

Standard leisure

Biggest and best

COLCHESTER audiences are set for a festive treat at the town's Charter Hall when the region's largest 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 they're back for a second run of four performances, which start on

Monday.

It's the most ambitious show ever staged at the venue, boasting more than 100 performers and the biggest stage set to be built at Charter Hall. Cast and crew alone fill a double-decker and a coach, travelling from Ipswich to Colchester to entertain the crowds.

With 25 years of pantomimes and musicals at the Regent Theatre Ipswich, and five years at Snape Maltings Concert Hall, this year is something of a

landmark for the group.

They are celebrating 30 years of entertaining the region at Christmas and now present more shows to more people than any other group in the UK.

The creative team starts work on the next show almost as soon as this one has

finished, with rehearsals from September.

In between, the cast perform at various events around the region, prepare for Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* at the Ipswich Regent in May, and teach younger children dancing at classes in the area.

Formed as the Co-op

Juniors in Ipswich during the 1940s, they became a Christmas fixture at the town's Regent for 25 years, staging a huge pantomime in the 1750-seat theatre, and attracting record audiences.

■ Tickets for Christmas Spectacular are available from the box office on 01206

282020, online at charterhall.co.uk or in person at Charter Hall, Cowdray Avenue, Colchester. Prices are £12, £15 and £18, with discounts for groups.

Performances take place on December 28 at 7pm, December 29 at 3pm and 7pm and December 30 at 3pm.

