



■ On a grand scale – this year's Christmas Spectacular will be the biggest show to be staged in Charter Hall

Juniors' big show is ready to roll into Charter Hall

COLCHESTER audiences are set for a festive treat at Charter Hall when the region's biggest musical theatre group, the Co-op Juniors Theatre Company, arrives in town with their annual Christmas Spectacular.

The company's debut in Colchester last year was a huge success, and now the group are back for a second run of four performances, starting on Monday.

It will be the most ambitious show ever staged at the hall, boasting more than 100 performers and the biggest stage set to be used at the Charter Hall.

The stage set fills one of the company's three 45ft trucks and takes two days to build, while a West End-style lighting and sound rig travels in the second truck and hundreds of costumes, props and set decorations are carried in the third. The cast and crew occupy a double-decker bus and a coach.

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After 25 years of pantomimes and musicals at the Regent Theatre, Ipswich, and five years performing at Snape Maltings Concert Hall, this year is something of a landmark for the Co-op Juniors. They are celebrating 30 years of entertaining Christmas shows and in the past year alone, have played to more than 14,000 people.

The creative team starts work on the next festive show almost as soon as this one has finished, with rehearsals beginning in September. In between, the cast performs at events around the region, while also preparing to put on Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* at the Ipswich Regent next May. Some members also run dance classes for younger children.

Formed in Ipswich during the Forties, the group performed at the Spa Pavilion, Felixstowe, from the early Fifties until 1977, when it moved to the Ipswich Regent – then known as the Gaumont.



The Co-op Juniors were a Christmas fixture there for 25 years, staging pantomimes in the 1,750-seat theatre to record audiences. The group also performed 13 major musicals at the Regent, including *Oliver!*, *The Sound of Music*, *Fame* and *Les Misérables*.

● You can see the show on December 28 at 7pm, on December 29 at 3pm and 7pm and on December 30 at 3pm. Tickets for Christmas Spectacular cost £12, £15 and £18 with discounts for groups.

They are available from Charter Hall, in Cowdray Avenue, Colchester, by calling 01206 282020 or visiting www.charter-hall.co.uk