

Theatres stage Aladdin and Beauty and the Beast pantomimes for dementia sufferers

Matthew Moore, Media Correspondent

November 16 2018, 12:01am, The Times



Hackney Empire is putting on a version of Aladdin that is quieter and more relaxed

Dementia-friendly pantomimes are being staged across the country this winter so that families can take elderly relatives to the theatre without fear of causing disruption.

The performances are tailored to people with the progressive brain condition who might find it difficult to sit through an entire production. House lights are usually kept partially up throughout and theatres allow members of the audience to move around as they wish and take breaks in quiet rooms away from the main auditorium. Loud noises and flashing lights that might feature in the standard pantomime are generally removed or reduced.

Many theatres also have trained volunteers on standby to help carers.

The performances have been staged at a handful of venues over the last few years but more theatres are now arranging at least one over the Christmas period. There will be a dementia-friendly version of *Aladdin* at the Hackney Empire, *Beauty and the Beast* at the Queen's Theatre Hornchurch, *Cinderella* at

Northwich Memorial Court and *Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood* at the Nottingham Playhouse.

Several theatres have staged dementia-friendly performances of other plays, including *Still Alice*, a drama about Alzheimer's disease, at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow this week.

The growing popularity of dementia-friendly shows follows a similar rise in "relaxed" performances aimed at children with autism and learning disabilities. These shows set aside typical theatre etiquette, allowing audience members to be themselves and make noise without families or carers having to worry about the effect it may have on others around them.

Cinemas have also embraced autism-friendly screenings and "parent and baby" screenings, which allow mothers and fathers of young children to attend informal matinees of newly released films.