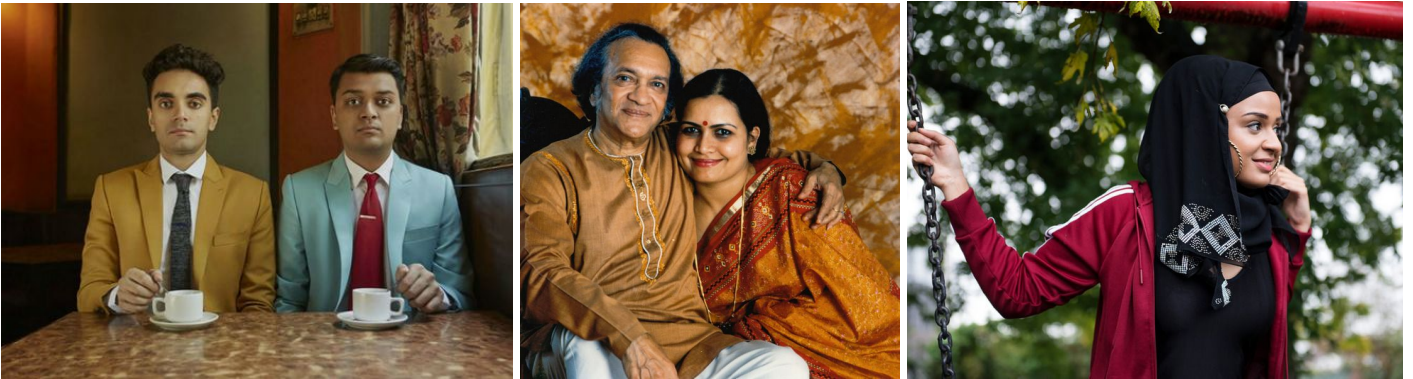


## ALCHEMY, THE LARGEST UK FESTIVAL OF SOUTH ASIAN CULTURE, RETURNS THIS MAY

Southbank Centre's international multi-arts festival *Alchemy* returns for its eighth year from **Friday 19 – Monday 29 May** celebrating the dynamic cultural connections and exchange of ideas between South Asia and the UK. *Alchemy* highlights this year include **RAVI SHANKAR'S SUKANYA, ABIDA PARVEEN** presented by **RAFI PEER MYSTIC MUSIC SUFI FESTIVAL**, the **KARACHI LITERATURE FESTIVAL, TEZ ILYAS, SIDDHARTHA BOSE, THE NRITYAGRAM DANCE ENSEMBLE** with **THE CHITRASENA DANCE ENSEMBLE, KERB, FAIZA BUTT, MAWAAN RIZWAAN, VISHAL & SHEKHAR**, the **EASTERN EYE ARTS, CULTURE & THEATRE AWARDS** and more.



(L-R: Parekh & Singh. Credit Parizad D; Ravi Shankar's *Sukanya*; *Diary of a Hounslow Girl*. Credit Talula Sheppard)

The largest festival of South Asian culture outside the subcontinent, *Alchemy*, showcases contemporary work from seven countries, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and the UK. Championing innovative British and international artists, the eleven day festival presents exciting collaborations and new work from both emerging and legendary artists across dance, music, theatre, visual art, comedy and literature. Over fifty per cent of the programme is free and there is an

array of engaging workshops, talks, debates and culinary delights taking place across the site. This year's *Alchemy* focuses on the contribution of diaspora communities to British society, with an increase in British Asian work including the *East Midlands Mela*, a day of music, dance and art celebrating Leicester, the UK's famously diverse city (29 May).

Alongside Southbank Centre, *Alchemy* will also tour the UK, with a return to Oldham (10 – 18 May), the Black Country (20 – 28 May), and Doncaster (31 May – 3 June). Working collaboratively with three key national partners, Black Country Touring, Cast Doncaster and Oldham Coliseum Theatre, each partner will curate their own bespoke *Alchemy* programme for regional audiences, featuring regional and international artists, running alongside the festival in London.

**Rachel Harris, Creative Producer, Festival Development, Southbank Centre said:** *“Alchemy continues to grow and evolve each year and this exciting line-up encompasses a mixture of emerging and established talent. The festival is a vital platform for new international global partnerships and we are proud to collaborate with both new and long standing partners from across the globe including Rafi Peer Mystic Music Sufi Festival and Karachi Literature Festival, bringing these festivals to the UK for the first time. This year’s festival sees a greater focus on celebrating work from the British diaspora across the UK and we are excited to once again tour and collaborate with partners Black Country Touring, Cast Doncaster and Oldham Coliseum Theatre to reach new audiences and bring Alchemy to these regions.”*

**Highlights of the 2017 programme include:**

- London premiere of *Sukanya*, the only opera by world famous musician **Ravi Shankar**, inspired by his wife and stories from the Indian epics and written just before his passing. Directed by **Leicester Curve** Associate Director **Suba Das**, the innovative production fuses Indian music with dance choreographed by the **Aakash Odedra Company** and production by **The Royal Opera**, Southbank Centre's Resident Orchestra **London Philharmonic Orchestra** and **Curve, Leicester** (19 May).
- **Abida Parveen**, one of Pakistan's finest Sufi vocalists of the modern era, performs for one night only in Royal Festival Hall, presented by Rafi Peer Mystic Music Sufi Festival (28 May) who also bring their famous puppet theatre from Lahore as part of the organisation's day-long residency.
- **Karachi Literature Festival** comes to the UK for the very first time in partnership with Southbank Centre, celebrating contemporary Pakistan and its rich history and culture in the context of the 70th anniversary of the country's foundation, showcasing the talent and diversity of Pakistan's literary scene, both at home and abroad. Aameena Saiyid OBE (co-founder of KLF and Managing Director of Oxford University Press Pakistan), in conjunction with Bloomsbury Pakistan, presents a day of debates, talks, recitals and

performances, immersing audiences in the creativity of Pakistani culture. Speakers include **Aamer Hussein, Ali Zaidi, Farjad Nabi, Imtiaz Dharker, Kamila Shamsie, Mehreen Jabbar, Mohammed Hanif, Moni Mohsin, Nimra Bucha, Taimur Rahman** and **Zehra Nigah** (20 May).

- Stand-up comedian **Tez Ilyas** returns to *Alchemy*, for his first residency, leading a debate on diversity in the arts (20 May) and a workshop on the craft of writing and performing comedy in *Tez Ilyas Comedy School* (21 May).
- A multitude of free events spanning music, performance and dance includes an afternoon of singing, dancing and film with *Bollywood Shakedown* (27 May); acoustic sessions with Pakistani soap opera star and Coke Studio favourite **Bilal Khan** (28 May) and *Beats Without Boundaries*, a night of rap and hip hop, featuring artists from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and the UK (26 May). Audiences can learn Bhangra at this year's *Alchemy Social dance* (23 May), take part in a mass public sitar workshop and performance in celebration of master of the sitar Ravi Shankar (20 May) and enjoy a puppetry workshop followed by performance by Rafi Peer Theatre (28 May).
- Street food pioneers **KERB** will return for a third year with a taste of Pakistani, Afghani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepalese and Indian food, from 30 specialist street-food traders, alongside their cocktail and beer bars (18 – 29 May).
- The **Nrityagram Dance Ensemble**, one of the world's leading Indian Classical dance companies present their first international collaboration in *Samhāra* with the **Chitrasena Dance Company**, a union of two exquisitely detailed dance traditions performed with live music (26 May).
- The **Eastern Eye Arts, Culture & Theatre Awards** returns to Royal Festival Hall for its second year to celebrate and recognise British South Asian talent across all art forms, including literature, film, television, theatre, poetry, music, photography, dance and visual arts (21 May).
- Video and sound installation *Five Rivers: A Portrait of Partition*, explores the partition of India through interviews, landscapes and historical documents, projected into a traditional Indian wedding tent (19 – 29 May).
- Renowned popular musical duo **Vishal & Shekhar** take over Royal Festival Hall with their acclaimed modern Bollywood sound, across Hindi, Telugu and Marathi languages (27 May).
- Actor, comedian and YouTube sensation **Mawaan Rizwan** returns to *Alchemy* with a brand new show, celebrating the profound meaninglessness of life (28 May).
- *Paracosm*, by London-based artist **Faiza Butt**, an installation of four large-scale light walls arranged in a cube-like formation, alluding to the architecture and decoration of the Holy Kaaba immersed in poems by Aga Shahid Ali and Faiz Ahmed Faiz (19 – 29 May).

- *Conditions of Carriage - The Jumping Project*, a unique dance experience choreographed by **Preethi Athreya** where 10 contemporary performers from across India negotiate the force of gravity within their bodies on the roof of Royal Festival Hall (21 May).
- Opening the festival in the Clore Ballroom is the first-ever UK performance by Kolkata dream-pop duo **Parekh & Singh**, whose infectious, melodic pop and magically inventive videos have been charming audiences across the world since the release of their debut album *Ocean* in 2016 (19 May).
- **Jyoti Dogra's** *Notes on Chai*, a collection of snippets of everyday conversations interwoven with abstract sounds, exploring the inner and outer landscape of urban life in a multi-layered and humorous way (25 & 26 May).

## MUSIC

Rafi Peer Mystic Music Sufi Festival presents a one night only performance with Sufi vocalist **Abida Parveen** (28 May) and popular musical duo **Vishal & Shekhar** perform their acclaimed modern Bollywood sound (27 May). A full afternoon will celebrate the legendary artist **Ravi Shankar** and the sitar, including an in conversation with his wife **Sukanya Shankar** and a mass Sitarathon (20 May). The popular Pashtun folk-rock band **Khumariyaan** will make their UK debut (20 May), Pakistani soap opera star and Coke Studio favourite **Bilal Khan** performs his unique singer-songwriter style in two acoustic sets (28 May) and Indian indie pop duo **Parekh & Singh** fuse neo-psychedelic music and folk with a range of instruments from guitars, synths and drums (19 May). There is also a rare opportunity to see **Shaukat Dholiya**, one of Pakistan's master shrine drummers (28 May), all female three-tone trio of Caribbean, English and Indian/Pakistani origin **The Tuts** perform their unforgettable pop tunes (26 May) and **Star DJ Nerm** presents his *Supersonic Buddha collective* with guests including **Oceantide** (26 May). *BBC Asian Network Presents Future Sounds* showcases the hottest British Asian talent with emerging artists from across the UK (21 May) and *Beats Without Boundaries*, a night of rap and hip hop featuring artists from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and the UK includes UK premieres and transcontinental collaborations in a unique chance to catch many of these artists outside of the Indian subcontinent and in one place together (26 May).

## DANCE & PERFORMANCE

A compelling programme of theatre draws on personal stories of family, immigration and diaspora. *The Diary of a Hounslow Girl*, a funny and provocative play told through the eyes of a 16-year-old British Muslim girl, highlights the challenges of being brought up as a young woman in a traditional Muslim family alongside the temptations of London (23 – 24 May). *No Dogs, No Indians*, a new play by poet and playwright **Siddhartha Bose** follows three stories and legacies of the British in India (21 May) and **Afreena Islam's** *Daughters of the Curry Revolution* places the audience in the intimate setting of her dinner table to explore her father's journey to this country from Bangladesh (26 – 27 May). Writer and performer **Joe Sellman-Leava** presents the multi-award winning performance *Labels*, a funny,

moving and honest story about mixed heritage and immigration (27 May). **Jyoti Dogra's** *Notes on Chai*, is a collection of snippets of everyday conversations interwoven with abstract sounds, to look afresh at everyday lives in a multi-layered and humorous way (25 – 26 May). The lives of Bangladeshi garment workers are explored in *Made*, the work in progress performance by **Target Theatre Company** (24 May). Actor, comedian and YouTube sensation **Mawaan Rizwan** returns to *Alchemy* with his brand new show *Twerk in Progress*, celebrating the profound meaninglessness of life (25 May). **Mashi Theatre's** travelling storytellers present the enchanting *Tales of Birbal*, using puppetry and music to tell the ancient stories of adventure and problem-solving treasured for centuries across the Indian subcontinent (28 – 29 May).

Powerful and innovative dance includes *Conditions of Carriage - The Jumping project*, a unique dance experience choreographed by **Preethi Athreya** where 10 contemporary performers from across India negotiate the force of gravity on the roof of Royal Festival Hall (21 May). *Choreogata*, a scratch performance presenting new dance works from five talented South Asian choreographers (29 May) and *Queen-size*, a choreographed duet responding to Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalises homosexuality in India played out on a charpoy, a traditional Indian bed (19 May). The **Nrityagram Dance Ensemble**, one of the world's leading Indian Classical dance companies present their first international collaboration in *Samhāra* with the **Chitrasena Dance Company**, a union of two dance traditions that began in temples as ritual (26 May). Southbank Centre's *YUVA* returns for the sixth year in a vibrant showcase of the best South Asian youth dance from across the country (29 May).

Two major new performance commissions, developed in partnership with Alchemy national partners **Black Country Touring, Cast Doncaster** and **Oldham Coliseum Theatre**, include a night of rap and hip hop with *Beats Without Boundaries*. This features artists from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and the UK, a culmination of an international creative project pairing UK music producers with South Asian rappers in partnership with the British Council (26 May) and a new live performance inspired by working with communities from across the UK (20 May).

This year's programme also showcases a host of performance poets and spoken artists including **Desi Girl Creatives**, a group of desi women poets who push back against the stifling codes enforced on them (21 May) and spoken word artist **Ronak Patani** explores the epic duality between being British and Indian in the modern day with *#BritishIndian* (23 May).

There will also be an array of free performance and dance events including the chance to learn Bhangra at this year's Alchemy Social dance (23 May), the free musical performance *New Life*, inspired by Ravi Shankar's opera *Sukanya* and directed by British Indian classical singer and composer **Ranjana Ghatak** with a vocal cast of 100 singers (19 May) and *The Border*, developed by

the Rafi Peer Foundation, combining acting, puppet characters, music and visual art in a humorous and poetic performance for young audiences (28 May).

## VISUAL ART & EXHIBITIONS

*Khat*, a hand-made installation inspired by Urdu calligraphy created specifically for *Alchemy* reflects Pakistan's contemporary design culture and local craftsmanship (19 – 29 May). *White Butterflies*, a global artistic movement of love, unity and activism created by Nepalese artist, **Milan Rai** will take over the Royal Festival Hall spaces with visually-stunning displays (19 – 29 May) and a month-long free archive display and special events will explore Ravi Shankar's long history with Southbank Centre, dating back to his first performance in the Royal Festival Hall nearly 60 years ago (18 May – 18 June).

Artists, **Sayed Hasan** and **Karl Ohiri**, explore heritage and migration through *My Granddad's Car*, an exhibition examining their relationships with two cars inherited from their respective late grandfathers in Pakistan and Nigeria (19 – 29 May).

Presented as part of Khoj's 20th anniversary celebration, mainstream stories about Kashmir, found in media and popular culture, are questioned in the storytelling game *Trapezium* (19– 29 May). The future of migration meets the digital world of gaming in **Vinit Nikumbh's** *Khirkee 2027*, an interactive experience perceived through the lens of a migrant girl (19 – 29 May). Board game *Walk of Life*, based on the ancient Indian game Ganjifa created by artists **Jiten Thukral** and **Sumir Tagra**, depicts Dashavatara, the ten earthly incarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu, to question the relationship of play and art (19 – 29 May).

Video and sound installation *Five Rivers: A Portrait of Partition* by **Remy Sheba Kharbanda** and **William Charles Moss** explores the partition of India through interviews, landscapes and historical documentation projected into a traditional Indian wedding tent (19 – 29 May). *Paracosm*, by London-based artist **Faiza Butt**, is an installation of four large-scale light walls arranged in a cube-like formation alluding to the architecture and decoration of the Holy Kaaba immersed in poems by Aga Shahid Ali and Faiz Ahmed Faiz (19 – 29 May).

## LITERATURE & DEBATES

Alongside **Karachi Literature festival**, further debates and talks across the programme include a discussion on the role of art and activism in creating social change in South Asia presented by **Amnesty International** (24 May), stand-up comedian **Tez Ilyas** leading a debate on diversity in the arts (20 May) and the return of Southbank Centre's monthly series *I AM...* with a special *Alchemy* edition and special guest artist, workshop and Q&A session (25 May).

## FOOD

Alongside the return of **KERB** food market, BBC Asian Network's **Ashanti Omkar** presents a culinary and musical journey through South India and Sri Lanka in special event *From Kerala to Kayts through Food and Music* (27 May). A short film about the much-cooked and much-loved dish Biryani will also be screened throughout the festival including stories, recipes and techniques from voices across London's kitchen's, brought together over the last few months by Southbank Centre (19 – 29 May).

**FULL ALCHEMY LISTINGS HERE**

**IMAGES HERE**

Further *Alchemy* information at [www.southbankcentre.co.uk/alchemy](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/alchemy)

Follow the conversation on Twitter [@southbankcentre](https://twitter.com/southbankcentre) #AlchemySC

**-ENDS-**

For further press information, interview requests or press tickets please contact:

Sasha Haughan, Press Officer, [sasha.haughan@southbankcentre.co.uk](mailto:sasha.haughan@southbankcentre.co.uk) / 020 7921 0992

Louise Gilbert, Press Manager, [louise.gilbert@southbankcentre.co.uk](mailto:louise.gilbert@southbankcentre.co.uk) / 020 7921 0780

Mary Rahman, MRPR: [maryrahmanMRPR@gmail.com](mailto:maryrahmanMRPR@gmail.com) / 07958 399740

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **About Southbank Centre**

Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre, occupying a 21 acre site that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. Southbank Centre is home to the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery as well as The National Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. For further information please visit [www.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk). Southbank Centre is carrying out vital restoration work on the Hayward Gallery, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room to make the buildings fit for future generations to enjoy, more information can be found here: [letthelightin.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://letthelightin.southbankcentre.co.uk)

### **Southbank Centre's Alchemy 2017 Partners**

Alchemy's 2017 partners are Asian Media & Marketing Group (AMG), BBC Asian Network, the British Council, Karachi Literature Festival, Rafi Peer Mystic Music Sufi Festival and Rock On.

### **Alchemy Touring**

Alchemy will also tour the UK with a return to Oldham, the Black Country, and Doncaster. Working collaboratively with three key national partners, Black Country Touring, Cast Doncaster and Oldham

Coliseum Theatre, each partner will curate their own bespoke Alchemy programme for regional audiences, featuring local and regional artists, running alongside the festival in London. This is a partnership between Black Country Touring, Cast Doncaster, Oldham Coliseum Theatre and Southbank Centre. The tour is generously supported by Arts Council England.

**International Performance Project: Beats Without Boundaries**

Southbank Centre's Alchemy has commissioned a new music performance in partnership with the British Council and Alchemy national partners: Black Country Touring, Cast Doncaster and Oldham Coliseum Theatre, generously supported by Arts Council England.

**TOUR DATES**

Oldham Coliseum Theatre (Greater Manchester): Wednesday 10 – Saturday 13 May 2017 & Thursday 18 May (For information & further announcements see: <http://www.coliseum.org.uk/>)

Black Country Touring (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton): Saturday 20 – Sunday 28 May (For information & further announcements see: <http://www.bctouring.co.uk/>)

Cast (Doncaster): Wednesday 31 May– Saturday 3 June (For information & further announcements see: <https://castindoncaster.com/>)