

# The music of life, love and laughter comes to stage

**T**HE Sunderland Empire has raised the curtain on the forthcoming season of musicals that will be staged there.

For those who fancy a bit of summer loving, there are still tickets available to Grease the Musical with Peter Andre running from July 30 to August 3.

The multi award-winning musical comedy, The Book of Mormon, has already generated huge interest resulting in more tickets being released. It comes to Sunderland on August 28 and now has an extended booking through to September 14.

Written by Trey Parker, Matt Stone and Robert Lopez, it follows a pair of Mormon boys sent on a mission to a place that's a long way from their home in Salt Lake City.

Rhythm is in the air when Gloria and Emilio Estefan's smash hit musical, On Your Feet, hits the stage from September 30 to October 5.

This exhilarating musical features some of the most iconic pops songs of the era, including Rhythm Is Gonna Get You, Conga, Get On Your Feet, Don't Want To Lose You Now and 1-2-3.

You can bet your bottom dollar that fans will love the revival of Annie, direct from the West End. This smash-hit production stars Birds of a Feather's Lesley Joseph as the tyrannical Miss Hannigan and features unforgettable songs such as It's The Hard-Knock Life, Easy Street, I Don't Need Anything But You and Tomorrow.

Move to the beat and experience the sensational West End hit, Motown the Musical from October 15 to 26 featuring over 50 classic hits including 'My Girl', 'What's Going On', 'Dancing in the Street', 'I heard it through the Grapevine', and 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough.

Motown the Musical tells the story of Berry Gordy who fought against the odds to create something more than a record label.



► **Motown the Musical features classic hits**

Be sure to tumble outta' bed and catch Dolly Parton's rip-roaring production, 9 to 5 the Musical starring Amber Davies. The smash hit musical, running from November 5 to November 9, tells the story of three workmates pushed to boiling point by their sexist and egotistical boss. Concocting a plan to kidnap and turn the tables on their despicable supervisor, will the women manage to reform their office - or will events unravel when the CEO pays an unexpected visit?

Alexandra Burke is set to make a triumphant return in The Bodyguard from November 12 to 23. The romantic thriller features a host of irresistible classics including Queen of the Night, So Emotional, One Moment in Time, Saving All My Love, Greatest Love Of All, I Wanna Dance With Somebody and one of the greatest hit songs of all time, I Will Always Love You.

Meanwhile the gritty and gripping production of Blood Brothers returns from December 3 to 7. Written by Willy Russell, it tells the moving tale of twins who, separated at birth, grow up on opposite sides of the tracks, only to meet again with fateful consequences.

and his sister Kitty constructed was done out of desperation to preserve respectability.

"In writing the book, I connected with people my grandad tried to hide from my mother and together we worked out the stories of not one, but two families who were never supposed to know about each other."

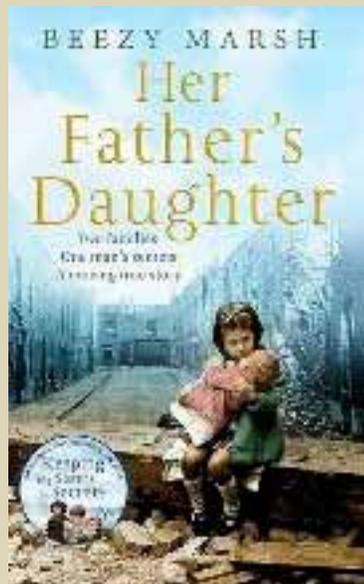
Apart from Harry, Beezy's family were Londoners.

She moved to Hartlepool when she was six and was educated at the local comprehensive, High Tunstall, and Hartlepool Sixth Form College.

After graduating from Leeds University, she returned to work in the region for The Northern Echo newspaper in Darlington.

She moved on to the Daily Mail for many years and the Sunday Telegraph before going freelance for the Sunday Times, Daily Mail and Mail On Sunday.

Living in Oxfordshire now with her husband and two sons, she



mostly writes books these days, she says.

Her previous book, Keeping My Sisters' Secrets, set in poverty-

stricken 1930s London, was a Sunday Times top-10 bestseller and international number one.

Next was All My Mother's Secrets, a prequel to Her Father's Daughter, set in London's slum laundries and this also was an international top-10 best seller.

Beezy said: "This is the third narrative non-fiction work of mine published by Pan Macmillan, which brings to life the turbulent years of the early 1900s for working class men and women.

"I find ordinary lives the most extraordinary and do lots of social history research to bring the era to life."

■ **Her Father's Daughter is published by Pan Macmillan and is out now priced at £7.99 and is available in all good book shops, as well as Asda, Tesco, Sainsbury's and Amazon <https://amzn.to/2JIYMcA>. It's available as a kindle download, CD and audiobook too.**

# It's time for the North East to move into future

Paul **Benneworth**



**I**'M now back in the North East for a few weeks sorting out buying a new house in Whitley Bay. I've certainly had the luck with the weather, with the beautiful sunlight showing off the town, its beaches and its parks at their finest.

Nowhere in Whitley Bay looks more stunning than the Dome, especially when thronged with seaside goers. The Spanish City remains a monument to local councillors' steadfast work in trying to build attractive places in the teeth of the global crisis and austerity.

Certainly Whitley Bay has gone through something of a renaissance in recent years, with a host of new shops, cafes and restaurants springing up around town.

But despite this buzz of energy, it's a clearly struggling post-industrial landscape rather than a booming town centre.

It's hard to tell how much is artisanal aesthetic and how much is business model, but there's a definite 'lean' feel to many of the new shops, cafes and bars.

It's tremendous quality and value for the customer, but those low prices are not paying for much more than keeping the town going.

Keeping things going is impressive enough given how recent governments connived to suck the life out of our economy.

Savage cuts to the public sector, local government and regional development funds left the whole regional economy clinging on precariously by its fingertips.

Those cuts' defenders have argued that they are being cruel to be kind.

The government's view is that London is the UK's beating heart, and money invested in the South East is much better spent than in remote provinces like the North East.

It's why in London they have Crossrail, the HS2 plans and new tube lines, while we have 40-year-old metro trains that can't even handle new radios.

That government narrative fits perhaps too conveniently with the post-war Whitehall stere-

otype of the north: "here be dragons", as a civil servant once told me. But when London's economy generates more than twice as much wealth per head than the north east, it's an easy stereotype to reinforce.

So I read with great interest this week a new paper from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, which tested this assumption. And in short, it found it a gross exaggeration.

There is nothing magic in London's soil that drives economic growth: it's simply that more people work longer hours in higher paying jobs.

Those conditions in the North East England would create just as much benefit for UK plc.

For 70 years, the North East has laboured under the burden of underinvestment by national governments of all colours that have regarded investments here as funds wasted. We are continually told we are inefficient and unproductive, when its main cause is low government investment.

We've been palmed off with the Northern Powerhouse; city-region devolution came with a sting in the tail of further heavy cuts.

Behind the façade, the zombie "here be dragons" mindset lives on, a convenient excuse to starve us into just keeping going rather than moving into the future.

The CRESR report makes it clear that we deserve much better from Whitehall.

Not just a few patchwork projects helping the odd business to create new products, but a systematic rebuilding of the region to properly realise our potential.

History suggests that it won't be a Conservative government with the creativity and imagination to change this toxic government mindset.

But we're facing a likely election soon with four or five parties seriously competing for our votes.

Now is the time to sell the case for rebuilding the North East to more progressive parties as a foundation for any sensible coalition government's post-austerity political agenda.