

THEATRE IS

GREAT

BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND



**A guide to musicals and plays
at theatres across Britain**

From the drama of *The Phantom of the Opera* to the magic of *Wicked*

Includes
an illustrated
map inside
of London's
Theatreland

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PRODUCER: SIR CAMERON MACKINTOSH



If I asked you what is the single highest-grossing piece of entertainment at the box office in any art form, you might think of blockbuster movies such as *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter* or a Marvel superhero flick. But you'd be understandably mistaken. The highest-grossing piece of entertainment in history is, in actual fact, a stage musical. Many productions have far outgrossed major movies and have helped establish London's West End as the powerhouse of musical theatre. And what's more, this huge demand for world-class theatre in London continues to grow and grow...

The West End is currently in impeccable health. Box-office records are being smashed left, right and centre and, indeed, the sheer range of shows on offer is staggering. I cast my mind back three decades ago – (shhh) – to when I started producing Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Cats*; we



Sir Cameron Mackintosh has produced more musicals than anyone else in history, including the longest-running musical of all time: *Les Misérables*

were hard-pressed to cast the production, struggling to find the right calibre of performer for a West End musical. Thankfully we did, but boy did we search. Nowadays, with the current pool of exceptional talent, we could cast *Cats* 30 times over!

My critically acclaimed reinvention of the quintessential British musical *Half a Sixpence*, now wowing audiences at the Noël Coward Theatre, showcases a cast bursting with just such

talent, including the brilliant new star Charlie Stemp as Arthur Kipps. The industry really has become à la mode and I never expected musical theatre in London to flourish and thrive to the extent it does now. Our productions continue to play to packed houses every night, and you, our audiences, keep coming back time and time again because we share the same passion: we love outstanding

talent on the British stage. When I was eight years old, I experienced the magic of theatre for the first time. That moment has never left me, and to this day it still fuels my need for audiences seeing any of our wonderful shows to experience that same magic for themselves.

London's West End always exceeds expectations, enchanting and delighting all those who experience the magic of live performance – making it truly the theatre capital of the world!

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MORRIS VISITOR PUBLICATIONS: Editor Kohinoor Sahota **Contributors** Mark Fox, Stuart Render, Sarah Riches, Sam Rogg, Kevin Taylor, Dominic Wells
Sub Editor Anna Frame **Art Director** Tim Benton **Senior Designer** Grant Pearce **Production** Melanie Needham, David Weeks
Sales Director Rob Way **Publishing Director** Mark Elliott

made: Managing Director Jonathan Mountford **Marketing Assistant** Alastair Drakesmith **Researcher** Oliver Dawe

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WE MEET...

KATHERINE JENKINS

The opera singer takes on her first musical – *Carousel* – at the London Coliseum

Why did *Carousel* appeal to you?

I was inspired as a child by singing in church and watching West End musicals. I went to see Phillip Schofield in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and I was hooked. *Carousel* appealed to me because of the music – I found myself humming the songs all day.

How did you approach your first acting role?

It's an amazing opportunity for me. I want to give everything I have to the role. I've been

working with a coach to perfect my American accent. As my husband is American, I hear it spoken, but I don't practice in front of him. He'll hear my accent for the first time when I'm on stage!



What's your favourite song in *Carousel*?

If I Loved You.

I've sung it in concert many times, but in the context of the musical it feels so emotional; it's a clever and beautiful song.

I hope the audience will leave singing the songs.

If, like Billy in the show, you had a second chance, what would you change?

I lost my dad at 15, so I'd go back and enjoy more moments with him. I'd make the most of him. I don't have adult memories of my dad, so I'd like us to have more conversations together.

What makes the West End special?

London is the capital of culture. The West End is known for its incredible performances and is a big platform for the stage.

Would you do more musicals in the future?

Musicals are my inspiration and passion. *Carousel* will be good practice for me, as I'd love to play Anna in *The King and I* – it is an amazing, old-fashioned musical that has stood the test of time.

And tell us why readers should see the show?

Carousel is one of the greatest musicals of all time. This version has an outstanding orchestra and will be performed in a beautiful place. *To 13 May.*
www.eno.org



STARS ON STAGE

The West End stage continues to welcome the most famous faces in the world, from music icons to blockbuster movie stars

Words: Sarah Riches and Kohinoor Sahota



ANDREW GARFIELD

Andrew Garfield may only be 33 years old, but he has already notched up many different roles: he has morphed into the geeky co-founder of Facebook in *The Social Network*, a blockbuster superhero in *The Amazing Spider-Man* and a 17th-century Jesuit priest in *Silence*.

While Garfield is no stranger to the stage, it's his current role in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* as Prior Walter, a young gay man who has AIDS, that is his most challenging.

'I feel tremendously grateful and healthily daunted at the prospect of being back in a rehearsal room at the National

Theatre, to attempt to scale the mountain of Tony Kushner's masterpiece,' Garfield reveals. 'It is a gift to work on and offer up this play, which feels so urgent at this very moment for all our souls.'

The fantasy play is set in America during the 1980s, amid the AIDS crisis and the conservative Reagan administration. Celebrating its 25th anniversary, this is a production on an epic scale: it is directed by Olivier Award-winner Marianne Elliott, and is staged in two parts – each spanning three hours and 40 minutes – which means Garfield fans will have twice as much to enjoy.

To 19 Aug.

www.nationaltheatre.com



“I FEEL GRATEFUL AND DAUNTED AT BEING IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM”

Main: Katherine Jenkins
Right: Andrew Garfield
Left: Katherine Jenkins
and Alfie Boe



SHEENA EASTON

One of the biggest exports to come out of Bellshill, a small town in Scotland with a population of only 20,000

people, is Sheena Easton. The Grammy Award-winning singer, famous for the songs *9 to 5*, *U Got the Look* with

Prince and the James Bond theme tune *For Your Eyes Only*, is now performing for the first time in the West End.

Easton takes on the role of Dorothy Brock in *42nd Street* at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. The show tells the story of director Julian Marsh's efforts to stage a successful stage musical extravaganza during the Great Depression. But when Dorothy, his leading lady, breaks her ankle on the opening night, will the show go on?

Director Mark Bramble, who has been nominated for a Tony Award three times, says: 'The original production had the look of a Warner Brothers black-and-white film. This time we're doing an MGM Technicolor version, with additional songs and dances.' To 22 Jul. www.42ndstreetmusical.co.uk

JOHN BOYEGA

John Boyega has come a very long way since playing a gang leader in *Attack the Block*, a low-budget British film that saw him save the streets of Brixton from an oncoming alien attack.

In 2015 he starred in a film that most actors would quite literally break a leg for: *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. The film took Boyega to another level of fame – the kind where dolls are made in your own image.

But while Boyega could walk into any blockbuster movie, he has opted to return to the stage.

He began his career onstage, starring in shows at the National Theatre and the Tricycle Theatre, but *Woyzeck* at The Old Vic is set to be his biggest theatrical role. Written by Jack Thorne, the play brings to life the Cold War and is set on the border between East and West Berlin.

You could say that Boyega is soldiering on: he played a rebel soldier in *Star Wars*, and in *Woyzeck* he portrays a young soldier who is trying to build a better life for his family. The force is strong with this one.

13 May–24 Jun.
www.oldvictheatre.com



“BOYEGA COULD WALK INTO ANY BLOCKBUSTER”



“THE LOVE STORY AT ITS HEART TOUCHES ME IN EVERY PERFORMANCE”

WE MEET... **JANE ASHER**

The actress, author and cake maker is starring as Madame Baurel in the musical *An American in Paris*.

Why did *An American in Paris* appeal?

The standard of my singing and dancing is at a bad pantomime level, so the opportunity to appear in a musical with brilliant music and choreography was irresistible. Luckily for me and our audiences, Madame Baurel only joins in one number!

How did you approach the role?

As I would any part – by trying to find her character from the script and learning to see the world and the situation from her point of view. She may be French and from a very different era, but I have much in common with her as a wife and mother.

What has been challenging with the role?

Whether it's a movie or play, the challenge is the same: to appear truthful – in this case with the French accent!

What is your favourite song in the show?

Stairway to Paradise – it is a miraculous theatrical moment that could not be reproduced in any other medium to the same effect. During rehearsals I would sit and watch it!

Would you want to do some more musicals in the future?

If I was allowed to do 'speak singing', then who knows what avenues might open up to me? I suspect, though, that my future may well continue to be more straight play-based!

What makes the *West End* so special?

The variety of what is on offer, the beauty of many of the theatres and, of course, the fantastic history behind them. We are also lucky to have the best people in the world working behind the scenes: from stage management to wardrobe, and from crews to stage-door keepers.

And tell us why readers should see the show?

If you're in a good mood, it will enhance it; if you're down, it will lift you up. It takes us out of the dark post-war days into the light and hope of Paris. The love story at its heart touches me in every performance.
To 30 Sep. www.anamericaninparisthemusical.co.uk





THE SHOW MUST GO ON

London is home to some of the longest-running shows in the world, from *Les Misérables* to *The Phantom of the Opera*

Words: Sarah Riches and Dominic Wells

LES MISÉRABLES 32 YEARS

Directors Sir Trevor Nunn and John Caird summed up their chances of scoring a hit with *Les Misérables*: 'It's got "miserables" in the title. It's got 29 onstage deaths, it's largely about French history, there are no dance routines, no tap shoes, no sequins, no fishnets, no staircases, no big stars, no cowboys, no chimney sweeps, no witches, no wizards. How can it succeed?'

The show opened in London at the Barbican Theatre in 1985 to disappointing reviews, but has had the greatest staying power and is now the longest-running musical in the world – it has been seen by 70 million people in 44 countries and 349 cities, and translated into 22 different languages.

Producer Sir Cameron Mackintosh says: 'It's as if

history has caught up with the show and now a modern audience appreciates it without us updating it.'

It got a new lease of life as a triple-Oscar-winning film, and, before that, became a surprise hit with the

YouTube generation.

The fresh spark was Susan Boyle's rendition of *I Dreamed a Dream* on *Britain's Got Talent* in 2009. The clip of the Scottish

Every Les Misérables performance uses 392 costumes, which consist of a total of 1,782 items of clothing and 31 wigs

Les Misérables



47-year-old, giving the performance of a lifetime, went on to be viewed more than 200 million times on YouTube. As for the play, just remember to bring tissues, as there's never a dry eye in the house, especially when Fantine belts out *I Dreamed a Dream*. www.lesmiserables.com

“REMEMBER TO BRING TISSUES”

CLAUDE-MICHEL SCHÖNBERG © SEAMUS RYAN; THE MOUSETRAP © HELEN MAYBANKS

★★ CLAUDE-MICHEL SCHÖNBERG ★★



The composer is best known for his collaborations with lyricist Alain Boublil on *Miss Saigon* and *Les Misérables*

How did *Les Misérables* come about?

I'd done a successful musical about the French Revolution with Boublil. When he saw *Oliver!*, he said: 'What do you think of writing a musical based on *Les Misérables*?' It took me a minute to make the biggest right decision!

Is it true critics hated it?

It was like a funeral. The reviews were awful. Princess Diana was our best PR – she said she loved it. In two days, a run of two months sold out.

How involved were you in the 2012 film?

When director Tom Hooper wanted it all sung-through, they realised the script is the score. From that moment, I was always there. If a song is a structure, a musical is the Empire State Building: when you touch one stone, you have to reshape everything so it stands up solid and has a beautiful arc.

Do you prefer stage or film?

So much can go wrong in theatre. It's like watching an acrobat in a circus without a safety net. You say: 'My God, they can fall.'

THE MOUSETRAP 64 YEARS

'It won't run that long, eight months perhaps,' said Agatha Christie about her play *The Mousetrap*. After premiering in 1952, it has become the longest-running show in the world – a fact that is celebrated with a blue plaque outside St Martin's Theatre.

The play was originally written for Queen Mary as a birthday gift, and it took the form of a 30-minute radio play *Three Blind Mice*. When it was transferred to the stage, the original cast included Richard Attenborough as

Detective Sergeant Trotter, while for its 60th anniversary, there was an all-star show with Hugh Bonneville, Patrick Stewart, Julie Walters and Miranda Hart.



Christie was upset that the conclusions of her murder mysteries were revealed in reviews. To ensure this did not happen with *The Mousetrap*, she asked the audience to be sworn to secrecy.

At the end of each show, a cast member says: 'Now you've seen *The Mousetrap*, you are partners in crime. We ask you to preserve the tradition by keeping the secret of whodunit locked in your hearts.' www.the-mousetrap.co.uk

The Phantom of the Opera

The Phantom's make-up takes two hours to apply and 30 minutes to remove



THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA IMAGES © JOHAN PERSSON

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

30 YEARS

Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* is celebrating its 30th anniversary at Her Majesty's Theatre. The original production opened in 1986 starring Michael Crawford as the Phantom and Sarah Brightman as Christine. Far beneath the majesty and splendour of the Paris Opera House hides the Phantom

in a shadowy existence. Ashamed of his physical appearance and feared by all, the love he holds for his beautiful protégée Christine Daaé is so strong that even her heart cannot resist.

Crawford went on to win an Olivier and Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical. In 2013, *Phantom* became the longest-running show in Broadway history, celebrating 25 years on Broadway. The show has since been seen by 140 million people, and is one of the most financially successful musicals ever. www.thephantomoftheopera.com



“MAMMA MIA! HAS BEEN SEEN BY EIGHT MILLION PEOPLE IN LONDON”

MAMMA MIA!

18 YEARS

Dancing Queen, *Super Trouper* and *The Winner Takes it All* are just some of the songs you can enjoy in *MAMMA MIA!*.

The smash-hit musical, which features the music of ABBA, has all the ingredients for a great night out: a Greek island, catchy songs and lots of dancing.

MAMMA MIA! originally opened at the Prince Edward Theatre in London in 1999, and is now in its 19th year. The musical transferred to the Prince of Wales Theatre in 2004, and in August 2007 it became the theatre's



MAMMA MIA!

longest-running show after 1,327 performances at the venue.

Now at the Novello Theatre, the musical has been seen by more than eight million people in London in over 7,500 performances, and by over 60 million people worldwide. The romantic comedy tells the

story of Sophie, who reads her mother's diary and discovers that one of three men could be her father. She becomes determined to track them down and invite them all to her wedding. But what will her unsuspecting mother make of that?

www.mamma-mia.com

MAMMA MIA! IMAGES © BRINKHOFF & MÖGENBURG



MAMMA MIA!

THE LION KING

To find out about another long-running musical, *The Lion King*, turn to page 28 ▶

LONDON'S LEADING LADIES

Producers, directors and theatre owners... London is a city where women are on top

Words: Sam Rogg and Kohinoor Sahota

JUDE KELLY CBE

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR,
SOUTHBANK CENTRE**

Kelly has been artistic director of the Southbank Centre for 10 years. She launched the *Women of the World (WOW)* festival in 2010 to champion gender equality.

What is the best thing about your job?

The number of people that I meet, from all persuasions, who are dedicated to making the world a better place – it's what the Southbank Centre believes in.

What are you proud of?

Founding artistic institutions that are still thriving, including Battersea Arts Centre and West Yorkshire Playhouse. I'm proud of being the Southbank Centre's artistic director, and founding the *Women of the World* festival.

What are the obstacles to gender equality in theatre?

The assumption that because nearly every famous historical book, film, play, painting and building was created by a man, that this is to do with an innate creativity in the male species, rather than a result of a historic tradition that gave men more

opportunities. It has resulted in the feeling that the male artist will be more naturally talented.

Men are never referred to as 'male artists', and that gives you a clue as to how discrimination is embedded.

What can we change for the better, for men and women?

I would change the systemic division between work and home life, so that childcare allows men and women to reconcile the critical importance of family-making with the desire to flourish in the workplace.

Is there anywhere in this city that makes you feel empowered as a woman?

In the parks of London. The woman who began the movement for parks and preservation of open spaces was National Trust founder Octavia Hill.

What are your ambitions?

I'm just back from doing a *WOW* festival in Kathmandu, and am planning the second *WOW* in Karachi.
www.southbankcentre.co.uk





“MY DREAM IS TO DROP DEAD ON STAGE IN THE MIDDLE OF A SPEECH”

NICA BURNS **PRODUCER AND CO-OWNER** **OF NIMAX THEATRES**

Nica Burns co-owns the Lyric, Palace, Duchess and Vaudeville theatres. Plays in her theatres include *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and *Thriller*.

Which women do you look up to?

The Queen. She is still doing her job exceptionally well at 91. Although she has always talked about ‘duty’ and has taken her job seriously, I think she likes being Queen. She is a woman who has worked hard all her life, been committed to her job, made few mistakes, is professional at all times and a mother of four. She is an inspiration. I love my work and my dream is to drop dead on stage in the middle of a speech at a very advanced age.

What would you change for the better, for men and women?

I’d blow up the concept of the glass ceiling. Times have changed and no one should waste time worrying about it. It is too easy to use it as an excuse – be brave.

What makes London stand out?

It’s a city that has everything: infinite culture, the best theatres in the world, wonderful art galleries, fascinating buildings dripping with history, fantastic parks and lots of hidden corners to discover. It is a great place in which to live and work.
www.nimaxtheatres.com



VEREEN IRVING
SALES AND TICKETING
MANAGER

Vereen Irving has been at the Adelphi Theatre for 38 years.

Why do you love your job?

I knew nothing about theatre when I started. My first show was *Irene*, with its beautiful sets, costumes and dancers. I was gobsmacked and thought 'I want to be part of this world'.

What are you proud of?

When I became box-office manager, I got a personal letter from producer Harold Fielding to congratulate me.

Tell us about females in theatre.

My counterparts are men, but it's great to see women producers like Nica Burns. www.reallyusefultheatres.co.uk

CARO NEWLING
SOLT AND NEAL STREET
PRODUCTIONS

Caro Newling is the president of the Society of London Theatre (SOLT) – she's the fourth woman, out of 31 people, to hold the post. With Neal Street Productions, her shows include *The Ferryman* at the Royal Court.



What's the best thing about your job?

Supporting writers, directors and theatre makers who have entertaining and challenging things to say.

What obstacles are there to gender inequality?

The technical departments were a challenge, but that is no longer the case. SOLT runs careers events to help people.

What are you proud of?

In the space of a month, I had a new musical opening on Broadway, a play opening in the West End and a transatlantic cultural endeavour launching with *The Old Vic* in London and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York. And I was standing for President of SOLT!

What makes you feel empowered as a woman?

I am president of a trade organisation that is one of the country's most important cultural and economic drivers. I am lucky to live in a political climate that has encouraged the acceptance of women in such roles, and amid changing times this is vital to protect. www.solt.co.uk

VICKY FEATHERSTONE
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE
ROYAL COURT THEATRE

In 2012, Featherstone became the Royal Court theatre's first female artistic director.



How important is feminism to you?

It's incredibly important. A world where women are genuinely equal to men, in all aspects, is the best kind of world that we can have.

What are the best things about your job?

I am able to create a platform for the best playwrighting talent, and welcome audiences into the theatre.

What are you proud of?

That I am still working in theatre – 25 years later! I am proud of setting up and running the National Theatre

of Scotland, and the fact that I'm artistic director of the Royal Court is a dream come true.

What obstacles are there to gender inequality?

Recalibrating the amount of women onstage and female playwrights. The majority of the British canon of plays has roles for men. In 25 years time, things will have shifted.

What are your ambitions?

We aim to inspire our audiences. We have a new production in June, *Anatomy of a Suicide*, which challenges what it means to be a woman. www.royalcourttheatre.com

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★★★★★

THE PLAY'S THE THING

Simon Stephens, the playwright behind *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, shares his words of wisdom on how to write a hit

Words: Kohinoor Sahota



William Shakespeare, Noël Coward and Tom Stoppard – few countries can boast a list of playwrights that are famous across the world. In Britain the playwright is at the heart of a production – just look at any poster and you'll see the playwright's name sitting next to the title, not the director's. One man

who has his name emblazoned on many posters is Simon Stephens. The Olivier and Tony Award-winning playwright has written more than 30 plays over the past 20 years, ranging from a school shooting in *Punk Rock* to a sympathetic look at the July 7/7 terrorists in *Pornography*. It was in 2012 that he had his biggest hit, when he was asked to adapt one of the nation's favourite books.

Few novels have captured the public's imagination as beautifully as Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Published in 2003, the story follows Christopher Boone, a 15-year-old boy with behavioural difficulties who is determined to find out who killed his neighbour's dog.

The play has become one of British theatre's greatest success stories. Premiering at the National Theatre, it moved to the West End and won a record number of seven Olivier Awards. After opening on Broadway, it gained rave reviews and five Tony Awards. The production can now be seen at the Gielgud Theatre, or on its UK tour. Here, Stephens talks to us about taking the story from the page to the stage.

PAGE TO STAGE

How well did you know *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* before you adapted it?

I read it once and loved it. I had frustrations with it – I wanted to see what Christopher's mum and dad were like. When I adapted it, I enjoyed imagining the people I was once unable to imagine.

How did you feel when you saw the finished play for the first time?

Absolutely thrilled! The story had

become an albatross for Mark. The most moving thing was watching it with him – he was weepy and told me that he had fallen back in love with the story. I also wrote the play for my kids. When I took my youngest child to watch it, he was 11 years old and hadn't seen any of my work. At the end he was nudging people around him – I'm going to tear up – and saying: 'The writer is my dad.'



Why do you think the show worked so well in America?

In the context of Broadway theatre, the aesthetic that director Marianne Elliott and the team built was radical. People fall in love with Christopher and his bravery, and recognise themselves in stories about families. And – this is a spoiler – they like a puppy!

Why should our readers see the show?

It's an experience that audiences will not get in another medium. Now, more than ever before, we need to be celebrating and reminded of the radical nature of kindness and bravery – I think they will get a kick out of that.

How did the success affect you?

The play reached an audience that I had never had: normally my plays are on for five weeks and are seen by a small audience, but *Curious* has run for five years and it has been seen by three million people. It was a game changer. I do not have to worry about feeding my kids now!



Main: Simon Stephens
Inset and this image:
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time's West End cast

DO THE WRITE THING

How do you write a play?

I spend my life mulling: thinking about ideas and putting them in the back of my head. Once you've got an idea, leave it. The danger is that you'll work on it too soon and kill it. If that hunch is still there six months later, then it is a good idea. After I am committed to the notion, I start researching – this could be interviews, travelling or reading books around the subject.

How much time do you spend writing?

Writing dialogue is the last thing I do! I know what is happening in each scene before writing and then I try to write as quickly as I can. It takes three to six weeks. The playwright's life is not like the novelist's life. Most plays are 30,000 words, while a novelist has to write 4,000 words a day minimum. The key is in the job title.

Where do you write?

I can write on the Tube, the bus and on holiday surrounded by children. It is like there's a tunnel that exists between me and the computer.

THE ROLE OF THE STORYTELLER

What is the role of the playwright?

The decision to tell a story is a political decision. If you're a playwright you have no choice but to be political. The choice is: what are your politics?

How has the role of the playwright changed?

When I started, the assumption was that the theatre was an elitist art form. As the political conversation in this country,

America and Europe have become one of mistrust and isolation; it is an inspiring time to be in theatre.

How has the space of the theatre changed?

In the past five years, theatre has become a rare space: it's obligatory to turn your phone off, sit next to a stranger and, for a time, with strangers, look in the same direction while a story is being told to you.

What makes British plays different?

British plays tend to have more character, action and narrative, as well as an impulse for the

“THE DECISION TO TELL A STORY IS POLITICAL”

function of the theatre. Plays are, however, a result of the economic structures in which they are made: in America the absence of state funding means that there is an impulse to seduce an audience with stories of redemption; while in Germany there is state subsidy and the stories are a provocation for a director to solve.

What makes London's theatre scene stand out?

If you go on the Tube, it's extraordinary to see how many posters there are for new shows. I don't know any other city – even New York – where that happens. The writers dominating commercial theatre, from *Matilda* to *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, continue to work in state-subsidised theatre, and there are theatres committed to new writing. *Gielgud Theatre, to 3 Jun. Shaftesbury Avenue, W1D 6AR. UK tour to 16 Sep. www.curiousonstage.com*

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time has won a record seven Olivier Awards

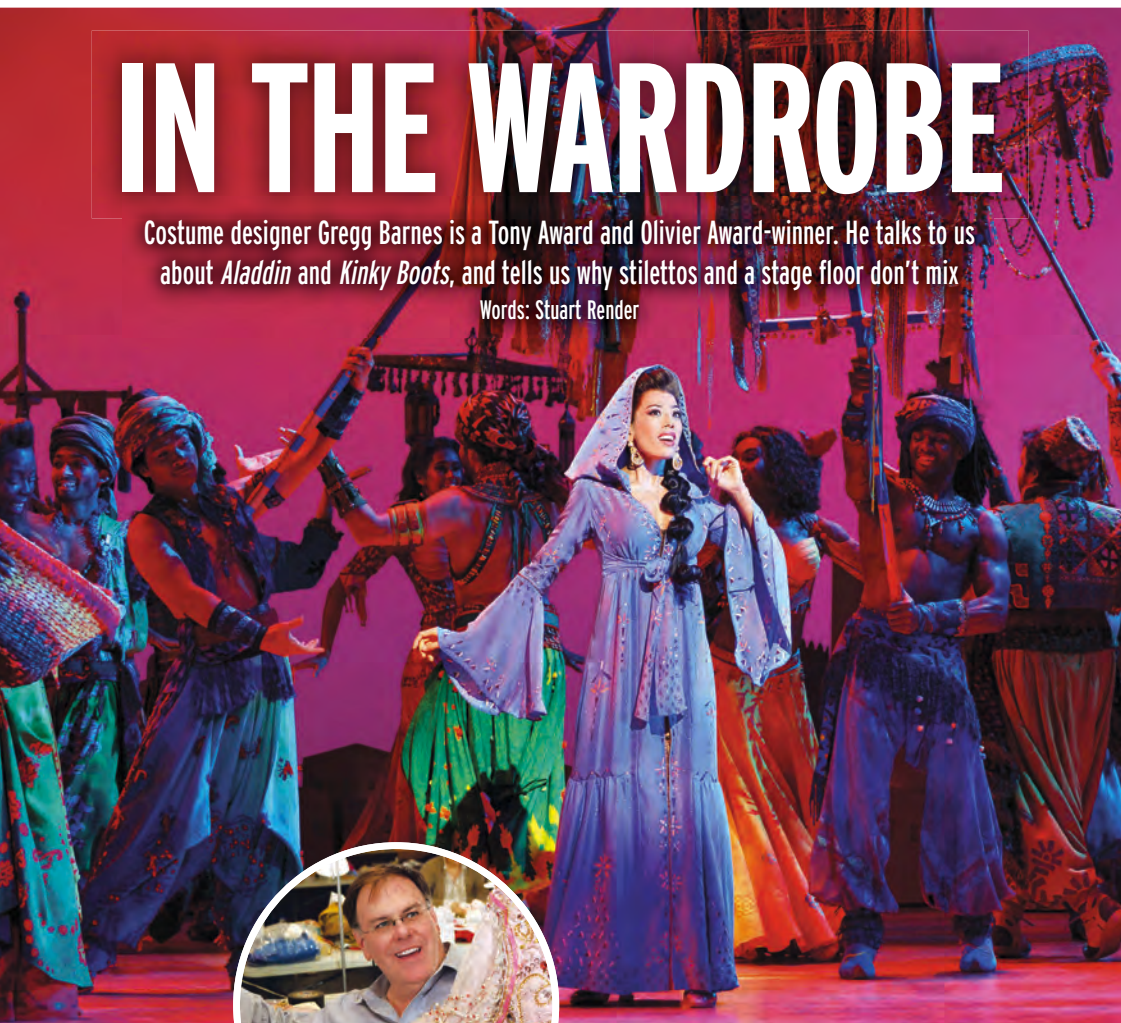


The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time's West End cast

IN THE WARDROBE

Costume designer Gregg Barnes is a Tony Award and Olivier Award-winner. He talks to us about *Aladdin* and *Kinky Boots*, and tells us why stilettos and a stage floor don't mix

Words: Stuart Render



Gregg Barnes

Growing up in San Diego, California, in the '50s and '60s, Gregg Barnes loved reading. While his family were all baseball fanatics, Barnes developed a passion for books and storytelling. Gaining an undergraduate degree to teach English, his career path seemed set.

But change was already on the horizon. Thinking that he might end up in a high school, maybe directing plays, he decided that he should start learning something about design.

It was a move that took Barnes into a 37-year career in design, a career that today sees him with *Kinky Boots* and

Aladdin in the West End. He explains that even after all this time, the job satisfaction is immense. 'I start off imagining something,' he says. 'You then have to corral a huge community of skilled people to make it happen. Then you hope, then your design appears, and sometimes it's so much better than you imagined. It's a very special moment when you see your designs come



Princess Jasmine in *Aladdin*



Gregg Barnes' original sketches for the costumes in *Aladdin*

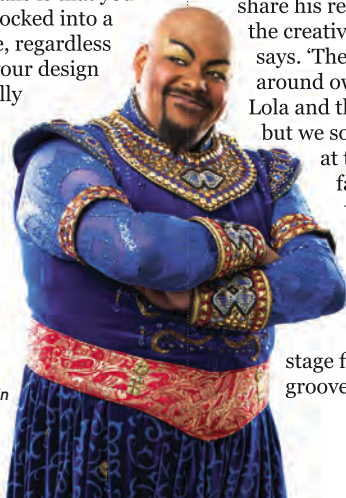
to life, and when you sit in the audience for the first time. Of course, sometimes it's a crashing mistake, but fortunately that's a rarity.'

Costume designers, while being supremely proud of their work, tend to shy away from the limelight, leaving the actors to take the spotlight. But does the media focus on the actors at the expense of the creative team cause any concerns?

'Unlike an actor who uses their voice, we use imagination and skill to bring ideas to life,' says Barnes with enthusiasm. 'Sometimes the critical response to a show is disappointing. If a critic loves the show, then they tend to love everything about it. Conversely, if they don't like the piece, then they hate everything about it.'

'Design is rarely critically supported in its own right. What that means is that you find yourself locked into a hit or a failure, regardless of how good your design is. A lot of really beautiful design work happens in projects that don't get the critical acclaim or the audience that they deserve.'

The genie in *Aladdin*



IF THE SHOE FITS

It's been nearly four years since Barnes received his Tony Award for Costume Designer for *Kinky Boots*. The original film was based on the true story of a family-run boot and shoe factory in Northampton. But as Barnes reveals, it wasn't just the boots that influenced the overall feel of the show.

'The director visited the factory and came back to share his research with the creative team,' he says. 'The story revolves around owners Charlie, Lola and the drag queens, but we soon realised that at the heart of the factory were the workers.'

We also had to learn about the architecture of a shoe, and change the stage floor. After all, grooves and holes don't



Kinky Boots

Gregg Barnes' favourite design in *Kinky Boots* is the bright-red patent-leather "Hero Boots"

work well with men dancing in stilettoes. When I start to think about a design, it's like starting an empty scrapbook and you're going to fill it full of themes to tell a story of a life. There might be a million little things that form a costume design: the architecture; countryside; Northampton; the time of year; the status of the people. All that stuff becomes part of the flavour, so by the time you get to the dress, or the boots, you hope you understand the landscape and the people who are living in that story.'

FROM SCREEN TO STAGE

Aladdin boasts dazzling costumes that are made from literally millions of Swarovski crystals. In fact, just one pair of men's trousers used in the song *Friend Like Me* contains 1,428 sparkling crystals. The scale of the show is phenomenal: 1,225 different fabrics are used in the costumes, and there are 108 costume changes that take place in less than one minute.

So where do you start designing a show that, on this side of the Atlantic at least, might be seen

by audiences more as a pantomime than a straight musical? 'I'd never seen a pantomime. I sort of knew what it was all about, but I realised I needed to find out more about what the expectations of a British audience might be,' Barnes says.

'So, while *Aladdin* the musical must be an adventure and a magical place, we had to make sure that among the comedy we honoured the story of the villain and the animation in the film. So, for instance, I made Jafar much, much more severe and much more simple.'

PICKING FAVOURITES

Does Barnes have a favourite costume? 'That's a difficult call, but in *Aladdin* it has to be Iago. In the film, it's a parrot, and in the musical, the role is played by a man. My design is as if someone has waved a magic wand over a parrot and turned it into a person,' he says.

'In *Kinky Boots* my favourite design is the bright-red patent-leather "Hero Boots", which make their first entrance in the factory on a conveyor belt.'

So, any advice on where to sit to get the best view of the designs? 'You're going to get a different experience wherever you sit,' Barnes says. 'For most musicals, you probably don't need to understand or see every bit of what's on stage. The key is to sit back, relax and let the experience take you on a ride.'

With Barnes' shows delighting West End audiences, how does he feel? 'I never thought that my career would see me with shows running concurrently in the West End,' he says. 'It really is all rather remarkable.' www.aladdinthemusical.co.uk www.kinkybootsthemusical.co.uk

★★ THE REAL KINKY BOOTS FACTORY ★★

In 1993, Steve Pateman became managing director of WJ Brooks Ltd, a family-run shoe-making firm located in Northampton, a town 70 miles north of London. Cheap, fashionable imports have been flooding the market, and Steve has to make redundancies to save the company.

One day he receives a call from a woman from a fetish shoe shop in Folkestone, Kent, who asks if he can supply

her with women's shoes in men's sizes. It's a turning point for the company.

A BBC documentary about the factory was spotted by film producers, which resulted in the 2005 film *Kinky Boots* being released. The story then went on to become a musical of the same name. It opened in the West End in 2015 with music by Cyndi Lauper, and went on to win three Olivier Awards.

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A DAY IN THE LIFE: ELPHABA

Wicked tells the untold story of the Witches of Oz.

As Willemijn Verkaik celebrates 10 years since she first played the green witch, we find out how she creates a magical performance

Words: Stuart Render

“THE MESSAGE
OF THE SHOW IS
THAT IT’S OK TO
BE WHO YOU ARE”



Suzie Mathers as Glinda the good witch



Wicked



Willemijn Verkaik

MAIN IMAGE, SHOW IMAGE AND SUZIE MATHERS © MATT CROCKETT; WILLEMIJN VERKAIK © MARC STERN

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, written by L. Frank Baum, is a classic story that is loved across the world and by different generations – especially since the 1939 film starring Judy Garland. In 2006, *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz* – an adaptation of Gregory Maguire’s novel that retells the story from the perspective of the witches of the Land of Oz – opened in the West End. At the centre of the story is the emerald green-skinned Elphaba, originally played by Idina Menzel on Broadway, who grows up to be the Wicked Witch of the West.

At London’s Apollo Victoria Theatre, Dutch singer and actress Willemijn Verkaik

stars as the green witch. It has now been a decade since she first played the role in the show in Stuttgart, Germany. Since then she’s also played the role in London, the Netherlands and on Broadway.

‘I’ve often been asked what the highlight of the show is for me – it’s the message that it is OK to be who you are, and not to be afraid of being you. After nearly 10 years of playing the role of Elphaba, and being green, it’s a message I wholeheartedly agree with,’ she says. Here Verkaik shares with us what a typical day as a star in the show involves, and why it’s not easy being green.

MORNING

I need lots of sleep so I tend to get up around 10.30am. I eat some fruit then immediately turn on Skype because I need to see and talk to my husband,

Bart. He’s a musician who works in musical theatre.

But he’s in Holland and I’m in London.

We are used to spending time apart, but sometimes it’s hard, so it’s important to have regular contact.

One of the things that I really love doing is walking in the park. I live in London so I often take a walk by the River Thames. It clears my mind, relaxes me and gets me fresh for the day ahead.

Wicked has been performed in over one hundred cities and in 15 countries around the world

AFTERNOON

The early afternoon is spent catching up with jobs around the house. I like to cook myself, so later in the afternoon I often have a Thai curry. Around 5pm I get all my things together and head off to the theatre. I might have been doing this for 10 years, but I still get a little shiver of excitement when I see the theatre and go through the stage door.

WARMING UP

I have a routine once I have arrived in my dressing room. We all do a warm-up: I do my own warm-up first, mostly in the shower because the acoustics are better, then the company warm-up.

I sing through all the high and low notes that I need to hit in the various songs in the show. It is really important for me to know that my voice is fit and healthy. That's the main reason why I need lots of sleep and vitamins.

Wicked won a Grammy Award for Best Musical Show Album in 2005

“WHEN I FIRST STARTED I WOULD GET THE MAKE-UP IN MY EARS”

MAKE-UP

Around 6pm, it's time to become green. From start to finish, being 'greenified' takes only around 20 to 25 minutes. The dark green make-up is water-based and is painted on to my skin by one of our fantastic make-up team. It's not greasy and is good for the skin. When I first started,

I would get it in my ears, hair and nose. Once

I'm green, I put on my costume and join the rest of the company for a singing warm-up. At 7.30pm the curtain rises and the magic begins.

INTERVAL

During the interval I spend a little time having the green touched up, especially in the summer when the weather is warmer. The character of Elphaba ages a little for the

second act, so there's some other make-up work to do. When there's a matinee and an evening performance, deciding to remain green or de-green depends on my mood, although usually I take a shower and have the make-up applied again.

POST-SHOW

It doesn't take too long to de-green after the show is over. In a typical week I have eight shows. Elphaba is a tough role, possibly one of the toughest roles you can play, so I have to protect my voice. Sometimes there are people at the stage door. In the early days I wasn't recognised without the make-up, but now I'm better known as me, and it's nice to hear they enjoyed the show. Most of the time I go straight home as I need to make sure I have enough rest to perform the next day.

www.wickedthemusical.co.uk



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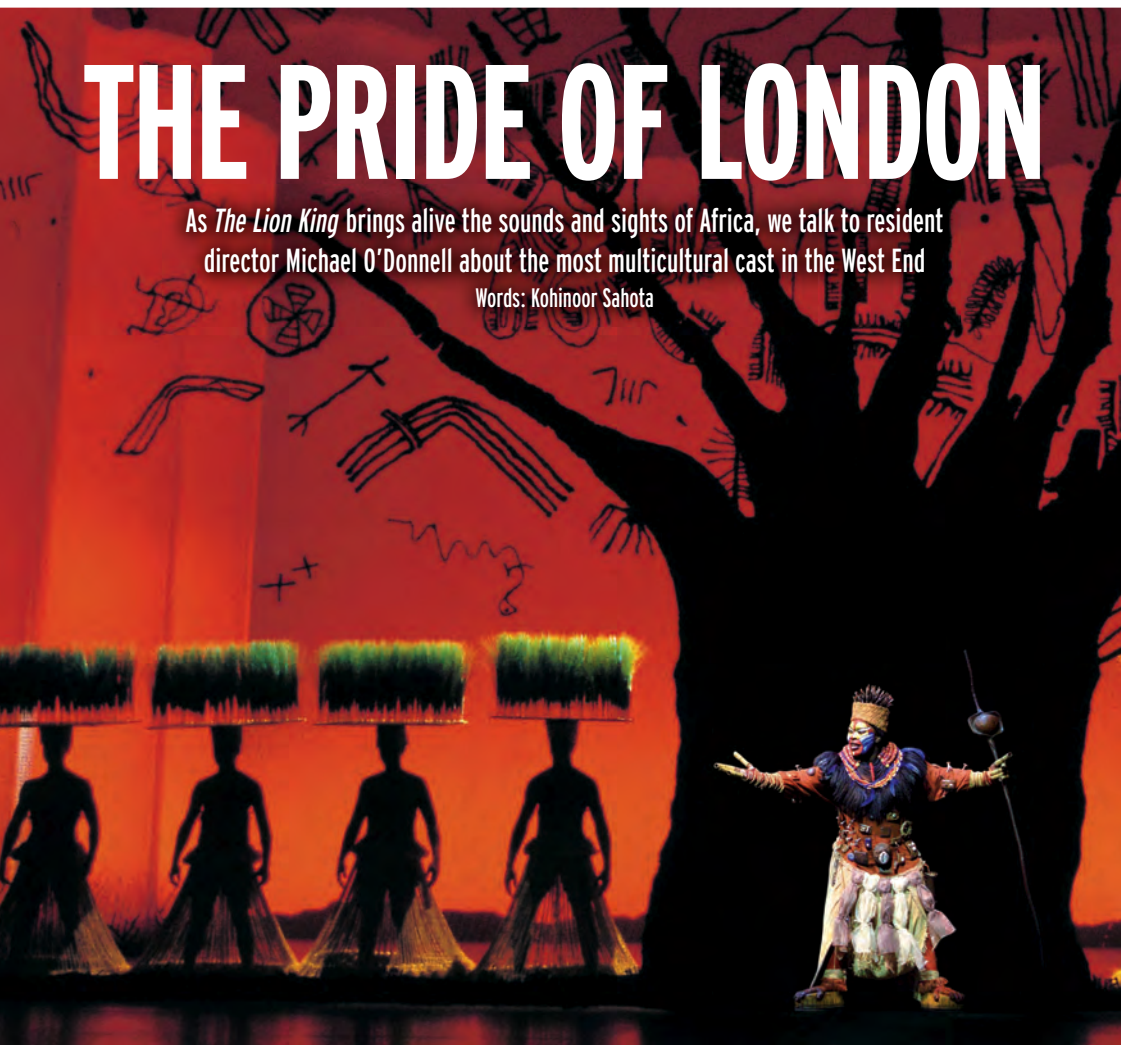
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THE PRIDE OF LONDON

As *The Lion King* brings alive the sounds and sights of Africa, we talk to resident director Michael O'Donnell about the most multicultural cast in the West End

Words: Kohinoor Sahota



How do you take an animated film about lions in Africa and bring it to life onstage? *The Lion King*, which is based on the 1994 film and is now in its 18th year, has successfully done just that. Resident director Michael O'Donnell says: 'Director Julie Taymor did not just take the film and put it on stage. Her brilliant idea was to make

the show theatrical, and to use masks, puppets and music.'

Despite its many awards – five Tony and two Oliviers, to be precise – one of *The Lion King*'s greatest triumphs is its cast. Few shows in the West End boast black, Asian or ethnic minority leads. The musical's cast members, however, are from as far away as South Africa, New Zealand and Japan.

Why do you think *The Lion King* has been a success?

The go-to answer is the universality of the story and the show. All theatre is based on people wanting to see themselves up on stage in some capacity. Everyone can connect with Simba's story, and the international feel of the production resonates with everyone, too.



Main: *The Lion King*
Inset: Nicholas Afoa

“SIX AFRICAN LANGUAGES ARE SPOKEN IN THE LION KING”

Tell us about Nicholas Afoa, who plays the adult Simba. Nick was a footballer and rugby player – he left a junior All Blacks team because of an injury. He happened to have this amazing voice and was a terrific actor. We put a beautiful Samoan dance into his song *Endless Night*. You might not even know that it is there – it fits in perfectly – but he knows it’s there. When New Zealanders come, they recognise it. It makes them feel like they are a part of the show, culturally.

How is the music inspired by Africa?

We hold auditions in Africa to find people who give us a true ethnic base to the show – people speaking Zulu and Xhosa, without learning it phonetically. We increased the amount of African music, rhythm and drums, and the instruments are handmade in Africa then brought here. The minute you close your eyes, you know that these instruments came from Africa.

www.thelionking.co.uk

Tell us about the cast members’ backgrounds.

Since the show is performed all over the world, there is a rotating cast. We have actors representing a dozen countries, such as the UK, America, China, Brazil and Trinidad, not including different countries in Africa. Anytime you walk down the corridor, you can hear up to 10 languages being spoken.

What languages are spoken in the show?

Six African languages: Zulu, Swahili, Sotho, Congolese, Tswana and Xhosa. Some of the arrangements are in Congolese and Tswana.

A STAR IS BORN

At only 23 years old, Charlie Stemp is wowing audiences in
Sir Cameron Mackintosh's hit musical *Half a Sixpence*

Words: Kohinoor Sahota



**“I DID
BACKFLIPS
IN THE IVY
RESTAURANT
WHEN I FOUND
OUT I GOT
THE PART”**



Half a Sixpence

Charlie Stemp is perhaps the most energetic man in the West End. In *Half a Sixpence*, he can be seen in every scene singing, dancing, acting – and playing the banjo. The musical tells the story of Arthur Kipps who comes into money but finds it hard to handle. Based on HG Wells' novel *Kipps*, it is a fresh adaptation by Sir Cameron Mackintosh.

Tell us about the auditions.

I had 11! I was supposed to be understudying the role. I've never been so happy with the material. I felt comfortable in the room – it was exhausting, but it was worth it.

How did you react when you found out you'd won the role?

I was on my way to my nan's house to have a shepherd's pie. My agent rung me and said: 'Come and meet me in London.' I made my way to The Ivy, and my agent said to me: 'You didn't get the cover.' I was gutted. Then he said: 'You got the part instead!' I did backflips in The Ivy.

How did you celebrate when you got the part?

By getting myself ready! I didn't have a big night out. I was excited, but there was a lot of practice that I needed – I started singing lessons, banjo lessons... I had to practice.

What is it like seeing yourself in the posters?

I purposely went via King's Cross, so I could look at it. I didn't want to make a fuss. I remember staring at it and thinking: 'That's cool' and walking on!

You have had lots of positive reviews. Do you read them?

I do. If they're on Twitter, I say thank you. *The Huffington Post* did an article on me – it was amazing to have a big American newspaper say wonderful things about me. My dad emails me every bad review, which is great actually. He says: 'I'm just keeping you down to earth.'

What's it like receiving a standing ovation?

It's great – even though I do it every night I don't get used to it. When it happens, a part of myself is even more excited.

You won the What's On Stage award for Best Actor in a Musical. How was that?

I'm very happy with that as it was chosen by our amazing fans. It's incredible to have that after all the hard work. It's on my book cabinet.

The show is about a young man who has to deal with success quickly.

How do you stay grounded?

It's all about my family and friends. I am surrounded by people who keep me focused.

What does the future hold?

It's very easy in our industry to forget that we do this because we love it. As long as I'm happy, I don't care where I am.

www.halfasixpence.co.uk

Half a Sixpence was originally written as a vehicle to showcase British pop star Tommy Steele

The Royal Opera House's shows reach an estimated 7.5 million people each year

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

Go behind the scenes of one of London's most renowned theatres and discover what it takes to raise the curtain night after night

Words: Mark Fox and Kevin Taylor

Stately building façades, glamorous foyers, gilded auditoriums and red velvet finishes are always synonymous with a trip to the ballet or opera. And more often than not, the productions themselves rouse standing ovations and satisfied cheers from the audience night after glitzy night.

But there is a whole other side to the theatre. One in which a host of moving parts, departments and teams work around the clock to deliver the perfect production. It's a side of the West End that not many get to experience, but one that will leave every theatregoer with a heightened sense of appreciation.

In the heart of Covent Garden sits the Royal Opera House, an establishment that's as iconic as it gets. It has survived three incarnations since the early-18th century, with the previous two theatres on the same site destroyed by fire. The first was set ablaze in 1808 after a production made use of real fireworks for stage props. The second found its fate in 1856 after a rowdy partygoer accidentally knocked over a candleholder and the place went up in flames.



Main: Royal Opera House
Inset: behind the scenes
at the Royal Opera House



Today, the significantly more fire-resistant building's two-and-a-half acres are home to three companies: The Royal Ballet, The Royal Opera and the Orchestra of the Royal Opera. Today the venue also hosts glamorous events such as the British Academy of Film and TV Arts (the BAFTAs). If you'd like to discover the fabulously efficient inner workings of the theatre, take one of the three tours, which show you what it takes to get the curtain up.

VELVET, GILT AND GLAMOUR TOUR

The auditorium is a magnificent space. A full refurbishment in 1997, which saw the venue closed for two-and-a-half years, resulted in the auditorium being restored to the version depicted in the building's original 1858 plans.

A bust of Queen Victoria glancing towards the Royal Box is displayed on top of the glittering gold proscenium arch above the stage. Rumour has it that the former monarch was such an avid theatregoer that she'd visit the Royal Opera House twice a week. Prince Albert was not as much of an aficionado, and preferred the room two floors below the Royal Box – the Royal Retiring Room, replete with a royal bed for those slightly longer performances. The

room, which forms part of the tour, still exists and is used by royal patrons today, but the bed no longer remains.

Make sure you look up at the dramatic, blue painted ceiling, which

is full of Victorian character and clad in velvet and gold – it emulates a Greek amphitheatre.

During the fascinating tour you will learn all about this majestic auditorium, from the experiences of the famous opera singers and ballet dancers who have taken centre stage here, to the architectural delights that are masking a world of modern technology.

GO ON TOUR

• THE LONDON COLISEUM

Home of English National Opera, the London Coliseum is the city's largest theatre. Opened in 1904, it became known as 'The People's Palace'. Guided tours (to 12 May) offer a great insight into the building, from the revolving stage to the old Gentleman's Baronial Smoking Hall.

www.eno.org

• NATIONAL THEATRE

The iconic National Theatre includes three auditoriums, rehearsal rooms and costume rooms set over five acres on the South Bank. Tours cover architecture and the costume rooms, and there is also a tour that takes place once the curtain comes down on a live show.

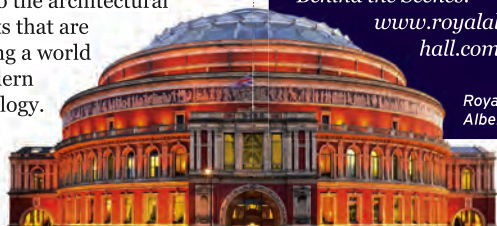
www.nationaltheatre.org

• ROYAL ALBERT HALL

Dedicated to Prince Albert, the Royal Albert Hall has a colourful history as a concert venue. Luciano Pavarotti, Adele and Cirque du Soleil have all performed here. Take your pick of tours, which include *Secret History*, *Afternoon Tea* and *Behind the Scenes*.

www.royalalberthall.com

Royal
Albert Hall



BACKSTAGE TOUR

Every week, the Royal Opera House stages up to seven productions. Myriad departments including technical teams, stage managers, costume makers, vocal coaches, dance teachers and the performers are all part of a well-oiled machine.

The Backstage Tour takes you through the corridors, which are constantly humming with activity, and showcases the sheer amount of work it takes to create these spectacular productions, from the inner workings of lighting and sound engineering, to the dress rehearsals. The ballet company's classrooms are on the fifth floor, and glass windows allow you to peek inside the world of vigorous ballet training.

As you walk along the corridor of the music rooms, you can hear the vocal brilliance of sopranos and tenors. Meanwhile, in the costume department, rolls of fabric are transformed into intricate designs, ready to take centre stage. As for the stage

The bridge on Floral Street connects the Royal Ballet School to the Royal Opera House



Props at the Royal Opera House

itself, it is like a giant Rubik's Cube, and can be re-configured up to four times a day.

Wander past the historic Paul Hamlyn Hall – once a flower market built to supplement the Royal Opera House's income and now a stunning dance hall with a terrace looking out on to Bow Street. And finally, you will return to the historic Front of House, where performers from bygone eras are immortalised on the walls as a tribute to their valued contributions to the art of ballet and opera.

THURROCK TOUR

The Royal Opera House Bob and Tamar Manoukian Production Workshop and Costume Centre is located in Purfleet in east London and offers an insight into the world of costume and set design. From crafting large backdrops and stage props to intricate, often historically accurate costumes, the science and skill behind this challenging work is displayed in each aspect of paintwork, metalwork, carpentry and clothing design. Discover how sets are created, assembled, disassembled and transported to the Royal Opera House. www.roh.org.uk

★★ A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WEST END ★★

The West End is a small area of central London containing theatres, both large and small, hosting plays, musicals, opera and dance. In Elizabethan and Jacobean London, theatres were established south of the river, beyond the controls of the city, but the venues were closed down by the Puritans after Charles I's execution.

With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Charles II

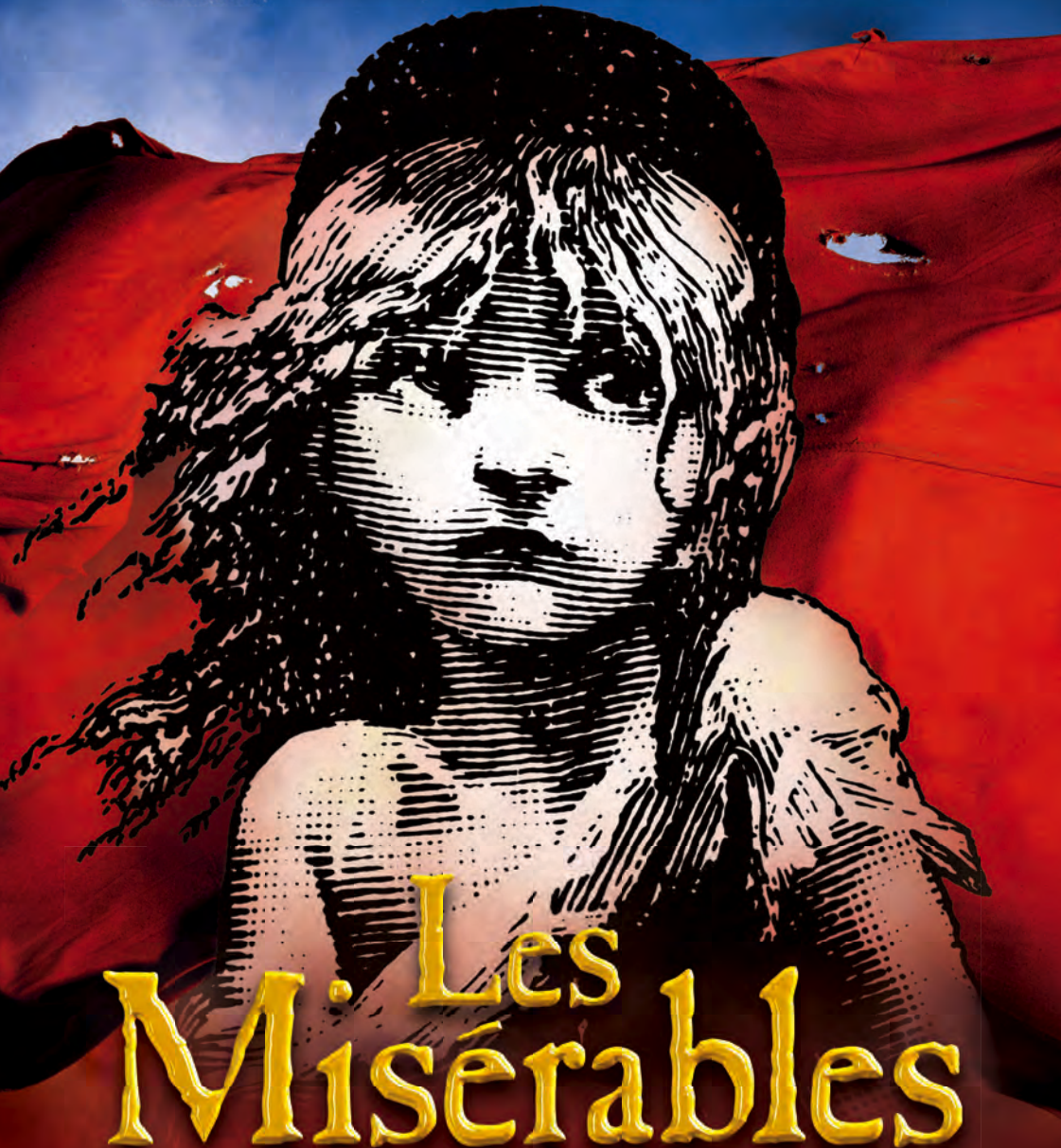
licensed companies to perform legitimate drama, and the Theatre Royal in Brydges Street – known today as Theatre Royal Drury Lane – was the first West End theatre to be built.

The patent theatre companies retained their hold over the legitimate drama into the 19th century, but as the city grew westwards, lots of small theatres were built. New roads such as the Strand, as well as

cleaned-up slums, became sites for venues such as the Adelphi and The Old Vic in the 1800s.

The Theatres Act of 1843 loosened the licensing restrictions and, along with road improvements, this resulted in a building boom from 1860 until 1910. A second boom occurred between the two world wars, which saw the creation of many of the theatres still standing today.

THE MUSICAL PHENOMENON



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REGIONAL SHOWS

Britain is home to acclaimed theatres and festivals, from the world-renowned Royal Shakespeare Company to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which is the world's biggest celebration of arts and culture

Words: Kohinoor Sahota and Kevin Taylor

REGIONAL THEATRES

BRISTOL OLD VIC, BRISTOL

The Bristol Old Vic is the longest continuously-running theatre in the UK, and recently underwent a £12.5 million

redevelopment project. Catch *Tristan & Yseult* (4-15 Jul), which follows the dilemma of Mark, a Cornish king with a pragmatic approach to battle. But when he starts to fall for his enemy's sister, he is forced to make an impossible choice.

Meanwhile, *People, Places & Things* (24-28 Oct), which was critically acclaimed at the National Theatre and saw Denise Gough win an Olivier Award, follows a woman as she recovers from drug addiction. www.bristololdvic.org.uk



BURTON TAYLOR THEATRE, OXFORD

This intimate space in the university town of Oxford is something special. Richard Burton had his first standing ovation here while he was a student at Oxford University. His English tutor made him promise that he would return to the theatre – and he did. In 1966 he performed with his wife Elizabeth Taylor, then the highest-paid star in the world, in *Doctor Faustus*. In the 1980s the name of the theatre was changed to honour the pair. Today, you can enjoy student theatre, dance and comedians, such as Shappi Khorsandi (10 Jun) and Stewart Lee (11-12 Sep). www.oxfordplayhouse.com

FLAG ICON AND EDINBURGH FRINGE FESTIVAL © ISTOCK

“RICHARD BURTON HAD HIS FIRST STANDING OVATION IN OXFORD”

LIVERPOOL EMPIRE THEATRE, LIVERPOOL

Two theatres have been on this site in London Road, Liverpool. The first site was the New Prince of Wales Theatre and Opera House. The current theatre has the largest two-tier auditorium in Britain, and can seat an impressive 2,348 people. Opened in 1925, The Beatles performed here at the start of their career. The theatre offers a mix of shows, including *My First Ballet* (5-6 May) for kids; *The Carpenters Story* (24 Jun), a tribute to the singing duo; and Matthew Bourne's *The Red Shoes* (27 Jun-1 Jul). www.liverpooltheatres.com

THE LOWRY, MANCHESTER

Following a Europe-wide competition, British architect Michael Wilford designed The Lowry in Salford. Completed in 2000, it was designed to resemble a ship with portholes and windows. The venue includes an exhibition space and theatre. Catch *Trainspotting* (6-10 Jun), a black comedy which is inspired by Irvine Welsh's book and Danny Boyle's successful film from 1996. It is the 21st anniversary of the production, which follows drug addicts in Edinburgh – this is not for the easily offended; expect strong language. www.thelowry.com

★★ EDINBURGH FRINGE FESTIVAL ★★

There is one time of year when it feels like the whole world is in Edinburgh, and that is during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (4-28 Aug).

The world's biggest arts festival, with 50,000 performers, 3,000 shows and 300 venues, has a big birthday this year: it's 70.

In an effort to enrich cultural life after World War II, the story dates back to 1947 when eight theatre groups turned up – uninvited – to perform at the

Edinburgh International Festival. The origins define the welcoming atmosphere of the festival, which sees professionals perform alongside newcomers.

As you walk around the city, you'll bump into groups trying to persuade you to watch their show and street performers who are ready to entertain you. Whether it's music, dance or comedy – in venues ranging from tiny rooms above pubs to big auditoriums, many of which are free – this festival makes the arts accessible to everyone. Edinburgh is a city worth visiting in its own right, and this event only makes it more appealing. www.edfringe.com





MINACK THEATRE, PENZANCE

Eighty years ago, when Rowena Cade wanted to perform *The Tempest*, she couldn't have created a more fitting venue in the form of the Minack Theatre. Situated cliff-side, it feels like you are on the edge of the earth as the stars come out and you can hear the sound of waves lapping. The venue puts on a range of alfresco shows, from William Shakespeare to live orchestras. *The Ballet Central* (6 May) returns to the venue under new artistic director Christopher Marney, and the show includes excerpts from *The Nutcracker* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Make sure you bring a blanket! www.minack.com

ROYAL EXCHANGE, MANCHESTER

This Grade II-listed building stages theatrical shows in the round – meaning that the seats are arranged in a circle around the stage, so that every audience member can appreciate the performance. Established in 1979, the venue has welcomed famous faces from Hugh Grant to Kate Winslet. Catch classic stories, including Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (to 20 May) and Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (25 May-24 Jun). www.royalexchange.co.uk

THEATRE ROYAL, BATH

Built in 1805, Theatre Royal, Bath is one of the oldest theatres in Britain. It survived extensive bombing in World War II, and today it is a beautiful building complete with spectacular chandeliers and an ornate ceiling. Children will love the shows in the main house: *The Addams Family* (13-17 Jun), which tells the tale of Wednesday and her spooky family, and a musical of Roald Dahl's tale *Fantastic Mr Fox* (30 May-3 Jun). www.theatreroyal.org.uk

THEATRE ROYAL, NEWCASTLE

Sir Ian McKellen described the Theatre Royal as his favourite venue in the world. More than 175 years old, this theatre was granted a royal licence by King George II in 1788. Excelling in concerts and comedy, enjoy the *Bowie Experience* (20 May) and *Shakin' Stevens* (25 May), as well as Jimmy Carr (12 May, 17 Jun) and Ricky Gervais (5-6 Jun). www.theatreroyal.co.uk



TOURING SHOWS

BILLY ELLIOT

Billy Elliot has been seen by more than 10 million people across five continents. Making the transition from screen to stage, it tells the story of a young boy who finds that he is good at ballet. The award-winning show includes music by Elton John – it ran for 11 years in London and is now on a UK tour. To 17 Jun. www.billyelliottthemusical.com

BREAKIN' CONVENTION

Not long ago street dance was a niche style in the UK. Today it seems you can't escape it: it's a staple on TV talent shows and has hit the West End in the form of *Into the Hood* and *Some Like it Hip Hop*. If you want to see street dancing at its pop and locking best, head to *Breakin' Convention*. Here, street dancing comes in all shapes and sizes: from female groups to disabled dancers. Look out for workshops where you can learn graffiti art, DJing and how to freestyle. To 3 Jun. www.breakinconvention.com

CRAZY FOR YOU

The Gershwin brothers' hits, including *I Got Rhythm* and *Shall We Dance*, come alive in the musical *Crazy for You*. TV presenter Caroline Flack stars in her first West End show – she plays Poppy, who is trying to resurrect a failing theatre, but falls for the man who is sent to close the venue down. 26 Aug-9 Dec. www.crazyforyoutour.com

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

This Olivier and Tony Award-winning production is currently on a 25-city tour. It tells the story of Christopher Boone, a 15-year-old boy who is determined to find out who killed his neighbour's dog. Christopher embarks on a frightening journey that upturns his world. *To 16 Sep.* www.curiousonstage.com

EVITA

Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's iconic musical *Evita* has spanned the stage and the big screen, winning many awards along the way. Set to wow audiences once more, *Evita* stars Emma Hatton as Eva Perón, and tells the story of Argentina's people and Perón's rise as their spiritual leader. Expect emotions to be stirred with classics such as *Don't Cry for Me Argentina*. *To 24 Jun.* www.evitathe musical.com

FOOTLOOSE

Based on the 1984 hit film, *Footloose* tells the story of Ren, who moves to a town where dancing is banned. But he soon gets everyone dancing to songs including *Holdin' Out for a Hero* and *Let's Hear It for the Boy*. The show stars *Pop Idol* runner-up Gareth Gates and Maureen Nolan. *To 30 Sep.* www.footloose-musical.com

JANE EYRE

This reimagining of Charlotte's Brontë's masterpiece is a collaboration between the National Theatre and Bristol Old Vic. This bold and dynamic production follows one woman's fight for freedom and fulfilment on her own terms. *To 30 Sep.* www.janeeyreonstage.co.uk



Royal Shakespeare Theatre

ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY ★★ STRATFORD-UPON-AVON ★★

Stratford-upon-Avon's most famous export, William Shakespeare, was born in 1564 and his work has been performed across the world. As a testament to his storytelling, his plays have been rapped by The Hip-hop Shakespeare Company, turned into a blockbuster movie by Baz Luhrmann and – still to this day – are constantly reimagined by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Set in the heart of Stratford-upon-Avon, which is just a two-hour train ride from London's Marylebone station aboard Chiltern Railways, the RSC opened its first theatre in 1879. Many acting greats have performed with the RSC, from Dame Judi Dench to David Tennant.

In 2010 the RSC's theatres – the Royal Shakespeare and

Swan Theatres – re-opened alongside new exhibition spaces, cafés and a restaurant. You can catch *Julius Caesar* (to 9 Sep) and *Twelfth Night* (from 2 Nov).

If you're keen to find out more, join one of the theatre's guided tours or visit the new interactive exhibition, *The Play's the Thing*.

Proving that regional theatre can produce commercially successful shows, *Matilda the Musical*, which was created by the RSC, has been in the West End's Cambridge Theatre for an impressive six years.

The show turned Roald Dahl's story into a musical, with songs by Tim Minchin.

Some 400 years after his death, the Bard's hometown is still the ultimate

destination for British theatre at its best.

www.rsc.org.uk



Matilda



The Lowry

The Lowry is named after 20th-century artist LS Lowry, who painted northern industrial scenes

MAMMA MIA!

The ultimate in feel-good theatre, *MAMMA MIA!* has played to more than 60 million people around the world. Set on an idyllic Greek island, a young woman's dream of learning the identity of her father before she gets married results in three men from her mother's past returning after 20 years. Chaos occurs alongside singing and dancing to ABBA. To 24 Feb 2018. www.mamma-mia.com

RENT

Now celebrating its 20th anniversary, Jonathan Larson's ground-breaking musical, inspired by Giacomo Puccini's opera *La Bohème*, won six Drama Desk Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1996. Larson's world is inhabited by a group of bohemian artists who struggle to maintain their friendships and their non-conformist ideals in New York's East Village. Facing their problems, they find out what matters most in life. The much-loved score contains *Seasons of Love*, *Without You* and *Out Tonight*. To 27 May. www.rentonstage.co.uk

SUNSET BOULEVARD

Andrew Lloyd Webber's award-winning hit musical, *Sunset Boulevard*, follows faded silent-screen star Norma Desmond, who lives in a fantasy world. Ria Jones, who stepped in for Glenn Close when she became ill during the show's run at the London Coliseum, stars as Norma Desmond with aplomb. 16 Sep 2017-21 Apr 2018. www.sunsetboulevardtour.com

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE

Based on the 1967 Oscar-winning film of the same name, six-time Tony Award-winning *Thoroughly Modern Millie* follows the ambitions of a young 1920s Kansas girl called Millie Dillmount, as she takes on the Big Apple and rewrites the rules of love. The *Strictly Come Dancing* champion dancer, Joanne Clifton, plays Millie. Book this for guaranteed laughs. To 15 Jul. www.modernmillie.co.uk

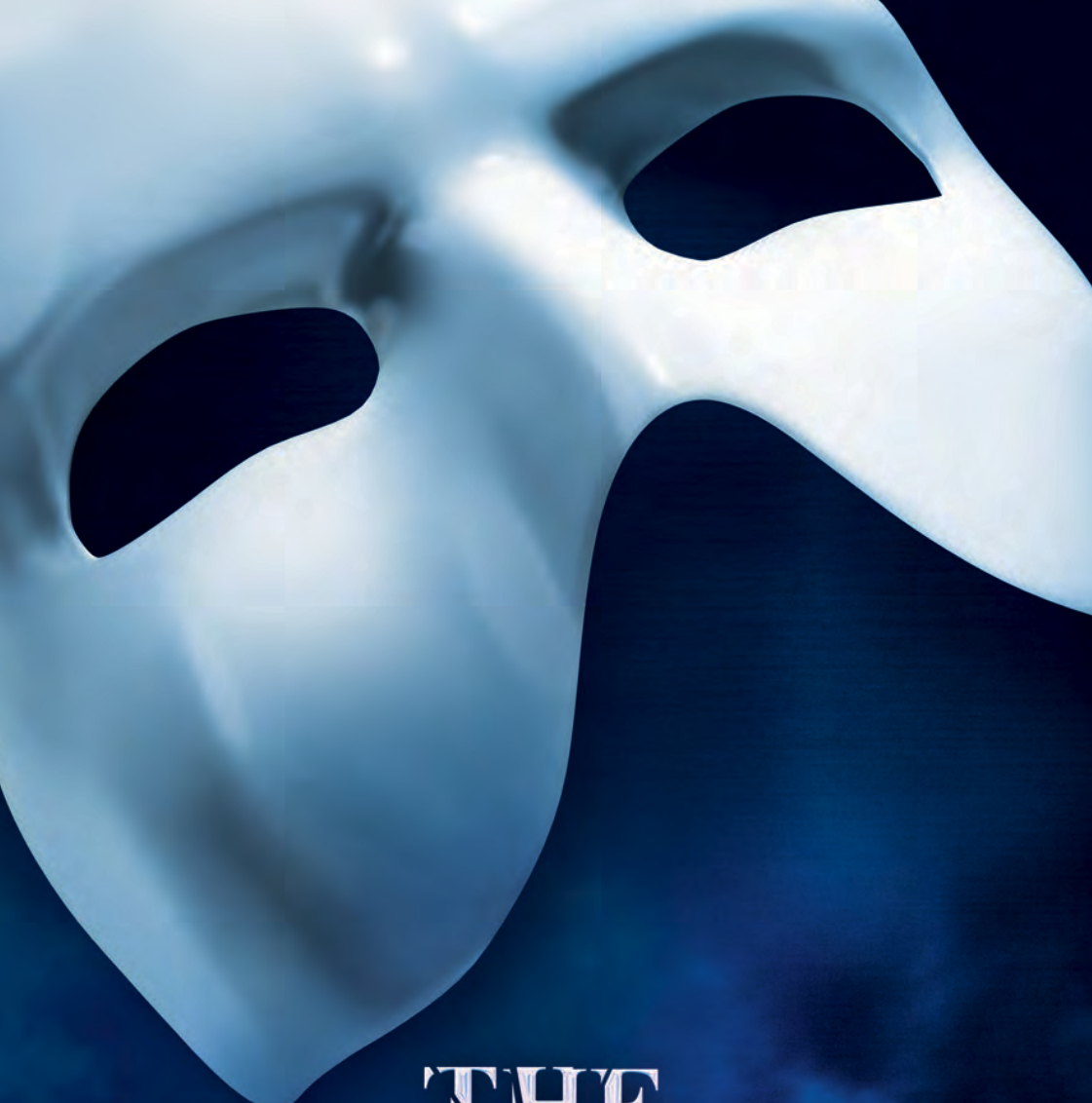


WAR HORSE

After eight years, 11 countries and over seven million tickets sold, the world-renowned *War Horse* is set to tour the UK this September. The show follows the heart-wrenching story of Joey, a horse that is sold to the cavalry and enlisted in the conflicts of World War I. After serving both sides of the war, Joey's owner, Albert, embarks on an adventure to find his beloved horse and bring him home. *War Horse* is produced in association with the award-winning Handspring Puppet Company, which brings breathing, galloping, charging horses to thrilling life onstage. From 15 Sep 2017-Jan 2019. www.warhorseonstage.com

CITY OF CULTURE, HULL

'Hull has always had a unique cultural voice and in 2017 it will roar,' says festival director Martin Green. Every four years, one place in Britain is awarded UK City of Culture – this year it is Kingston upon Hull, better known as Hull. Enjoy street events (left), comedy, theatre, art and even the Turner Prize. You can see Jim Cartwright's dark comedy *Stand Up*, *Stand Up* at East Riding Theatre (9-10 Jun), or the bittersweet comedy *Sex Cells* at Hull Truck Theatre (27 Jun-1 Jul). www.hull2017.co.uk



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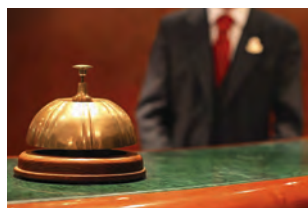
WEST END TICKETS

Beware of ticket touts. Instead, follow our advice to help you get the best seats in the house

Words: Kohinoor Sahota

THEATRE.LONDON

London & Partners is the official promotional body for London, and the official partner to all West End theatres. Its new site offers up to 60 per cent off ticket prices. With 24-hour customer service, the site shines the spotlight on theatres big and small, so you can find your perfect show. www.theatre.london



CONCIERGES

If you are staying at a hotel, your concierge is a key to the city. Many of them are members of The Society of the Golden Keys, and have established connections with box-office managers.

STAR MEMBERS

The majority of theatre tickets are bought with no problems at all. Unfortunately things can go wrong. Follow STAR's (Society of Ticket Agents & Retailers) advice when buying tickets: clearly identify the face value and check the terms and conditions, including transferability, cancellation and viewing restrictions. STAR represents most ticket agents and box offices in the UK, though some agents who are not members still offer a good service. www.star.org.uk

OFFICIAL LONDON THEATRE

If you require captioned, signed, relaxed or audio-described performances, visit Official London Theatre's Access page for comprehensive listings. www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk

VISITBRITAIN SHOP

For more than 50 years, the official shop of the British Tourist Authority has been ensuring tourists have great holidays. Save money when you book your tickets online, and collect them from Leicester Square's London Ticket Information Booth. www.visitbritainshop.com

STANDBY AND RETURNS

If the show you *really* want to see has sold out, don't panic. Go directly to the theatre's box office as theatres can have tickets returned, and these are released each morning. Be warned: arrive early and be prepared to queue!

An average of more than 10 million tickets are sold each year for theatres in the West End

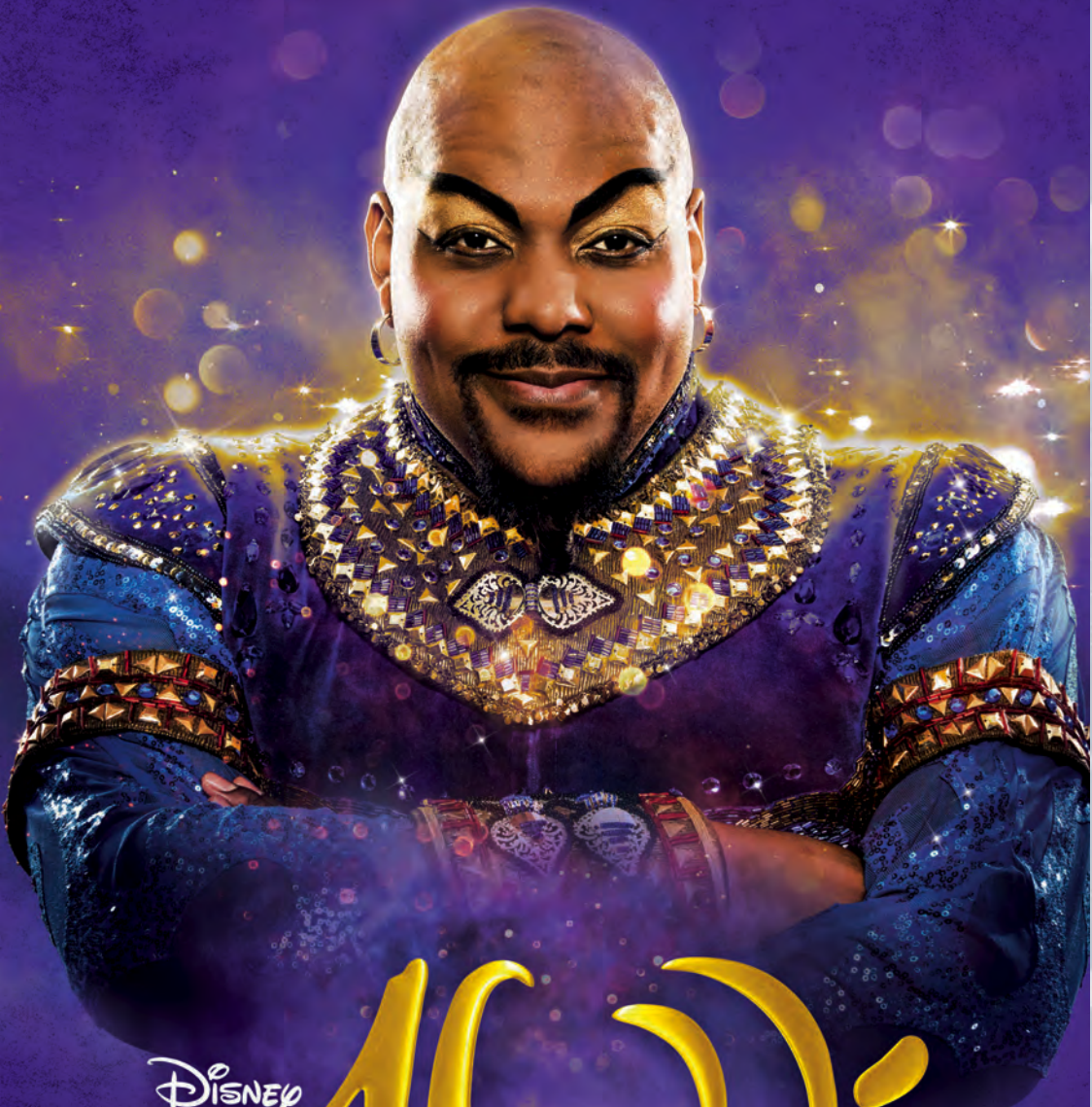
MATINEE SHOWS

Matinee performances take place in the afternoon, normally on a Wednesday or Saturday. These shows are often cheaper than evening performances.

TKTS

The TKTS booth has been in Leicester Square since 1980. Visit for on-the-day deals, but it can't guarantee tickets as popular shows often sell out in advance. www.tkts.co.uk

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THE LION KING

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'THERE IS SIMPLY
NOTHING ELSE LIKE IT'

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