

## Pantomime

Pantomimes are an enduring and popular theatrical experience – they are often a person’s first introduction to a theatre. Most commonly associated with Christmas, Victorian and Edwardian pantomimes were often the theatrical highlight of the year, with London theatres reportedly spending thousands of pounds on the one production. A Christmas pantomime called for elaborate, multi leveled scenery, ethereal lighting, trap doors and special machinery to allow the actors to fly across the stage.

### What makes a Pantomime?

Several key features make up a pantomime. They range from formulaic stories, character archetypes and simple stage directions. A modern pantomime is full of jokes, songs, and dances – they always have a happy ending and often a huge wedding scene where the whole cast walk down an ornate set of stairs.

### Key features in a pantomime include:

**Dames** – this central comic female character is usually played by a man. Modern dames tend to fall into three broad types, believable characters, glamorous and over the top dames. Dames have a bawdy sense of humour, wear outrageous costumes and are very extrovert characters. They interact with the audience, initiate slapstick and play tricks on the other performers. The costumes they wear play a large part in the jokes and are often visual puns.

**Principal boys** - the young male hero of the play is often played by a young actress. Many female music hall stars of the day like Marie Loftus (who was the lead of the Hippodrome’s opening programme) would ensure high ticket sales.

**The forces of good and evil** – there are recognisable characters in all the different pantomime stories such as the fairy godmother and a baddie like the evil queen or wicked sorcerer.

**‘Skin parts’** - actors who portray animals, such as cows, geese, horses and cats. They are often human-like with an ability to sing and dance.

**A recognisable story** – pantomimes are based on well-known fairy tales but often have contemporary topical jokes or references such as politicians, world events and other forms of media such as TV shows, films and books.

**Audience participation** – one of the most enjoyable and interactive parts of pantomime is the audience participation. The audience is encouraged to engage with the actors on stage, booing, hissing, cheering and joining in the songs.

## Popular pantomimes

Snow White  
Cinderella  
Jack and the Beanstalk  
Robin Hood  
Babes in the Wood  
Sleeping Beauty  
Mother Goose  
Dick Whittington  
Peter Pan

Aladdin  
Ali Baba and the 40 thieves  
Beauty and the Beast  
Puss in Boots  
Red Riding Hood  
Hansel and Gretel  
Robinson Crusoe  
Goldilocks and the three bears

This is not a definitive list. We're sure that your children will recall seeing other pantomimes.

