SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Date: Tuesday 17 November, 10am
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Images: HERE
Listings: HERE
Festival dates: Wednesday 10 – Saturday 20 February 2027

Celebrating 25 years of Southbank Centre's *Imagine*

London's leading festival for families returns to take over the iconic 13-acre site with a bumper programme of interactive experiences for all ages, including a sensory playscape and an immersive art trail



Clockwise from top left: SideWays Play: A Sensory Playscape © Pete Woodhead; Digital rendering for *The Many* by Jessica Wilson, original image © Pete Woodhead with illustration by Marisol Layseca; Photo credit Felipe Pagani; Kininso Koncepts: *Kolofu* © Daniel Beecroft

Returning for its landmark 25th year, **Imagine**, the Southbank Centre's festival for children and their adults, showcases a diverse and vibrant line up of performances, artworks and creative cultural experiences for children aged 0 – 11 years and their families to get stuck into together, sparking their imaginations and lighting up their senses.

Evidence shows that regular engagement in community cultural activities bolsters lifelong wellbeing, with play, artistic and cultural activities acknowledged as fundamental to a healthy and balanced childhood, helping children to achieve and thrive.[1] Imagine introduces children to the wonder of arts and creativity from their very earliest years, offering the Southbank Centre's youngest visitors and their families a gateway to a lifetime of inspiration. The captivating line-up includes dance, circus, literature, parkour, music, visual arts, and over one third of the programme is totally free. There's something for everyone, and everyone is welcome.

Turning the Southbank Centre's iconic 13-acre site into one giant playground across February half term, this year's Imagine programme showcases an astonishing array of innovative artistic work for families. Bringing together art and artists from all over the world, this year's festival marks the 25th anniversary of Imagine and includes work from Belgium, Australia, and Nigeria, and across the UK from Inverness to Cornwall.

Imagine will also see the London premiere of Australian artist Jessica Wilson's ***The Many***, an augmented reality trail produced in collaboration with a group of local children. The trail is designed to transform urban environments into playful places where children are given agency. *The Many* is accessed through a phone and a physical map, reimagining the Southbank Centre's distinctive architecture as hidden monsters and creatures that come to life, powered by the children's imaginations and their own illustrations. *The Many* will launch as part of Imagine and return for the Easter and Summer half terms.

Other highlights of the Imagine programme include:

- The London Premiere of ***Double You*** from Belgian company Be Flat. Devised around the notion of FOMO, the Fear Of Missing Out, *Double You* combines high octane circus, parkour and live music in an irresistible night of fun for the whole family (12 – 14 Feb, Queen Elizabeth Hall).

- An unmissable, one-off live edition of Yoto's beloved Yoto Daily podcast takes over the Royal Festival Hall with ***Yoto Daily Live***, as Jake delivers an hour of his trademark mind-boggling facts and rib-tickling jokes for all the family (13 Feb).

- Created by Kininso Koncepts – who foster artistic exchange and the development of innovative theatre for young and early years audiences – award-winning performance ***Kolofu*** invites curiosity towards how we perceive ourselves and others through colour, music and movement (Sat 13 - Mon 15 Feb, Royal Festival Hall, Blue Room).

- An Unlimited commission which seeks to tap into young people's curiosity about disability, ***Mummy What's Wrong With That Man's Legs*** from Head Over Wheels leans into uncomfortable questions to create a celebratory and joyful show (16 Feb, Purcell Room).

- Embark on an epic quest to save the world, battle daemons and meet legendary Greek gods with a transfer of Polka Theatre's beloved sell-out production of ***Who Let the Gods***

[1] The expressive arts are proven to have personal and social benefits enabling them to achieve and thrive: agency; wellbeing; collaboration; communication; empathy; creativity and interpretation – Cultural Learning Alliance 2026. See also: Art Fund's recent The Recommended Dose of Art: A prescription for health & wellbeing, in partnership with Daisy Fancourt; National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH); and a landmark 2019 World Health Organisation (WHO) scoping review which confirmed, by analysing 3,000 global studies, that the arts play a major role in the prevention of mental ill-health, the promotion of wellbeing, and the management of illness across the lifespan.

Out?, the hilarious family musical adapted from Maz Evans' bestselling book (16 – 20 Feb, Queen Elizabeth Hall).

- Hear from the newly crowned winner of the first ever **Children's Booker Prize**, joined on stage by host of the event and 2027 Chair of judges Frank Cottrell-Boyce and Waterstones Children's Laureate Patrice Lawrence (20 Feb, Purcell Room).
- A whole host of family-friendly, fun and free events for all ages, including **Little Readers' Story Nook**, cosy corner for interactive storytelling sessions with storyteller Niall Moorjani, in partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library UK (10 - 12 Feb, Sunley Pavilion); ***OYUN: Performance & Folk Dance Party*** a non-verbal, sensory spectacle that culminates in a dance party (19 Feb, Clore Ballroom); ***Home Song*** a musical meditation on migration and the power of home (10 Feb, Clore Ballroom); **Head to Head with Thierry Noir**, where little artists can create experimental artworks inspired by Noir's iconic colourful heads (15 – 17 Feb, Undercroft), and much more.

Running alongside *Imagine* is the brand new interactive play experience **SideWays: A Sensory Playscape** (23 Jan – 6 June), commissioned by the Southbank Centre and co-produced with sensory theatre pioneers Oily Cart. Children and their grown-ups are invited into an immersive, sideways world designed to stimulate all the senses. In the wiggly world of SideWays, visitors can feel colour, listen to light, sink into sound and discover new ways to play alongside their families. Building on research which found that Disabled children and young people face the most significant barriers to play and activities, SideWays has been designed with radical inclusion at its heart, working closely with the babies, toddlers, children and families that it is made for, as well as by Disabled and non-disabled artists of all ages. The result is a design with access embedded from the start, rather than added on at the end, creating a play space where everyone can fully be themselves, together.

Ruth Hardie, Head of Public Programming at the Southbank Centre, said: *"Participation in play and artistic and cultural activities are fundamental to a healthy and balanced childhood, and so at Imagine Festival and throughout the year, we invite families to explore their curiosity and try new creative experiences together. With world-class performances, participatory events and plenty to see and do for free, I hope every family, children and grown ups together, find something that sparks their imagination, brings joy and helps to inspire a lifetime of creativity."*

Imagine is a relaxed festival, meaning that families are welcome to move around, make noise and leave and re-enter the performance spaces if they need to. A chill-out space and ear defenders are available for both adults and children. Imagine includes many specific BSL-interpreted events, as well as shows that are Speech-Free and include integrated access.

Tickets for the Imagine programme go on sale to members on **Thursday 19 November** and to the general public on **Friday 20 November 2026.** Tickets for SideWays are on sale now: https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/sideways-a-sensory-playscape/

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NOTES TO EDITORS

For more information and for press tickets please contact georgia.holmes@southbankcentre.co.uk & megan.edwards@southbankcentre.co.uk

IMAGES HERE & LISTINGS HERE

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest multi-arts centre and engages the most diverse audiences of any performing arts organisation in the UK. Our biggest venue, the Royal Festival Hall (2,700 seats) is the lasting legacy of the 1951 Festival of Britain and the ambition and values of that project – that arts, ideas, innovation and culture can heal communities and should be available and accessible to everyone – are still our guiding principles today. The Southbank Centre is uniquely able to offer a wide-ranging, inclusive and world-class artistic programme spanning contemporary visual arts, music, dance, performance, literature, comedy and spoken word across the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, the Hayward Gallery and our free spaces. We are also home to the National Poetry Library, the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), two resident organisations (Kinetika Bloco and Tomorrow's Warriors) and six resident orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Orchestra).
www.southbankcentre.co.uk