LIAM RUDDEN – MUST SEE THEATRE

Edinburgh's Mr Entertainment picks his Hot Tickets to see in the Capital and beyond

Most of Dolly's songs feature in the musical

Ahead of the Fringe there are slim pickings as the city readies itself for the over supply in August

It's the calm before the storm, the lull before the cultural overload that is the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, yes July in Edinburgh frequently has a dearth of theatrical happenings to keep us entertained as venues prepare for the arrival of the biggest arts festival in the world. This year is no different.

Consequently, there's not much 'Must See Theatre' to highlight in the city this coming month although The Playhouse does buck the trend, bringing Here You Come Again: The New Dolly Parton Musical (23-27 July) to the Greenside Place venue.

Prior to its West End run in London, Here You Come Again allows, for the first time ever, all of the country and western singer's biggest hits to be experienced together in a 'rollicking' new musical comedy.

A piece that's sure to make you smile, expect to hear a raft of classic hits such as Jolene, 9 to 5, Islands in the Stream, I Will Always Love You, Here You Come Again and many more. Originally written by two-time Emmy award-winning comedy and songwriter Bruce Vilanch with Gabriel Barre, who also directs, and Tricia Paoluccio, who also plays Dolly, Here You Come Again has been adapted for UK audiences by acclaimed British playwright Jonathan Harvey of Gimme, Gimme, Gimme, Coronation Street and Pet Shop Boys' musical Closer To Heaven fame.

It's a tale of self-discovery. Kevin has just separated from his long-time boyfriend, Jeremy, an investment banker, and is in quarantine in the attic bedroom of his childhood home in Yorkshire. Surrounded by precious belongings from his youth, he is reunited with a much-loved old record player and his cherished Dolly albums. He remembers the hard times those songs helped him through in the past and counts on them to help him once again. With her wit, humour and charm, Dolly teaches him a whole lot about life, love and how to pull yourself up by your bootstraps… even if your bootstraps don't have rhinestones.

Steven Webb plays Kevin from Yorkshire

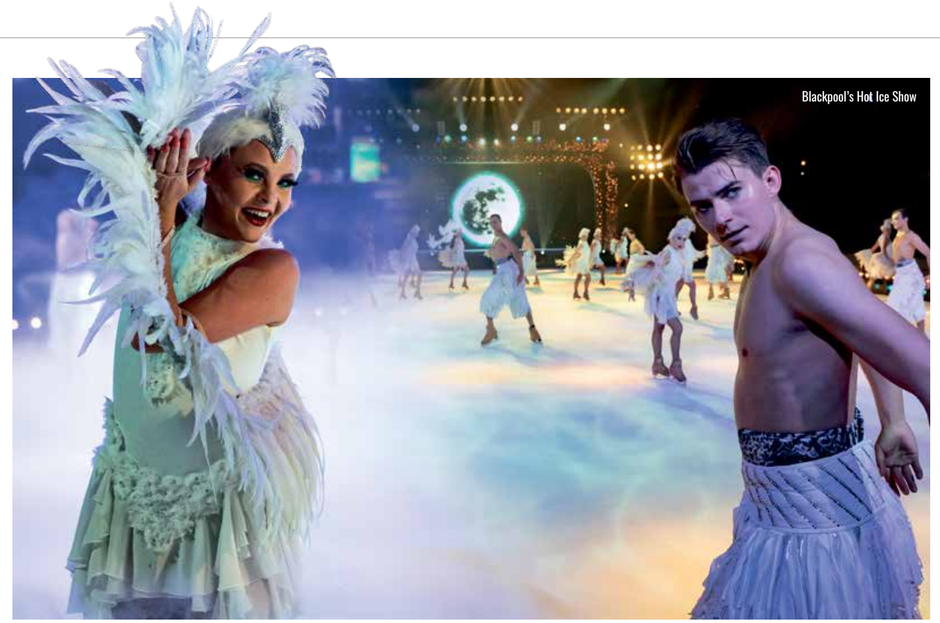
West End star Steven Webb plays Kevin, a 40-year-old has-been-who-never-was comedian, alongside Paoluccio, who reprises her celebrated role as Dolly following much US acclaim. For Webb, who began his career 30 years ago playing the title role Sam Mendes' production of Oliver! at the London Palladium and has just finished a long stint starring as Elder McKinley in the West End run of The Book of Mormon, it's a very personal project.

He explained: "I'm beyond excited to be bringing Kevin to life. I grew up listening to Dolly and other country music as my dad was a big fan. Twenty years ago, I was in a similar state to Kevin. I was down, a relationship had come clattering to a halt and I felt aimless. Then Dolly Parton played one night at the Hammersmith Apollo in London. So, I grabbed a ticket and took myself down there.

"Just like Kevin, I was inspired, galvanised and uplifted by Dolly and her message of love and perseverance. It was practically life changing. And that's why she means so much to so many people. It's no coincidence that the hashtag #WhatWouldDollyDo became a life motto for so many. Getting to sing and hear her biggest hits, and watch Tricia embody Dolly, every night is going to be the greatest gift a show could ever give."

It's been a while since I last saw Webb on stage - he was quite brilliant in the world première of the late Lionel Bart's until then unperformed Quasimodo, at the King's Head back in 2013 - so it will be good to see him at work on the much bigger Playhouse stage.

Running time 2 hours 20 minutes including interval. Tickets £25.50-£73.50 **https://www.atgtickets.com/shows/here-you-come-again-the-new-dolly-parton-musical/edinburgh-playhouse/calendar/2024-07-23**



Blackpool's Hot Ice Show

With Edinburgh theatres so quiet, and a fair proportion of the local population taking advantage of the Edinburgh Trades fortnight to get away on holiday, looking a bit further afield for July brings us to Blackpool, where they tell me Scots are still one of the mainstays of the economy come July - the aforementioned Trades followed by the Glasgow's Fair Fortnight keeping the seaside resort busy. If you are one of the thousands heading there, you could do worse than to check out Blackpool Pleasure Beach's now legendary Hot Ice Show, always a highlight of the season.

Staged in the oldest purpose-built ice theatre in the world, this year's ice spectacular is entitled Eternity (4 July-7 September). It's a show that has been created from a 'shared passion for sport and art' that has brought together some of the world's best show figure skaters. Showcasing the 'joy of gracefully and creatively gliding, spinning, sliding, jumping and being lifted across the ice', Eternity promises to 'devour the imagination with its artistry'.

Hot Ice costumes, a feast of rhinestones and feathers, are always as breath-taking as the adrenaline fuelled skating performed by the 30-strong cast of Olympic and World Champion skaters who weave together a colourful tapestry of emotion and art on the ice. High-speed, high-skill skating paired with with cutting edge effects ensure that the impossible becomes possible - just watch as the ice is set alight and 11,000 rhinestones flicker in the glow of the flames and lights.

Running time 2 hours including interval. Tickets £10-£32 **https://www.blackpoolpleasurebeach.com/shows/hot-ice/**

Zheng Xi Yong and Mia Kobayashi

If you are London bound for a Theatre Break in July and happen to be a fan of all things manga, then this month's West End Hot Ticket could be especially for you. Based on the manga (graphic novel) of the same name, the English language premiere of Your Lie in April (until 21 September) has just opened at the Harold Pinter Theatre, Panton Street.

Beautifully fusing the classical masterpieces of Rachmaninoff with a stunning contemporary pop infused musical theatre score by Tony, Emmy and Grammy nominated composer Frank Wildhorn (of Jekyll & Hyde and Bonnie & Clyde fame), this production is a sure fire must see show. The story: When Kosei Arima, the perfect piano prodigy, loses his ability to hear the music following the death of his mother, can his friends help him return to the heights of his Rachmaninoff piano playing peak?

Originally published as a manga in 2011, Your Lie In April has since sold more than 7.5 million copies in 17 countries and proved a popular property across a number of mediums. It was adapted into a 22-part animé TV series in 2014, a Japanese live-action film in 2016 and a Japanese stage production in 2017. Wildhorn's musical, meanwhile, opened in Tokyo in 2022, followed by a Japanese tour during which it smashed box office records.

Running time 2 hours 15 mins including interval. Tickets from £25-£95 **https://www.haroldpintertheatre.co.uk/shows/your-lie-in-april**

Next month, I'll be sharing my Edinburgh Festivals Must See Hit Lists - the five must see shows from various categories in the Fringe and EIF programmes, but before I go, let's stay in London a little longer.

If you believe, as I do, that theatres should be 'social hubs' to be enjoyed out with performance times, pop online and visit the Theatre Royal Drury Lane website where you will find they have embraced the concept brilliantly. I recently spent an afternoon there exploring the theatre on their informative, funny, and nicely dramatic, tour followed by Afternoon Tea in the Grand Saloon.

The tour, courtesy of James and David, takes you to parts of the theatre you'd never normally access and the Afternoon Tea is like taking a trip back in time. You can also just pop in for a cocktail from the foyer cocktail bar. Read all about my afternoon in 'The Lane' with details of how to book ahead at **www.mustseetheatre.com.**

Hopefully, the Drury Lane model is one our very own King's Theatre might look at ahead of its reopening - Afternoon Tea at the King's, now that certainly has a ring to it.

Until next time, happy theatre-going.

Liam