUSIC OF THE MOVIES: THE LORD OF THE RINGS, GAME OF THRONES AND BEYOND Concert featuring the greatest movie music of all time, Fri 27 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

BINGO LOCO CHRISTMAS SPECIAL Bingo rave with random prizes, dance-offs, confetti showers and more..., Fri 27 Dec, Dudley Town Hall

MINISTRY OF SOUND CLASSICAL The London Concert Orchestra perform the greatest dance compilations of all-time - 're-orchestrated, re-imagined, re-lived'. This unique concert also features special guest AJ Gibson, Sat 28 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THE MUSIC OF ZIMMER VS WILLIAMS The London Concert Orchestra perform popular scores from two of the greatest film composers of all time, Sun 29 Dec, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

THE DOLLY SHOW The 'ultimate UK and international Dolly Parton tribute'. Sun 29 Dec, The Buttermarket, Shrewsbury

MURDER BEFORE MIDNIGHT: A NEW YEAR'S EVE WHODUNNIT Presented by Murder In Mind - a team of professional actors specialising in murder-mysteries, Tues 31 Dec, Old Joint Stock Theatre, Birmingham

Events

THE POLAR EXPRESS™ TRAIN RIDE Immersive family experience based on the iconic festive film, until Mon 23 Dec, Telford Steam Railway, Shrops

THE POLAR EXPRESS™ TRAIN RIDE Christmas experience in which visitors become fully immersed in the sights, sounds and intrigue of the classic festive tale, until Mon 23 Dec, Birmingham Moor Street Station

THE CHRISTMAS GROTTO Wander through a Christmas village, where there's a surprise around every corner, until Tues 24 Dec, Webbs at West Hagley, Stourbridge

WINTER FUNLAND The UK's largest indoor fairground, 'filled with festive fun', until Wed 1 Jan, NEC, Birmingham

THE CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL A collection of real Christmas trees, decorated by local businesses, schools and charities, until Sun 5 Jan, Lichfield Cathedral

ICE SKATE BIRMINGHAM The big wheel and weatherproof ice rink are back!, until Sun 5 Jan, Centenary Square, Birmingham

THE ENCHANTED EXPRESS Steam-train journey inspired by the classic poem 'Twas The Night Before Christmas, Tues 24 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

SANTA TRAIN Travel on a steam train to see Santa in a pantomime, Tues 24

Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

CHRISTMAS EVE FAMILY SKATE Tues 24 Dec, Telford Ice Rink, Telford Town Park



FESTIVE SEASON SERVICE See a selection of the SVR's fleet of steam engines and heritage diesel locomotives in action, Thurs 26 - Sun 29 Dec, Severn Valley Railway, Bewdley, nr Kidderminster

TOY COLLECTORS FAIR Featuring more than 500 stalls packed with new and old collectables for sale, Fri 27 Dec, NEC, Birmingham

NEW YEAR'S FAMILY FUN Make a balloon animal, bake a New Year treat or make a confetti popper, Tues 31 Dec, Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms, South Shropshire

THE OLD JOINT STOCK PRESENTS

SCROOGE IN Rouge

An English Music Hall Christmas Carol

Book & Lyrics by RICKY GRAHAM Additional Material by JEFFERY ROBERTSON

Other Interesting bits by YVETTE HARRIS Original Music Composed by JEFFERSON TURNER Directed by EMILY SUSANNE LLOYD

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Enter now at whatsonlive.co.uk to be in with a chance of bagging one of these fabulous prizes!



Win! Four tickets to The Red Shoes at the RSC

Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's dark fairytale about a pair of enchanted shoes that take their wearer to places she doesn't want to go, *The Red Shoes* shows at RSC's The Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon until Sunday 19 January. We are offering one lucky reader the chance to win four tickets to see the 1pm matinee on Saturday 11 January.

Competition closes Friday 3 January



Win! Two weekend camping tickets to Shrewsbury Folk Festival

Shrewsbury Folk Festival returns to the DMOS People West Mid Showground from 22 - 25 August 2025, with Levellers, Oysterband, Skerryvore and Jim Moray amongst the acts announced so far. We are offering one lucky reader the chance to win two weekend camping tickets to next year's event.

Competition closes Friday 31 January



Win! Two tickets to see BRB's Cinderella

Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB) will bring Sir David Bintley's timeless story of Cinderella to life at the Birmingham Hippodrome next year (Wednesday 19 February - Saturday 1 March). We have two tickets up for grabs to see the fairytale favourite on Wednesday 19 February at 7.30pm.

Competition closes Friday 24 January



Win! Four tickets to see The Smeds And The Smoos

Soar into space with this exciting staging of the award-winning book by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler. Presented by Tall Stories, *The Smeds And The Smoos* shows at Warwick Arts Centre until Sunday 29 December.

We have a family prize (4 tickets) to give away to a performance of your choice, plus a set of 3 *The Smeds and Smoos* soft toys.

Competition closes Monday 9 December

For your chance to WIN! with What's On, visit:
whatsonlive.co.uk

LIVE EVENTS
IN SHREWSBURY
 WINTER 2024 / SPRING 2025

THE BUTTERMARKE
SHREWSBURY



MASSAOKE CHRISTMAS LIVE
 FRI 6 DEC

★★★★★
LET ME ENTERTAIN YOU
 STARRING Dan Budd AND HIS LIVE BAND!
 THURS 12 DEC

SAT 14 DEC
EM FEST
 THE GREATEST TRIBUTE NIGHT TO THE MUSIC THAT WAS NEVER JUST A PHASE.

LEGENDS OF MOTOWN
 SUN 15 DEC
Christmas PARTY

The RAT PACK
 Christmas in VEGAS
 WED 18 DEC

GORDON HENDRICKS
ELVIS
 THE KING'S VOICE
 THURS 19 DEC

SHOWADDY WADDY
 FRI 20 DEC

SAT 21 DEC
MERCURY
 The Ultimate Queen Tribute

SUN 22 DEC
George
 Rob Lanferti
 PRESENTS PERFECTLY GEORGE

CELEBRATING 50th ANNIVERSARY OF WATERLOO
ABBA GOLD PARTY
 GREATEST HITS FEATURING ABBA/R3VIVAL
 FRI 27 DEC

SAT 28 DEC
THE BIG 80'S PARTY
erased
 THE ULTIMATE ERASURE TRIBUTE
 A LIVE TRIBUTE TO PET SHOP BOYS BY PET SHOP BOYS, ACTUALLY

SUN 29 DEC
The Dolly Show

DOOKIE GREEN DAY TRIBUTE BAND
 FRI 10 JAN

THE DEFINITIVE TRIBUTE TO GLAM ROCK
GLAM 45 LIVE
 SAT 11 JAN

THE NO.1 LIVE TRIBUTE TO MORRISEY & THE SMITHS
THESE SMITHS
 10TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR
 FRI 17 JAN

THE UPBEAT BEATLES
 30+ hits packed into a two-hour extravaganza!
 SAT 18 JAN

The Princess Party
 MEET & MEET WITH Ariel & Belle
 SUN 19 JAN

FRI 24 JAN
The Moderators
 THE ULTIMATE MOD NIGHT OUT!

LUKE GOMBS
 FEATURING THE MUSIC OF MORRISSEY, WOODEN JOHNSON, DARTS ROCKERS
RYAN EVANS THE HEARTY W SOUL OF NASHVILLE
 THE COUNTRY MUSIC SHOW
 "OUTSTANDING" "A MUST-SEE SHOW"
 A SPECIAL COUPLER PRESENT JAKE O'NEILL
 SUN 26 JAN

YOUNG ELTON
 CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF SIR ELTON JOHN
 OUTSTANDING PRENUMERAL
 INTENSELY BRILLIANT ABSOLUTELY FANTASTIC
 A MUST-SEE FOR ALL FANS AWESOME VOICE
 FRI 31 JAN

SAT 1 FEB
MARTIN KEMP
 BACK TO THE 80'S SET

CHASING MUMFORD
 FRI 7 FEB
 Europe's No.1 Tribute to MUMFORD & SONS

A TRIBUTE TO ADELE BY NATALIE BLACK
HOMETOWN GLORY
 SUN 9 FEB
 SOMEONE LIKE YOU ROLLING IN THE DEEP WHEN WE WERE YOUNG SET FIRE TO THE RAIN EASY ON ME AND MANY MORE!

IN THE NAME OF LOVE
 THE DIANA ROSS STORY
 FRI 14 FEB

CHRISTMAS

light show

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