

TAKE FIVE

Winter Warmers by Judith Schrut



The beautiful and heartwarming *Giselle*, English National Ballet, photo Jason Bell.



Tango Fire lights up Sadlers Wells, photo courtesy Sadlers Wells Press Team

By the time you are reading this, the holiday bright lights and seasonal buzz will be fond memories, and it will be some weeks before winter's thaw and the first snowdrops of spring are with us. Well, we say that just gives us more time to snuggle up and savour the new year's best toasty treats. We are delighted to share with you some great ways to cheat that chill and warm those cockles.

1. Dare To Dance

You might have heard of "the Strictly Effect", after Britain's favourite television show, *Strictly Come Dancing*, but have you ever wondered why we humans get such pleasure from all things dance?

Growing scientific evidence shows deep-seated reasons for our excitement at watching others in motion and being in motion ourselves. Apparently, rhythmic movement stimulates and rewards important parts of our brain that other things just cannot reach. Adding music to the mix increases this effect, which may explain why watching others dance or taking part ourselves gives us a double dose of pleasure and food for the brain.

Whether you dare to dance or just wish to watch, you'll find Britain's 2017 dance scene packed with opportunities to indulge in this healthful habit.

The English National Ballet's new season features a classic production of the spellbinding

love story, *Giselle*; Rudolf Nureyev's sumptuous version of romantic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*; and *My First Ballet: Cinderella*, everyone's favourite rags-to-riches story in a beautifully adapted ballet version for children aged three and up. This promises to be a very special treat for the whole family and will include children's workshops in London and on its UK-wide tour. ENB also hosts an impressive programme of master classes, open rehearsals, 'ballet buddy' days and courses for all ages and levels.

The Barbican Centre presents its most ambitious dance programme ever, with dance-connected performances, exhibitions and screenings taking place across the year and a treasure trove of guest companies and artists from around the globe, across its stages. Highlights include the world premiere of the Royal Ballet's *Les Enfants Terribles* as part of a weekend celebrating *Philip Glass at 80*; bold, original works from *Ballet Black*, an expressive feast from the *London International Mime Festival* and a unique season of films in the Barbican cinema with dance at their heart.

Sadler's Wells brings the world's best contemporary dance to its three London stages, with a vibrant year-round programme of tango to hip-hop, ballet to flamenco, Bollywood to cutting-edge modern. Although its current space was extensively re-designed in 1998, there

has been dance and body-based entertainment on Sadler's Wells historic Islington site for over 300 years. Back in the 17th century, visitors to Sadler's Wells might be entertained by jugglers, tumblers, rope dancers, ballad singers, wrestlers, fighters, dancing dogs and, reputedly, a singing duck. Its 2017 season won't include either dogs or ducks, but does have some splendid options for dance buffs.

Look out for the annual *Flamenco Festival*, setting the stage alight with exciting figures from the global flamenco scene and culminating in the *Gala Flamenca*. Japan's astonishing *Yamato* drummers push their limits in a display of physical strength, using their whole bodies to produce thunderous music with drums weighing up to half a tonne. New York's award-winning *Dorrance Dance* imaginatively takes the traditional American art of tap dance to a new level. With its astonishing use of electronic tap boards, the Company's every step, swipe, and scrape sets off an element of sound, turning the stage into a musical instrument in its own right. Twenty years ago, *Matthew Bourne* turned the ballet world upside down with his unforgettable all male *Swan Lake*. Now he and his ever innovative company, *New Adventures*, debut a mesmerising *Red Shoes*, a ballet version of the classic movie, before heading out on an extensive UK tour.

If all those top taps and tango turns give you the urge to get up and boogie, there are dozens of dance options you can try for yourself in halls, churches and community centres around the country.

Apart from all that brain food we mentioned, dancing is a wonderful way to warm up in winter as well as meet new people, keep fit and have tremendous fun. Top of the stops for DIY dance lovers is **Cecil Sharp House**, the delightful North London headquarters of the English Folk Dance and Song Society for the past 80 years. With a wide variety of classes, workshops and events on offer, you can dance your way around the world with a choice of Irish Set Dance, Quadrille Club, Lancashire Clogging, Balkan, Morris Dancing and regular live band Celtic Ceilidhs, American Barn Dances and Filet Gumbo Cajun.

Further information:

www.ballet.org.uk

www.sadlerswells.com

barbican.org.uk

www.cecilsharpshouse.org

2. Meandering Museums

For a simple, pleasurable and often free way to come in from the cold on a winter's day, it's hard to beat a visit to one of Britain's huge range of museums and art galleries. With over 2500 to choose from, there's sure to be one for every interest, age or attention span in your household.

And 2017 promises to be an extra-ordinary year for museum lovers.

If you're in London, why not start at the top, literally? The new **Tate Modern's** recent expansion added ten stories and multiple galleries of cutting edge design, event and display space. An awe-inspiring place to begin is its 10th floor open viewing gallery, with panoramic views of the city's skyline and the River Thames below. Entry to the Tate remains free, although you really won't want to miss ticketed shows like the retrospective of American mixed

media innovator, **Robert Rauschenberg**, and upcoming displays of 20th century Italian masters, sculptor **Alberto Giacometti** and painter **Amedeo Modigliani**.

You don't need to be 'radical' to enjoy Tate Modern's **Radical Eye: Modernist Photography from the Sir Elton John Collection**. Sir Elton has been passionately collecting photographs for 25 years, hanging them in every nook, cranny and wall of his Atlanta, Georgia home. This show treats you to roomfuls of gems from his 2000-item collection, one of the largest private collections in the world, and is a chance to see the best of American and world photography, by pioneers and innovators like Edward Steichen, Dorothea Lange, Imogen Cunningham, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Man Ray, each of whom helped change the way we see. Start your visit with the show's introductory film, in which Sir Elton speaks with honesty and warmth on why he collects, how he loves living in a house covered with wall-to-wall photographs and why he's so keen to share his collection with us.

Down the river at **Tate Britain**, **David Hockney's** 80th birthday is celebrated with a major show. From portraits and images of LA swimming pools to his Yorkshire landscapes, drawings on the iPad, and photography, this is a rare chance to see a lifetime of Hockney's unforgettable works in one place. Opening in April, the first exhibition dedicated to **Queer British Art** showcases the rich diversity of LGBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, queer) visual art created during the oppressive 100 years before UK law partially de-criminalised male homosexuality.

There's still time to dig out those bellbottoms, fringed leather waistcoats and Twiggy wigs and make your way to the **Victoria and Albert Museum's "You say you want a Revolution? Records & Rebels 1966-1970"**. If you, your parent or, indeed, grandparent hung around Carnaby Street, Haight Ashbury or *Granny Takes a Trip* in the Swinging Sixties, this show will surely blow your mind. Explore the upheaval, explosive

sense of freedom and radical changes of the time through music, fashion, film, design and political activism. **Revolution** is followed by another V&A big bang, **the Pink Floyd Exhibition: Their Mortal Remains**, a multi-sensory journey through Pink Floyd's universe, from the 1960's psychedelic scene to the present day.

Recently honoured with the prestigious Art Fund Museum of the Year prize, the ever innovative **V&A** is the world's greatest museum of art and design. View British, European and Asian fashion, furniture, glass, toys, jewellery and instruments through the ages, and so much more - all exquisitely displayed - and enjoy free activities, special events, late night openings and daily guided tours, including the unique and award-winning LGBTQ tour.

Turning to the many wondrous small museums and galleries, it's hard to know where to start. No, that's not entirely true: we'd start with London's **Charles Dickens Museum**, in the only remaining home of the beloved Victorian writer and social activist and one of the most intimate and enchanting small museums we know. In this renovated Georgian terraced house in a Bloomsbury back street, you can immerse yourself in the sights and sounds and the living spirit of the man, explore the family home of the great writer, his wife Catherine and several of their 10 children, the furnished rooms where Dickens dined and entertained many famous

David Hockney, Portrait of an Artist, (Pool with Two Figures) 1972, photo credit Art Gallery New South Wales, Jenni Carter, courtesy Tate Press Team



A warm welcome, Charles Dickens Museum, London, photo courtesy Michael Barrett, the Press Office



Radical Eye, Gems from Sir Elton John's photography collection, Tate Modern

guests, the working rooms where he wrote *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. From amongst 100,000 treasures in the Museum's collection, you can view original manuscripts and drawings, his writing desk and more unusual items like a commode (chair with a concealed chamber pot) and hip bath. There's a cosy and charming café and walled courtyard garden to sip hot chocolate and sample some enticing cakes. A bonus to discover that the museum's lovely new director is an American expat and lifelong Dickens aficionado, Dr Cindy Sughrue.

The Dickens Museum is only one masterpiece in London's **Museum Mile**. A walk along Museum Mile will provide you with fascinating insights into London past and present, and a chance to discover 13 museums and galleries and their diverse collections. These include **Sir John Soane's Museum**, the **Foundling Museum**, **Hunterian Museum of Surgery**, the **Cartoon Museum** and the **British Museum**.

Amongst the many other small but perfectly-formed gallery gems, we highly recommend the **International Slavery Museum**, Liverpool, telling the history of the transatlantic slave trade through stories of resilience and resistance; the **Galleries of Justice Museum**, Nottingham; Wales' **Dylan Thomas Centre** and **Big Pit National Coal Museum**, with its astounding underground tour. The delightful **American Museum**, housed in an 18th-century manor outside Bath, is the only museum of Americana outside the USA. Our favourite small museums in Scotland include Edinburgh's **Museum of Childhood** and the **People's Story**.

Further information:
dickensmuseum.com
www.vam.ac.uk
www.tate.org.uk
museum-mile.org.uk

3. The Wonder Of The Wander

It's official: walking is good for you- it boosts your memory, lung capacity and sense of wellbeing. It prevents cancer, cuts the risk of heart attacks by half and strokes by a third. Walking an hour a day adds up to 1000 miles in 12 months.

But those frosty winter mornings, shorter daytimes and early darkness make us all feel a little more sleepy. Resist the urge to hibernate! Instead, pull on your furry boots, pack up the waterproofs, energy bars and hip flasks and walk yourself warm. Whether you're up for a short stroll in your lunch hour, an energetic trek at the weekend or just long for some fresh air *hygge*, Britain's got an endless choice of great wintertime walks and wanders, from forest tracks to urban

Californians Walk London: Eric, Rikki, Toni, Pete, 2016



ambles, hilly byways to waterside towpaths.

Try the enchanting illuminated stroll through Isle of Wight's **Electric Woods**, a sound and light spectacle set amidst glowing glades and trees. Witness early Spring as it's sprung, with a fragrant walk around Sussex's **West Dean Gardens** or Surrey's **Winkworth Arboretum**, with its 1,000 different trees and shrubs and 10,000 snowdrops. Late spring brings the glorious British bluebell season and a chance to experience the special magic of bluebell woods. Think blue and violet perfumed floral carpets, sweeping through ancient woodlands adorned with birds, butterflies and winding paths. Try the bluebell woods of **Ashridge Estate** in Buckinghamshire or a guided bluebell walk on Norfolk's famous **Blickling Estate**, once home to Anne Boleyn's family.

Whatever the season, Britain offers some of the most exhilarating coastal walks imaginable. Sample, for instance, the stunning castle-to-castle walk along **Northumberland's coast**, with an optional boat trip to seabird and seal sanctuaries of the nearby Farne Islands, or follow in the footsteps of *Ross and Demelza Poldark*, with a bracing stroll along Cornwall's scenic **Southwest Coast Path**.

If social walking is your thing, consider joining that very British institution known as the **Ramblers Association**, or new kid on the block, **Walk Unlimited**. Both feature annual winter wanders, walking weekends and free guided walks as well as advice, training and maps galore. **Walk London** has seven beautiful walking routes covering 390 miles across all 33 London boroughs. Check out **Walk4Life** to find a UK walking group, or make use of their incredible "Walkfinder". Here you can source over 100,000 (yes, really) walks, or create your own to suit individual wander-wishes and needs. **Walk4Life** also encourages GPs to 'prescribe' a local walk to patients using its ingenious *Dr Maps* prescribing pad and invite you to join one of hundreds of groups like the *Wishful Walkers*, *BodyBlitz Walk Fit*, *Dog Trotters*, *Walking Wobblers* and *Clothes Optional Walking*.

Further information:
www.ramblers.org.uk
www.walk.co.uk
www.walk4life.info

4. Hot Tickets

Anyone in the drama-know will tell you that some of the UK's best theatre can be found on its many wonderful regional stages, venues like

Liverpool's **Everyman** and **Playhouse**, long famed as launching pads for groundbreaking drama and talent like Julie Walters, Jonathan Pryce and Bill Nighy. The E&P's upcoming season has been proclaimed 'a dream come true season'. It includes an eagerly awaited production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, a rock 'n roll *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Story Giant*, marking the 50th anniversary of *The Mersey Sound*.

March winds blow in some thrilling regional premieres. **One Love: The Bob Marley Musical** debuts at the **Birmingham Repertory Theatre** and *Sleepless in Seattle*, *the New Musical*, opens with an all star cast at the **Theatre Royal Plymouth** before transferring to London's West End.

Naturally, you'll expect more than a few hot tickets to warm the London stage. **An American in Paris**, a gorgeous, award-winning reinvention of the Hollywood film and Gershwin musical, has its eagerly awaited UK premiere at the **Dominion Theatre**. *42nd Street*, the classic song and dance American dream fable of Broadway comes to **Theatre Royal Drury Lane**, and *Doctor Who* and *Broadchurch* star David Tennant will play the title role in *Don Juan in Soho* at **Wyndham's Theatre**.

At long last, **Hamilton**, the critically acclaimed Pulitzer Prize-winning play and multi-awarded Broadway musical, hits the **Victoria Palace Theatre**, with tickets on sale from January and an opening date in late 2017. *Hamilton* tells the story of America's Founding Father Alexander Hamilton, an immigrant from the West Indies who became George Washington's right-hand man during the Revolutionary War and was the nation's first Treasury Secretary. The score blends hip-hop, jazz, blues, rap, R&B and Broadway and is described as "the story of America then, as told by America now".

For something completely different as well as historic, beautiful and reasonably-priced, you'll love an evening at **Wilton's Music Hall**. This one-of-a-kind gem in the heart of London is the oldest Grand Music Hall in the world. Recently re-opened after a glorious restoration and re-design, Wilton's offers a year round programme of exceptional productions and community events. Highlights of 2017's first season are an electrifying *Frankenstein* and the renowned and hilarious Reduced Shakespeare Company in *Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play*. Wilton's also has terrific stuff for the whole family, like time-travelling magicians Morgan & West's *Utterly Spiffing Spectacular Magic*

An American in Paris comes to London, photo Matthew Murphy



Hamilton, Broadway production, Daveed Diggs as Thomas Jefferson and ensemble, photo Joan Marcus, courtesy Raw PR



Show for Kids (and Childish Grown Ups!) and *Silver Electra*, an inspirational show about American pioneer aviator, Amelia Earhart.

Further information:

www.wiltens.org.uk

www.hamiltonthemusical.co.uk

www.everymanplayhouse.com

5. The Magic Of Music

To many music lovers, Britain is Music Heaven, with hundreds of venues, concerts and gigs to suit every taste or genre. Whether your favourite is rock, jazz, folk or classical; grime, gunge or gangsta rap - or a sound so new it doesn't have a name yet - the UK hosts a breadth and variety of music unequalled anywhere on the planet.

London's Southbank Centre, a particular jewel in the nation's musical crown, starts the new year with a passion, offering plenty to stir the heart and warm the soul. Expect a glittering array of classical pearls, historic gems and

The magic of music, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Southbank Centre, photo copyright Benjamin Ealovega



contemporary sparklers, as the world's most gifted musicians take centre stage and wave batons, show off vocal vim and make their instruments sing.

Belief and Beyond Belief is the Southbank Centre's rich, ripe central theme for 2017, bringing with it an ambitious year-long festival of music, performance, film, debate and exhibitions. If you've ever asked yourself "*Being human: what's it all about?*", this is the festival for you. In a fruitful partnership with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, there will be eight themed weekends across the year. A creative mix of music, words and ideas will explore massive themes like "*The search for the meaning of life?*", "*How do we live with death?*" and "*Can science and religion live side by side?*".

The coming Southbank year will also see dozens of musical premieres and artist

debuts, movie screenings with live orchestra, an international piano series and a Nordic season, as well as the annual *Women of the World*, *EFG London Jazz*, *Darbar Indian Music* and *Imagine Children's* festivals. You'll be spoilt for choice with evenings of Mozart masterpieces, the Sounds of Musicals, the Glenn Miller Orchestra and concerts from the cream of classical soloists like Mitsuko Uchida, Pinchas Zukerman, Maurizio Pollini and Vladimir Ashkenazy.

You can always depend on the Southbank to have plenty for families and young people, including its popular *FUNharmonics* family concert. This year's *Imagine Children's Festival* will have a strong Nordic focus. There will be dancing, singing, wiggling, giggling and other childish fun for all ages, from *Groove Baby*, dance for the very youngest set, to *Rave-a-Roo*, a brand new clubbing experience for the whole family.

The Southbank offers many attractively priced or free options, such as over-60s concessions, student and family tickets, series savings, *Friday Tonic* after-work concerts and other free foyer events.

Further information:

www.southbankcentre.co.uk

Take Five is our quarterly feature bringing the best of British to Americans in Britain. We'd love to hear how you've been warming up this winter: you can email Judith at judith0777@gmail.com

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