

The poster features a large, dark silhouette of a man's head and shoulders in the upper half, looking down. Inside the silhouette, a large, diverse crowd of people is gathered, many with their arms raised in celebration. The background is a dark, starry space with a bright light source at the top, creating a halo effect. The overall color palette is dark with blue and white highlights.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

adapted from the acclaimed classic film by Mary Elliott Nelson

4-7 December | 7pm | PAC

WHITGIFT



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In my thirteen years of directing school productions, I have always avoided choosing a Christmas show for the Christmas period. I've felt that, with so few productions a year, to 'waste' one on something merely festive, or yet another rendition of 'A Christmas Carol', would be a missed opportunity. The desire of audiences however, and particularly of some colleagues (you know who you are), has always been for a show which celebrates the season.

So, when choosing such a production, I wanted something timeless yet innovative – something which captured the warmth and magic of Christmas whilst offering an opportunity to explore the complexity of our times. *It's A Wonderful Life* seemed the perfect choice. At its core, it is a tale of hope, resilience, and the profound impact of ordinary lives on their communities – a story as poignant now as it was when the film first graced cinema screens in 1946.

Yet, to revisit this story in 2024 is to see it through a lens shaped by uncertainty. Like George Bailey, many of us live in a world where personal dreams can feel sidelined by the weight of responsibility, and where global events cast long shadows over our sense of optimism. But that is precisely why this story matters. At its heart, it reminds us that even in the face of hardship, our connections and acts of kindness can ripple outward, often in ways that we cannot comprehend.

This production is a deeply collaborative effort, blending theatricality with live cinema to create a uniquely immersive experience. Our young performers and technicians have embraced the challenge of bridging the immediacy of live performance with the intimacy of film, crafting a Bedford Falls which hopefully feels vibrant, raw, and alive. The production design invites you to step into this small American town – one full of dreams, struggles, and quiet triumphs – where the line between audience and actor dissolves.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

It's A Wonderful Life has always been a deeply personal story for me. It is my favourite Christmas film, and every Christmas Eve without fail, I sit down to watch it. There is something magical about its enduring message: that light and darkness often exist side by side, but it is in small, human connections that we find the greatest hope. Even amidst turmoil, the smallest gestures – a kind word, a helping hand – can remind us of the value of every life.

This ambitious production would not have been possible without the boundless creativity, dedication, and hard work of our cast, crew, and design team. It has been a privilege to work with such talented and insightful young people, and I am immensely proud of what they have achieved. Tonight's performance is a testament to their belief in the transformative power of storytelling.

So, as we gather to witness George's journey, I hope this performance inspires you to reflect not only on his story but on the ways in which we all have the power to make a difference. Because, as Clarence might remind us, "No man is a failure who has friends."

Welcome to Bedford Falls, and thank you for being part of this shared experience.

JC Hammond
Director



*'A Bedford Falls
which hopefully
feels vibrant, raw,
and alive'*





IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

CAST

<i>George Bailey</i>	Felix Warren
<i>Mary</i>	Elana Punjani
<i>Clarence</i>	Danny Montgomery
<i>Mr. Potter</i>	Sam Warren
<i>Uncle Billy</i>	Nicholas Seal
<i>Harry Bailey</i>	Ethan Carmalt
<i>Ma Bailey</i>	Raya Shah
<i>Gower</i>	Otto Monge
<i>Sam</i>	Kobi Watson
<i>Franklin</i>	Xavier Taylor-Smith
<i>Joseph</i>	Seb Wade
<i>Violet</i>	Anna Afekore-Ortola
<i>Pa Bailey</i>	Marcos Byrne
<i>Bert</i>	Hamish McMillan
<i>Ernie</i>	Patrick Carswell
<i>Martini</i>	Raf Cianfarani
<i>Ruth</i>	Theresa-Mae Brown
<i>Ed</i>	Rahul Chakravarty
<i>Annie</i>	Adaeze Arinze
<i>Charlie</i>	Julien Gande
<i>Tom</i>	Thomas Sullivan-Ferrarin
<i>Mrs. Thompson</i>	Sapphy Oboh
<i>Mrs. Davies</i>	Amber Nodder
<i>Mr. Welch</i>	Michael Shi
<i>Randall</i>	Omi Lashev
<i>Sheriff</i>	James Li
<i>Dr. Campbell</i>	Daniel Ampleford
<i>Passer By</i>	Arianna Mohamadi
<i>Mrs. Martini</i>	Florence Murray
<i>Marty</i>	Daniel Thomas
<i>Angel</i>	Dayna Franklin
<i>Angel</i>	Laura Egbebu
<i>Angel</i>	Elizabeth Marshall
<i>Angel</i>	Magnus Tibbals
<i>Angel</i>	Michael Tsui

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

Young George	Tommy Carmalt
Young Harry	Austin Alder
Young Sam	Ameer Lunga
Young Mary/Janie	Vienne Punjani
Young Violet	Badejoko Ogunade
Pete	Emilian Stan
Zuzu	Adelina Petrachi
Child	Rupert Noble
Boy 1	Xander McMillan
Boy 2	Max Kan
Boy 3	Ethan Roberts
Martini Bartender	AL Eynard

All other parts are played by members of the company

CREATIVE & PRODUCTION TEAM

Director	JC Hammond
Producer	CO Aluko
Technical Director	DP Jenkinson
Costume & Scenic Design	E Mulligan
Production Technician	AJ Hill
Production Technician	DO Olufowora
Scenic Artist	L Crestani
Scenic Assistant	CA Munday
Dialect Coach	HJ Taylor
Intimacy Director	R Martin
Lighting	Arjun Kashyap
Vision Mixer	Matthew Tsui
Sound	Jack Coppin
Hair and Make Up	HI MacGregor CM Kelly
Runner	Isobel Binacchi

Photography by AJ Hill

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

IMMERSIVE THEATRE AND LIVE CINEMA

"You want the moon?"

Immersive theatre is an unconventional theatre style, where the separation between stage and audience member is thrust aside both in a physical and metatextual sense; the seats are placed inside the set (usually a specific location that does not change) and the actors perform and engage with the audience members, decidedly breaking through the fourth wall to make them feel like they are not just experiencing the story but within it. One way of obtaining this level of immersion is through "polychronic narrative" in which the participant does not play a key role, as they would in interactive theatre, to not violate the structure of the story. Instead, they are given specific prescribed moments to fulfil actions and input; something akin to the call-and-response interactions of popular pantomimes. These moments affect narrative but more so for the participant than the story itself. Another method is by addressing the audience as "you" meshing the role of the whole audience within an immersive piece with the individual role of the participant. This allows the features of the ambiguous individual to become an entity devoid of known age, profession and gender and opens the inclusivity of whoever witnesses/takes part in the piece to be boundless, furthering the connection between actor and audience. Suspense and anxiety can even help to guide an audience through narratives by taking them out of their comfort zones; their actions and reactions motivated by instinct and prompts from actors. The environments of immersive theatre are

often fixed but vary from open areas to multi-level buildings. These environments can enhance an audience member's level of involvement with the world around them, having the ability to move around personalised spaces from room to room. There are a few examples of groups/companies that mainly dabble in this craft like when the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution created an immersive theatre about John Brown.

On the other end of the spectrum, Live cinema is the art of intermixing the screening of a film with special augmentations of integrated live performance and audio/visual effects in real time to further the audience's experience. This can range from sing-alongs to quote-alongs to active participation in the events of the movie. One example of a company that frequently takes part in these activities is Secret Cinema, a global production and creative studio that hosts massive screening events. These entail extensive sets that replicate the look and feel of the movies (and in the following case, TV series) they present, such as their Autumn 2019 *Stranger Things* event which sought to mirror the locale of Hawkins, Indiana with arcade's, malls and the music of the 1980's. A famous practitioner in Live cinema is Katie Mitchell, the English theatre director well known for her use of cinematic video projections; a feature that has been prominent since her 2006 production of "Waves".

Otto Monge
Lower Sixth Form

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

THEATRE AT CHRISTMAS

For some, their only experience (sadly) of theatre is at Christmas. Pantomimes are the family favourite for most, with many also watching Peter Pan, The Nutcracker and a Christmas Carol, however times were not always like this. The Christmas magic contained in British theatre was a journey starting with the aristocratic 17th century masques followed by the chaotic joy of 18th century pantomimes, the opulence of Victorian extravaganzas and all the way to the modern pantomimes we have all seen. Theatre allows the audience escape into worlds filled of laughter, music and spectacle. Through these it highlights the evolution of British theatre from the Renaissance to the modern day.

Masques: Celebrations and Royal Festivities

Masques are a combination of drama, dance and music with festive costumes and revolutionary stage effects (for the time). Masques were typically written by literary luminaries such as Ben Johnson. They were lavish court events during the Renaissance and early 17th century. Masques were exclusive events, reserved for royalty and their courts. Masques during Christmas depicted the 'light' that always triumphed over darkness, reflecting Jesus' birth as the arrival of divine light. They usually included Christian imagery whilst blending religious celebrations with the humanist ideas of the Renaissance. Masques emphasised the weight of royal power

'Extravaganza was a theatrical form which blended music, dance and visible intrigue'

and the sophistication of the court which set the stage for future forms of festive entertainment, especially shows relating to Christmas.

Pantomime: A British Invention

Pantomime as we know it today began in the 18th century taking influence from the commedia dell'arte, medieval mummers' plays and the Harlequinade. By the Victorian era pantomime has become a vital part of British Christmas culture. Cross-dressing became a hallmark with men portraying dames and women taking heroic roles, signalling not only a change in British theatre but also a change in the mindset of gender roles. Stories like Cinderella and Aladdin

gave a mix of fairy-tale narratives, topical humour and gender bending performances. This also showed the start in actors and the audience having a real connection, breaking the fourth wall with catchphrases such as "its behind you!" and "Oh, no it isn't!"

becoming the norm. The evolution of elaborate stage effects including flying systems added a real sense of 'Christmas magic'. To this day pantomime has become a cornerstone in British theatre.

Extravaganza: A Victorian Spectacle

The 19th century saw the rise of the extravaganza. Extravaganza was a theatrical form which blended music, dance and visible intrigue. The productions were influenced by

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

pantomime, but they had an elevated focus on elaborate costumes and sets with intricate stage machinery and dazzling stage effects. Extravaganzas also took inspiration off Pantomimes with them often including fairy tales or mythical themes, but they were defined by their scale and ambition which appealed to the growing middle class of the time.

Relations to the Modern Day

While Masques have faded into history, pantomime and extravaganzas continue to be a cornerstone in British Christmas culture. Pantomimes contributes significantly to the UK's theatre economy with £60 million being generated annually.

Solomon Marks
Lower Sixth Form

Auld Lang Syne

*Should old acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind?
Should old acquaintance be forgot
In the days of auld lang syne?*

*For auld lang syne, my dear
For auld lang syne
We'll drink a cup of kindness yet
For the sake of auld lang syne*

THANK YOU...

Mounting a theatrical production in such a busy school requires the help and goodwill of a great number of people. We would like to thank: the Headmaster and the Governors for their support; subject teachers for their patience and good faith in helping the performers to balance their studies with rehearsals; S Leonidas for sending letters and organising the calendar; G Maudsley for designing the programme; the Marketing team for compiling the programme and advertising the show; the Catering team for providing dinners during show week and for organising interval refreshments; C Pennicott for managing the box office; the cleaning staff for cleaning up after long rehearsals and finally, the parents of the cast for supporting their children to attend rehearsals, learn lines and commit to many exhausting rehearsals.





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FORTHCOMING DRAMA EVENTS

The Odyssey: It's a Really, Really, Really Long Journey

by Nina Segal

12-14 February 2025, 7pm, PAC

Love & Information

by Caryl Churchill

26-28 March 2025, 7pm, PAC

Lightening Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical

by Joe Tracz and Rob Rokicki

18-20 June 2025, 7pm, Big School

www.whitgift.co.uk/events

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