Theatre in the UK

West End Shows

For many people the highlight of a visit to London is the chance to see a West End show. The West End of London, situated a stone’s throw from Piccadilly Circus and Chinatown, is home to dozens of beautiful theatres.

London’s West End theatres are currently enjoying a boom in popularity and ticket sales. According to the Society of London Theatres, nearly 12 million people attended a West End show last year, whilst audience numbers in 2005 look set to outstrip that impressive figure.

One possible reason for the success of contemporary theatrical productions is the casting of A-list Hollywood actors in lead roles. Val Kilmer, star of films like Top Gun and Batman Forever, is currently appearing in The Postman Always Rings Twice.

And he is not alone - other American movie stars performing in London include Oscar winner, Kevin Spacey, and David Schwimmer, who found international fame in the hit TV sitcom, Friends.

British screen stars are also treading the boards in West End shows. Scottish actor, Ewan McGregor, is appearing in the classic 1950s musical Guys and Dolls – an experience very different to making movies. McGregor says ‘The actual process of making films is extraordinarily tedious. It is very difficult to keep your energy and focus. Whereas what is wonderful about this is we have to create it together.’

Ironically, it is not just that film stars are acting in plays nowadays but films themselves are being adapted for the stage. Amongst the films that can now be seen as plays or musicals are The Lion King, A Few Good Men, and Billy Elliot.

The longest-running shows in the West End are usually musicals. The Andrew Lloyd Webber show, Cats, ran for 21 years and 7000 performances, making its composer a multi-millionaire.

However, not all musicals do so well. Oscar Wilde: The Musical ran for only one night, closing after terrible reviews and poor bookings. It was quite possibly the biggest flop in London theatrical history.
### Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>the highlight - a moment of vivid interest, an outstanding feature</td>
<td>a stone’s throw - very near</td>
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<td>a boom - a period of prosperity or sudden activity</td>
<td>to outstrip - to be bigger than</td>
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<td>casting - allocation of roles</td>
<td>A-list - most popular</td>
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<td>lead roles - main characters in a play</td>
<td>sitcom - short for situational comedy</td>
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<td>treading the boards - being an actor, appear on the stage</td>
<td>musical - a theatrical piece where music is an essential element</td>
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<td>extraordinarily tedious - long and taking a lot of effort</td>
<td>ironically - in the nature of irony</td>
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<td>plays - theatrical pieces</td>
<td>longest-running - that has been performed for the longest time</td>
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<td>ran for - was on the stage</td>
<td>bookings – reservations of seats</td>
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<td>flop - failure</td>
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1. Reading Quiz

Are these sentences true or false? Circle the correct answer.

1. London’s West End is located not very far from Chinatown.  True / False

2. Ticket sales for West End shows have been very poor in recent years due to high prices.  True / False

3. The actor, Ewan McGregor, feels that the process of shooting a film is actually very boring.  True / False

4. Many successful West End shows are adapted for the big screen and made into movies.  True / False

5. Some West End musical can have a run lasting decades.  True / False
2. Error Correction

Each of these sentences has a mistake in it. Find the mistake and rewrite the sentence correctly.

1. My girlfriend said me that she wanted to see a musical in London.

2. Tonight’s performance of The Lion King has been called up because the lead actor is ill. Tickets can be exchanged for another performance.

3. Every week there are ten performances of the show.

4. ‘I think the song “Memory” from the musical Cats is a really beautiful song.’
   ‘I am agree. It’s a lovely ballad.’

5. The ticket sales for Oscar Wilde: The Musical were very disappointed. Nobody wanted to see the show.

6. If I will go to London, I will certainly try to catch a show.
3. Idioms

Look at the idioms below. Each one is connected to the theatre

Match the idiom to its definition.

1. waiting in the wings  
   a. Good luck! (said to somebody who is about to perform or speak in public)
2. the show must go on  
   b. to perform better than another person
3. break a leg!  
   c. being ready and prepared to step into the action
4. to upstage somebody  
   d. it’s necessary to continue despite problems or difficulties

Now complete the sentences below by using one of the idioms above.

1. ‘I have to go now and deliver my presentation to the board of managers.’
   ‘__________ . I hope it all goes well.’

2. ‘We are having problems with our staff at the moment. Nearly half of them are off work with the flu.’
   ‘Well, I know it’s difficult but __________. We can’t just give up.’

3. My boss is very angry with me because I __________ him at the meeting. My ideas were much better received than his.

4. You should always do your best in your job because there are always people __________ to take your job if you don’t do it well.
4. Wordsearch

Try to find the words associated with the theatre in the puzzle below.

There are ten words to find. Words can be written horizontally (g), vertically (i) or diagonally (m)

theatre flop role cast ticket play
musical drama production sing dance
Answers

1. Reading Quiz

Are these sentences true or false? Circle the correct answer.

1. London’s West End is located not very far from Chinatown.  True
2. Ticket sales for West End shows have been very poor in recent years due to high prices.  False
3. The actor, Ewan McGregor, feels that the process of shooting a film is actually very boring.  True
4. Many successful West End shows are adapted for the big screen and made into movies.  False
5. Some West End musical can have a run lasting decades.  True

2. Error Correction

Each of these sentences has a mistake in it. Find the mistake and rewrite the sentence correctly.

1. My girlfriend said to me that she wanted to see a musical in London.

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   ‘I agree. It’s a lovely ballad.’

5. The ticket sales for Oscar Wilde: The Musical were very disappointing. Nobody wanted to see the show.

6. If I go to London, I will certainly try to catch a show.

3. Idioms

1. c 3. a
2. d 4. b

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   ‘Break a leg. I hope it all goes well.’

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4. Wordsearch