

THEY'RE BEHIND

YOU!

One of the best things about Christmas is a trip to see one of the hundreds of pantomimes performed at theatres across the UK.

But how much do you really know about the great British panto?

20 PANTOMIME FACTS THAT'LL MAKE YOU SAY "AAAH!"

"LOOK BEHIND YOU!"

HISTORY OF PANTO

The word pantomime comes from the Greek word "pan", meaning all and "mimos", which means imitator.

The first recognised panto was Harlequin Doctor Faustus which took to the British stage in 1723.

Pantomimes were originally intended to offer a light-hearted alternative to the more serious and dramatic opera.

Up until 1843, pantomimes were silent. Fortunately, the Theatres Act lifted restrictions on dialogue, allowing for the puns, wordplay and audience participation we enjoy today.

Pantomimes may have become popular around Christmas due to the Tudor "Feast of Fools" that took place at that time of year and involved much merriment and role reversal.

"OH NO THEY DIDN'T!"

FAMOUS PANTO STARS

Pantomimes typically star popular celebrity Brits, including Christopher Biggins, Shane Richie and Craig Revel Horwood. But has also included some big Hollywood names like Pamela Anderson and David Hasselhoff.

In 1984, Elton John starred with Sir John Gielgud in a Mother Goose benefit pantomime performance at the Theatre Museum London.

The late Queen Elizabeth II played the principal boy in a wartime production of Aladdin at Windsor Castle, while her sister, Princess Margaret, played the Princess of China.

"OH YES THEY DID!"

PANTO DAMES

The first panto dame appeared on stage in 1806.

Popular panto dame Christopher Biggins has performed in more than 41 pantomimes.

There can be around seven dame costume changes in each performance.

Widow Twankey, the Dame in Aladdin, is named after an unpopular cheap Chinese green tea.

"AAAH!"

PANTO FUN FACTS

Pantomimes make up more than half (51%) of all Christmas events.

Panto villains always enter the stage from the left while the good character, like the fairy godmother, always enters from the right. This dates back to the Middle Ages when it was believed that the right side represented Heaven and the left was Hell.

Pantomimes today usually last around two hours. However, in 1900 a Sleeping Beauty and the Beast production at Drury Lane Theatre lasted five hours and included dozens of performers.

Over 3 million people watch at least one panto performance each year.

Around 260 professional pantomime productions are staged each year in Britain.

The most popular pantomimes performed today in the UK are Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk.

In 2021, Staffordshire University launched the world's first degree in pantomime.

The word slapstick originates from the wooden bat used by the panto character Harlequin.

THE
GREAT
BRITISH
PANTO

INFORMATION SOURCE

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