

Oh yes it is...

Pantomimes are many children's first experience of the theatre and what a way to start! Dashing heroes, beautiful heroines and villains you can boo and hiss at, they really are great family fun for all. Karen Neville offers up our guide to some of the star-studded highlights and those on the local stages...

Surely the most beloved of all pantos, *Cinderella* is taking to the stage at the **Hexagon in Reading** this year and once again great friend of the theatre and CBeebies superstar Justin Fletcher, known to thousands as Mr Tumble, will be joining the cast as the lovelorn Buttons. Another Reading favourite Paul Morse is back as the Dame for all the usual slapstick nonsense and in among it all Cinderella just wants to go the ball and dance with the Prince. Boo and hiss as the Wicked Stepsisters do their best to thwart their stepsister in her quest. Will she make it home before midnight and whose foot will the slipper fit? Yes, you know the answers but it's always worth going to this panto classic! Join them all from Saturday, 7th December to 5th January with sign language on 27th & 28th December and relaxed performances on 13th December & 3rd January. Tickets from £15. Call the box office on **0118 960 6060** or visit www.readingarts.com/whats-on/cinderella-2019

A lesser well-known tale is the subject for the seasonal treat at the **Watermill, Newbury**. An adaptation of the Mark Twain classic *The Prince and The Pauper* tells of the young prince who is bored of royal life and the young girl on the streets of London who just wants to sing and dance. Their worlds collide when they meet and switch places to live each other's lives in this tale of dreams, ambition and friendship. *The Prince and The Pauper* is on now until 4th January with several accessible performances. Tickets from £12-£25 depending on date and time. To book call the box office on **01635 46044** or go to www.watermill.org.uk/the_prince_and_the_pauper_christmas_2019

Some favourite panto stars are helping to make all your wishes come true in *Aladdin* at the **Theatre Royal, Windsor**. Hop on board the magic carpet ride of a show, rub the lamp to summon up the Genie and see what happens! A glittering cast of stars are treading the boards this year including

some panto favourites Paul Nicholas as the evil Abanazar and musical legend Marti Webb, not forgetting some 'boom, boom' from Basil Brush! *Aladdin* is a real treasure of a show and such is its popularity that an extra week has already been added making it the biggest panto of all time at the Theatre Royal Windsor, running from now until 12th January. Tickets start from £17, call the box office on **01753 853888** or visit at www.theatreroyalwindsor.co.uk/aladdin/

Join *Belle and the Beast* as they are transported to the cursed castle, under the spell of an evil enchantress at the **Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury**! Can the wicked Hugo be defeated? Can Belle see beyond the Beast and fall in love with her captor? Will the Beast's heart be melted by Belle's beauty? With an unmissable transformation moment, comedy and stunning scenery join the journey Danny Walters (Keanu Taylor) swaps the cobbles of EastEnders to tread the boards as the Beast from 6th December to 5th January. Tickets from £13-£44. www.atgtickets.com/shows/beauty-and-the-beast/aylesbury-waterside-theatre/

Ever wondered what it would be like to ride on a polar bear's back or give one a bath? One night when she's fallen asleep Tilly is visited by an enormous bear. But, far from being scared, they become friends in this playful, funny and heart-warming tale *The Bear* by Raymond Briggs. If panto's not your thing then perhaps the younger members of the family would enjoy this offering at **Norden Farm, Maidenhead** instead? *The Bear* runs until 29th December. Tickets £13.50, under-16s £11.50. Call the box office on **01628 788997** or visit www.norden.farm/events/the-bear

It's not just about the professionals – there are some highly entertaining and well-produced

amateur dramatic shows, too, which are well worth seeing such as Riverside Players's *Dick Whittington* at **Memorial Hall, Old Windsor**, 28th November to 1st December and 5th to 7th December. Tickets £11 adults, £7 children. Visit www.riversideplayers.com/boxoffice.shtml to book.

Once upon a time in land far away Princess Aurora pricked her finger and fell asleep (perhaps that's the way to avoid Brexit?) and as a hush descends, the struggle begins to save the day. Can the evil fairy be defeated and will a handsome prince arrive to awaken Aurora from her slumber with a kiss, helping good to prevail over evil? You'll already know the answer but don't let that stop you from enjoying the spell-binding production, full of songs and stunning dance routines, magic and sparkle. *Sleeping Beauty* at the **Corn Exchange Newbury** runs from now until 4th January. Full price tickets from £20-£26. To book visit www.cornexchangenew.com/event/sleeping-beauty or call **0845 5218218**.

The **Whitty Theatre in Wokingham** has not one but two pantos to choose from this year! Enjoy *Snow White* on 7th and 8th December before Wokingham Pantomime Group perform *Cinderella* on 27th to 29th December at the venue at Luckley House School, Wokingham. For more details about these festive favourites and to book tickets visit www.list.co.uk/place/77790-the-whitty-theatre-wokingham/

Join the cast at **Wycombe Swan in High Wycombe** as they star in the panto paved with gold, *Dick Whittington*. The starring role is played by *Love Island* star Curtis Pritchard who as Dick will be trying to outwit the evil rodent King Rat, save London from the team of rodents and win the hand in marriage of Alice. With spectacular costumes, stunning scenery, sing-along songs and heroes and villains along the way, it promises to be a magical adventure from 13th December to 5th January. Tickets £15.50 to £41. Visit www.wycombeswan.co.uk/Online/panto-wycombe-buckinghamshire-pantomime

Wishing you all a lovely panto season full of laughs! KN

