

The rock legend went on to cast her as a new character, 'Meat,' but he couldn't hold her for long. Ellis soon landed what was to be her seminal stage performance in *Wicked. The Wizard of Oz* reimagining become a tour de force that nobody could have anticipated, whisking her away to Broadway where she turned the Empire State Building green. "Wicked was a pretty big goal for me," she says on the role that saw her win an award for Best Breakthrough Actress from Broadway.com. I ask if she could choose between London's West End and the bright lights of Broadway, but she simply could not decide.

In the past ten years, Ellis has worn more hats than the pointed witches' cap that is now synonymous with the West End. She has acted as a TV mentor for Dorothy hopefuls in BBC One's *Over the Rainbow*, and has even starred in a one woman show. Is Ellis angling to be the British Barbra Streisand? "It's nice to be doing a bit of everything. but there's so much I still want to do!" As she waves me off, the star's attention is drawn to a new batch of clothes from her stylist – all black. "I am obsessed with wearing dark black, I just love it." You can take the Kerry Ellis out of *Wicked*, but you can't take the Elphaba out of her. }



The nominations begin...

London Theatre Show of the Year

The Lion King deservedly walked off with the crown last year, but with the wealth of theatre options in and around south east London, we need to get voting to get our shows in the running for this.

London Cultural Attraction of the Year

Could it be the next exhibition at The National Maritime Museum? Another huge event at the O2 arena? Greenwich Comedy Festival, or any of the other plethora of events held in Greenwich Park?

London Fashion Retailer of the Year

From Belle Fashions and Meet Bernard in Greenwich to Daniel Blake profiled on page 8 and Bailey clothing in Blackheath... who gets your vote?

Start nominating now at londonlifestyleawards.com



London Lifestyle Awards founder Jason Gale on theatreland...

One of my passions is theatre. You can give me every type: vaudeville, drama, musicals, magic and acrobatics. My first experience was a serious affair, though, the classic *Great Expectations*. As a young boy from Hull I sat spellbound fascinated by the naive Pip and the run around he was given.

I loved the idea of acting – rarely in life does something allow you that feeling of freedom to become an entirely different person. Early performances as Eugene in my school production of *Grease* quickly showed me and everyone else that if I were to at least attempt being a success then I should stay as far away from treading the boards as possible.

This early deep seated admiration for those who can transform and make me believe in their characters has lead me through many theatre doors. London theatre is lucky enough to have an abundance of talent: it is one of our greatest assets and to hear we may not be firing on all cylinders is devastating. The fact is many of the shows that rely on overseas tourists, school breaks and 'staycation' visitors may close during the Olympics period. 'Sir Theatre' Andrew Lloyd Webber has publicly fired the warning shots that this is a real possibility.

I have learnt that 40 per cent of our theatre revenue during the summer months comes from international tourism and that this is generated through mass coverage in holiday brochures. In 2011 the brochures of tour operators targeted only the Olympics visitor omitting the theatre market. Not that the two are exclusive, but as a sports fan myself it may prove hard to leave the rush of the Games to try and add the rush from theatre.

I feel, however, there are some exciting opportunities here. Surely more London residents will have the chance to get to the shows that the tourists usually cram into. A golden opportunity to become an ambassador for the performances, tweet, rave about and blog. People visiting London do their homework, get word of mouth advice, Google reviews and often rely on being told what show they should see. It's time London residents take back theatreland during the Olympics and support our Arts. The Mayor is encouraging us to go for a drink or a meal after work during the Olympics to stagger the build up of traffic, so look at the best deals for your budget and get on board. Throw some world class theatre into your social mix, especially if you've never experienced it. Take advantage of London in what will be a spectacular show not only of our diverse theatre, but of our mixed culture.