

IT'S BEHIND YOU...

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Marianka Swain explores the development of pantomime and rounds up the best of the festive season

The quintessentially English pantomime actually has its origins in Ancient Greece, but its archetypal characteristics were cemented in the Middle

Ages. The Mumpers performed shows during community gatherings, entertaining with raucous stage fights, coarse humour, fantastical creatures and

subversive gender role reversal. In the 18th century, influenced by the Commedia dell'Arte, London theatres developed shows inspired by classical

stories, retaining the popular Mumpers elements and adding stock clown characters, dance, acrobatics, slapstick, audience participation and topical humour. In the 19th century, European fairy stories and children's classics were mined, and pantomimes based on those tales remain most popular today.

The tradition of celebrity guest stars also dates back to the 19th century, when Theatre Royal Drury Lane proprietor Augustus Harris

enticed famous variety artists into his shows, a key element in pantomime's survival. Even so, it began to fall out of fashion towards the end of the 20th century, and it took clever script updating, an injection of showbiz glitz and imaginative stunt casting to bring about its recent revival.

There's also more to interest dance fans in the latest crop of pantos, from featured artists like street crew Flawless to comedic dance-theatre companies such

as ponydance creating their own shows, as well as impressively slick choreography in many of the big pantomimes and, of course, *Strictly* sightings galore.

After two years with partner-in-crime Ann Widdecombe, this Christmas Craig Revel Horwood pairs up with new muse Lisa Riley, as he continues to reign supreme over pantoland. (Oh, yes he does!)

Enjoy our guide to the season's top tickets... ●

BEST CLASSIC PANTOS



Gok Wan as the Man in the Mirror, Stephanie Beacham as the Wicked Queen and John Partridge as the Prince in Birmingham's *Snow White*

PETER PAN, RICHMOND THEATRE, LONDON

December 6 – January 12
The Fonz as Captain Hook? Happy days indeed. Henry Winkler stars in this family-friendly show.
<http://tinyurl.com/kawopj2>

SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS, BIRMINGHAM HIPPODROME

December 19 – February 2
John Partridge, Gok Wan, Danielle Hope and short-lived *Strictly* contestant Stephanie Beacham feature in a monumental production.

www.birminghamhippodrome.com

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK, LYRIC THEATRE, LONDON

November 23 – January 4
Playwright Tom Wells' witty take on a traditional tale includes a sprinkling of Zumba.
www.lyric.co.uk

PETER PAN, LIVERPOOL EMPIRE

December 13 – January 5
Former Junior ballroom champ and *Dancing on Ice* winner Ray Quinn heads the billing as the boy who never grows up.
www.atgtickets.com/shows/peter-pan/liverpool-empire

DICK WHITTINGTON, OPERA HOUSE, MANCHESTER

December 6 – January 5
The classic rags-to-riches tale features (appropriately enough) *Britain's Got Talent's* Ashleigh and Pudsey and *I'd Do Anything's* Jodie Prenger.
www.atgtickets.com/shows/dick-whittington/opera-house-manchester

ALADDIN, NEW WIMBLEDON THEATRE, LONDON

December 6 – January 12



Joining Matthew Kelly and Jo Brand, street dance crew Flawless (all pictured above) bring their innovative approach to a traditional tale.
www.atgtickets.com/shows/aladdin-wimbledon/new-wimbledon-theatre

CINDERELLA, BRISTOL HIPPODROME

December 6 – January 5
Louie "camp as Christmas" Spence shares his irrepressible toe-tapping in a packed production that also features real Shetland ponies.
www.atgtickets.com/shows/cinderella/bristol-hippodrome

BEST STRICTLY PANTOS



Strictly judge Craig Revel Horwood is the Wicked Queen in Southend-on-Sea's *Snow White*

SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS, CLIFFS PAVILION, SOUTHEND-ON-SEA

December 13 – January 4
Last year's contestant Lisa Riley and the fabulously

villainous Craig Revel Horwood feature as lady's maid and – what else – the wicked queen in this a-maze-ing show.
www.southendtheatres.org.uk

"AFTER TWO YEARS WITH PARTNER-IN-CRIME ANN WIDDECOMBE, THIS CHRISTMAS CRAIG REVEL HORWOOD PAIRS UP WITH NEW MUSE LISA RILEY, AS HE CONTINUES TO REIGN SUPREME OVER PANTOLAND"

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK,
NEW THEATRE, CARDIFF**

December 14 – January 19
Popular *Strictly* finalist Julian Clary stars as the Spirit of the Beans in this family spectacular. (No mention of maracas, sadly.)
www.newtheatrecardiff.co.uk

**CINDERELLA, THE SPA,
BRIDLINGTON, YORKSHIRE**

December 12 – January 1
2008 pro champion Camilla Dallerup helps someone else become belle of the ball as she plays the Fairy Godmother.
www.thespabridlington.com/cinderella

**PETER PAN, ST HELENS THEATRE
ROYAL, MERSEYSIDE**

December 6 – January 12
Former pro Brian Fortuna takes the title role in a show full of glitz and glam.
www.sthelens theatre royal.com

**SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS,
LIGHTHOUSE THEATRE, KETTERING**

December 11 – January 5
Fan favourite Russell Grant brings his joyful pizzazz to the apt role of Astrologer Royal.
www.lighthouse theatre.co.uk

BEST ★ ALTERNATIVE PANTOS



Pony Panto

**PONY PANTO,
DEPTFORD AND IRELAND**

December 5–22
The brilliantly irreverent comedic dance-theatre company bring their witty take on the Christmas office party to the MAC Belfast, Project Arts Centre Dublin and the Albany in Deptford.
www.ponydance.com

**PETER PAN: THE NEVER ENDING
STORY, NATIONAL ARENA TOUR**

December 13 – January 16
The high-flying, hi-tech extravaganza, playing at Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds, Manchester and Wembley Arena, features aerial acrobats and a Peter Pan flying without wires.

www.theticketfactory.com/ppt

**POTTED PANTO, VAUDEVILLE
THEATRE, LONDON**

December 8 – January 5
Can't decide which panto to see? Here's the perfect solution: seven classics in just 80 minutes, with plenty of slapstick fun along the way.
<http://tinyurl.com/ox4lnbh>

**COCK ROBIN AND HIS VERY
MERRY MEN, BRIGHTON DOME**

January 21 – February 4
For a more adult experience, this X-rated festival favourite offers a wonderfully naughty take on a familiar tale.
www.brightondome.org