

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 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...

It's a tale as old as time: Beauty is everything the Beast is not. But when the pair are trapped inside a castle together they must learn to get along. With a little help from Lumiere and Chip, they learn to overcome their differences to achieve the traditional happy ending. Full of gorgeous costumes, super singing and dazzling dancing (not to mention a bit of slapstick humour), it's time to boo, hiss and cheer another fabulous family panto at the **Oxford Playhouse**. This year's run has already started and continues until 12th January. Tickets start from £15 – please book at www.oxfordplayhouse.com/whats-on/all-shows/beauty-and-the-beast/11924#tickets or call the box office on **01865 305305**.

The Oxford Playhouse's other theatre – the BT Studio – has a children's favourite, *The Jolly Christmas Postman* who in his final delivery of the year visits well-loved characters such as Miss

Riding Hood and Humpty Dumpty and more with a gift for all this Christmas time. Based on the best-selling book by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, the colourful characters are brought to life in a show full of music, puppetry and storytelling. *The Jolly Christmas Postman* is on from 12th December to 5th January. Many dates are already sold out so don't "miss the post". Tickets £11/£9 – book at www.oxfordplayhouse.com/whats-on/all-shows/the-jolly-christmas-postman/12289#tickets or call **01865 305305**.

Enjoy *Stories with Santa* as he comes to the **New Theatre, Oxford**. The jolly chap in the red suit has heard lots of stories as part of his travels around the world as he delivers presents to all the good boys and girls every Christmas Eve. This year, he's coming to share them with the children of Oxford. Settle down in the Piano Bar and share some festive tales and Christmas carols and each child will take home a gift too. Join Santa on 8th,

14th-17th and 20th to 24th December. Tickets £2.50-£13.50. To book visit www.atgtickets.com/shows/stories-with-santa/new-theatre-oxford/

There's nothing like a good old traditional British panto to get you in the holiday mood and a classic example is the one at the **Kenton Theatre in Henley** which presents the love and romance of *Sleeping Beauty*. The classic tale of the princess who pricks her finger and falls asleep only to be woken by a prince's kiss may be familiar but there'll be many hilarious moments along the way and no doubt a boo and a hiss or two. *Sleeping Beauty* is on 13th to 28th December; tickets £17-£76 for a family, prices vary depending on performance time. To book visit www.kentontheatre.co.uk/event/sleeping-beauty/ or call **01491 575698**.

There's a twist on the classic tale of *Puss in Boots* at **The Theatre, Chipping Norton** – this version is set in 1950s London where King rat is lording it over the city with his gang of rodent sidekicks and only one fashionable feline can save the day with the help of some stylish footwear! Robberies and car chases are part of this fast and *fur*-ious family fun, complete with stunning costumes, great original music and laughs for all. *Puss in Boots* runs until 12th January, tickets £9.50 to £30. Book at www.chippingnortontheatre.com/whats-on/puss-in-boots or on **01608 642350**.

Much-loved local group the Sinodun Players are staging *Robin Hood and Babes in the Wood* at **Wallingford's Corn Exchange** from 17th January to 1st February. Ticket details not available at time of going to press, For more information call **01491 825000**.

Abingdon Drama Club are putting on one of the most popular pantos at the **Unicorn Theatre**, 10th-12th and 16th-18th January when they'll be staging the story of *Snow White*.

An original new script sees the Wicked Queen hire assassins to rid her of Snow White

but when she finds they have failed she disguises herself to get Snow White to eat a poisoned apple and fall asleep. You know how it ends but how will it get there? Full price tickets, £10, are available from The Bookstore, Abingdon or else you can visit www.abingdon-drama-club.com

Witney Dramatic Society are following the yellow brick road to see *The Wizard of Oz* for their panto on 29th January to 1st February at **Witney Methodist Church Hall**. Join Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion on their magical journey. Tickets £10, concessions £8, from Rapture Entertainment, Margaret Hamm on **01993 704032**, www.witneydrama.co.uk and on the door but booking is advised.

Join *Aladdin* and Widow Twankey as they journey from rags to riches aboard the magic carpet, trying to defeat the evil Abanzar and winning the hand of the Sultan's daughter Princess Jasmine in this fun-filled extravaganza guaranteed to charm the whole family at the **Beacon, Wantage** on 21st and 22nd December. Tickets £10, call **01235 763456** or visit www.beaconwantage.co.uk/events/christmas-pantomime-at-the-beacon/

One of the first pantos on stage this festive season is the offering from Jigsaw Stage Productions with their version of the much-loved *Cinderella*. The traditional family pantomime is a typical rags to riches story, with all the usual elements along the way – wicked step-mother, ugly sisters, a handsome prince, a beautiful maiden with a fairy godmother, and a comic duo. There's a matinee and evening show on Sunday, 8th December, at **East Challow Village Hall** (tickets from Mill Street Hair, Wantage) and Sunday, 15th December at **Old Mill Hall, Grove** (tickets from Brett's Chemist, Grove). Tickets £7 and £5 (concs). Find more details online at www.jigsawstageproductions.co.uk

Panto favourite Michelle Collins is taking on the role of the evil Caraboose with CBeebies presenter Chris Jarvis as Happy Harry in *Sleeping Beauty* at the **Wyvern Theatre, Swindon**, which he also directs. This favourite story of the princess condemned to sleep for 100 years by the evil fairy is on from 7th December to 5th January. Tickets £17-£32.50; book yours at www.swindontheatres.co.uk

Wishing you all lots of laughs! KN

