

Must See Theatre this February

From *Oliver and the Artful Dodger* to *Mary Poppins*, *Roxie Hart*, drag queen *Lola* and not forgetting punk princess *Toyah Willcox*, there's a host of musical stars just waiting to entertain you in February.

Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* is the toast of London's West End right now, and rightly so. The new production from Cameron Mackintosh, directed and choreographed by the brilliant Matthew Bourne, is a glorious uplifting affair and by far the best musical take on Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, I've seen yet.

When this *Oliver!*, which started life at Chichester Festival Theatre last year, had its red carpet opening night at London's Gielgud Theatre in January, it was a buzzing, star-studded affair with the great and the good of theatreland out in force. Edinburgh was well represented too; it was great to catch up with the capital's very own star of *The Rig*, Iain Glen, while Prestonfield and Witchery supremo James Thomson was there soaking up the atmosphere. Michael Harrison, producer of the King's/Festival Theatre panto, was also in attendance. Harrison has just been crowned Producer of the Year by *The Stage*, a proud achievement for an alumni of what was the acclaimed Queen Margaret College drama course.

Arguably one of the hottest opening nights the West End will have in 2025, *Oliver!* is therefore my Must See for anyone

planning a theatre break this month. That said, there's plenty of time to see it as its run has already been extended to March 2026. Read my review, 'Magnificently staged, Matthew Bourne's *Oliver!* is the musical master-piece you've waited all your life to see' now at mustseetheatre.com.

Running time 2 hours 40 minutes. Tickets £45-£195
<https://oliverthemusical.com/>



PHOTO Liam Rudden



Closer to home, The Playhouse brings a hat-trick of hit musicals to Greenside Place this month, elsewhere it's a bit quieter. Shakespeare continues to entertain at the Royal Lyceum where you can catch John Douglas Thompson, one of America's most lauded Shakesperian actors, playing Shylock in Theatre For A New Audience (New York) and Washington's Shakespeare Theatre's co-production of The Merchant of Venice. It's a play that has a very special place in my heart. As a shy teenager, it was a class reading of The Merchant of Venice, led by an inspirational English teacher called Mrs Durkin, that sparked my love of Shakespeare – she had me read the part of Shylock. Safe to say my 13-year-old Shylock was considerably different to the one Thompson delivers.

You can read my review of Merchant of Venice on MustSeeTheatre.com



Over at the Festival Theatre, the magical nanny, Mary Poppins, continues to wow audiences with her high-flying antics ahead of the arrival of the Manipulate Festival (1-11 February),

which celebrates 17 years of presenting the best of Scottish and international animated film, puppetry and visual theatre in 2025. While elements of the Manipulate Festival also pop up at the Traverse this month, the highlight of the Cambridge Street theatre's February programme is the return of award-winning Irish play, Heaven (25 February-1 March), for a homecoming run following its Fringe First winning run there in August 2023.

A deeply funny, moving and poignant exploration of marriage and middle age, Heaven also won The Irish Times New Play Award 2023 and Best Actress – The Irish Times Theatre Awards for Janet Moran who reprises her role alongside Andrew Bennett in the two-hander.

Running time 1 hour 30 minutes, no interval. Tickets £20
<https://www.traverse.co.uk/whats-on/event/heaven-spring-25>



Janet Moran PHOTO Pic Ste Murray

It's the Playhouse, however, that has the show I'm looking forward to most this month, Now That's What I Call A Musical

(25 February-1 March). I'm keen to see it not because I'm expecting the most earth-shattering jukebox musical ever, it'll likely be a the usual feel-good evening of nostalgia, but because the Edinburgh shows are the only ones on the tour to feature my own teenage heroine, punk princess Toyah Willcox, as a special guest.

Celebrating 40 years of the iconic compilation albums and starring EastEnders' star, Nina Wadia, and 2013 X Factor winner, Sam Bailey, the musical comedy tells the story of Gemma and April, two school friends busy with very important business... planning their lives based on Number One Magazine quizzes and dreaming of snogging Rick Astley.

Fast forward from the Birmingham of 1989, to Birmingham 2009 and we find the pair confronted with their worst nightmare, a school reunion where long lost friends reunite and drama unfolds as old flames reappear. The action plays out to a soundtrack of hits from the 80s, expect Gold, Girls Just Wanna Have Fun, Tainted Love, Hey Mickey, Sisters Are Doing It For Themselves and many more, not forgetting that live set from Toyah – I predict we'll hear It's A Mystery, I Want To Be Free and Thunder In The Mountains.

Running time 2 hours 30 minutes, including interval. Tickets £25 - £68

<https://www.atgtickets.com/shows/now-thats-what-i-call-a-musical/edinburgh-playhouse/>



Toyah Willcox PHOTO Liam Rudden
A week earlier, Kinky Boots The Musical (18-22 February) struts back onto the stage of the Playhouse, starring Strictly Come Dancing favourite Johannes Radebe and Dan Partridge, my

box office spies tell me that this run of Kinky Boots has almost sold out already. That's possibly the Doctor Who effect, Radebe appeared in Doctor Who: The Devil's Chord in a big song-and-dance routine with Doctor number 15, Edinburgh and Fife raised, Ncuti Gatwa.

Based on a true story and with music and lyrics by pop diva Cyndi Lauper and a life-affirming book by Harvey Fierstein, Kinky Boots takes place in the unlikely setting of a footwear factory. After inheriting his family's failing shoe business and with his relationship on the rocks, life is proving to be very challenging for Charlie Price. That is until he meets Lola, a drag queen whose sparkle and unsteady heels might just hold the answer to saving the struggling business.

Fans of Radebe should note, however, that he will not be performing at matinees on Wednesday 19 and Thursday 20 February, when Lola will be played by Newtion Matthews. Remember, get those tickets fast.

Running time 2 hours 25 minutes, including interval. Tickets £27 - £95

<https://www.atgtickets.com/shows/kinky-boots/edinburgh-playhouse/>



Finally, let's flip right back to the start of the month for the other Playhouse big-hitter, *Chicago* (4-8 February), which brings Faye Brookes, Brenda Edwards, Djalenga Scott and Kevin Clifton to town ready to razzle-dazzle audiences with their footwork.

Created by John Kander, Fred Ebb and legendary choreographer Bob Fosse, *Chicago's* score includes the show-stoppers *Razzle Dazzle*, *Cell Block Tango* and *All That Jazz*. Set amidst the decadence of the 1920s, the musical is the story of Roxie Hart, a housewife and nightclub dancer who murders her on-the-side lover after he threatens to walk out on her. Desperate to avoid conviction, she dupes the public, the media and her rival cellmate, Velma Kelly, by hiring Chicago's slickest criminal lawyer to transform her malicious crime into a barrage of sensational headlines, the likes of which might just as easily be ripped from today's tabloids.

Get ready for a classy, sassy, sexy evening of stylish musical theatre.

Running time 2 hours 30 minutes, including interval. Tickets £32.50 - £63

<https://www.atgtickets.com/shows/chicago/edinburgh-playhouse/calendar/2025-02-04>

Until March, happy theatre going,

Liam

