

24 March 2026

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

For immediate release: Tuesday 24 March 2026, 10.30am GMT

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The Southbank Centre's 2025 Impact Report reveals thriving appetite for new classical music formats and a year of breaking down barriers between art forms



Image credit: *WE SHOULD HAVE NEVER WALKED ON THE MOON* © Hugo Glendinning

The Southbank Centre today publishes its **2025 Impact Report**, highlighting a year of bold experimentation that saw the classical music experience reimaged, barriers between art forms dissolved and a commitment to opening up its 11-acre site to more people.

Headline evidence from the report:

- **55% of events at the Southbank Centre were free in 2025**
- **11,672,984 visitors to its 11-acre site**

- **8,695 artists performed on its stages**
- **The Southbank Centre delivered work in 24 towns and cities in all four nations across the UK. This includes touring exhibitions, which were seen by 300,465 people outside of London**
- **The Southbank Centre engaged 328 schools and 6,860 pupils**

The report, the first of its kind for the UK's largest arts centre, outlines the Southbank Centre's impact across 2025. It considers what it means to be the arts centre of the future and demonstrates how it is growing to meet the needs of a modern audience – from creating live, site-wide experiences to supporting young people's mental health. The report reveals how **over 11.6 million people visited its 11-acre site** and stayed for durations ranging from 30 minutes and six hours.

The Southbank Centre upholds its commitment to making world-class art accessible to all by **delivering 55% of its 2025 programming for free**. This mission has been a guiding principle since its beginnings, rooted in the 1951 Festival of Britain. To ensure this work can continue for the next generation, the report also acknowledges an ongoing and significant need for investment in its iconic buildings, protecting the unique estate for the future.

Elaine Bedell OBE, Chief Executive of the Southbank Centre, said: 'This report is testament to our confidence in purpose: to be a place that is open, creatively brave, and deeply connected to the communities it serves. Our biggest venue, the Royal Festival Hall, is the lasting legacy of the 1951 Festival of Britain. And, as we celebrate its 75th birthday we continue to be guided by that project's founding ambition - that arts, ideas, and innovation can bring people together - especially in troubled times - and must be available and accessible to everyone.'

Justine Simons OBE, Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries, said: 'The Southbank Centre is one of our great cultural treasures, bringing world-class music, literature, art and performance to all. As we mark the Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary this year, there's no better time to celebrate the vital contribution it continues to make to our city and beyond.'

Key stories from the 2025 Impact Report:

Classical music –

The report shows the Southbank Centre's work to keep classical music modern and relevant. Highlights include the debut of its *Multitudes* festival and new opportunities for digital engagement, such as partnering up with TikTok and launching a new podcast, *So, Hear Me Out*. In 2025 overall, **40% of classical music tickets were sold to people booking with the Southbank Centre for the first time.**

Mark Ball, Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre, said: 'We've been asking ourselves how we should be thinking differently about the large-scale orchestral experience in order to reach new audiences. The *Multitudes* festival reflects the Southbank Centre's belief that classical music is a living art form, shaped by new exchange between artists, and collaboration across artistic disciplines. It excites younger audiences and first-time attenders, bringing them into an encounter with the full force of classical music via diverse artistic touchpoints.'

Site-wide experiences –

The Southbank Centre is increasingly prioritising live, hands-on experiences that dissolve the boundaries between art forms. In 2025, the site-wide takeover *WE SHOULD HAVE NEVER WALKED ON THE MOON* featured 50 dancers, DJs, and a limousine outside the Royal Festival Hall. This experimental approach continued with the launch of *KUNSTY*, a late-night series for radical performance art.

Cultural icons –

As a global stage for pioneers and the stories that shape the world, the Hayward Gallery hosted the largest European retrospective to date of Yoshitomo Nara, **drawing over 114,000 visitors** and reaching the gallery's highest daily footfall since the pandemic. The 30th edition of *Meltdown* festival, curated by Little Simz, also captured the Southbank Centre's reputation for bold curation, blending local grassroots talent with global stars like James Blake, Nubya Garcia, Jon Batiste and The Streets. At the 2025 *London Literature Festival*, one day of the festival was curated by musician Self Esteem, and it welcomed icons including Malala Yousafzai, Zadie Smith, and former US Vice President Kamala Harris – bringing voices that define global conversations together with the Southbank Centre's audiences.

Creative talent pipeline –

The report outlines how the Southbank Centre is working to ensure the creative industries are more inclusive and accessible at every level. The Technical Academy and Southbank Centre Presents are providing tangible pathways for the next generation of technicians and curators, while the Associate Artists programme gives established artists the creative

freedom to debut ambitious new work. From entry-level talent (**83% of 2025 Technical Academy graduates have already found paid work, professional experience or further study in technical production**) to the **8,695 artists who performed this year**, the Southbank Centre is a home for every stage and shape of a creative career.

Young people –

2025 saw the launch of the Youth Collective, a group of 11–25-year-olds from the local area who are helping to co-design our Arts & Wellbeing youth programmes. Putting young people front and centre, 2025 also saw the launch of a dedicated Under-30s scheme, a free community offering discounted tickets and connection opportunities. The scheme, which **launched in November, had over 1,300 sign-ups by the end of 2025 (– as of March 2026, the scheme currently has over 6,000)**.

Local area –

The Southbank Centre's local impact grew significantly through the work of a dedicated Community Connector. In 2025, the Southbank Centre **distributed over 1,000 free tickets to local community groups** and **launched the Community Space offer**, providing free rooms for local organisations to collaborate.

Cllr Donatus Anyanwu, Lambeth's Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, said:

'The Southbank Centre is one of Lambeth's most important cultural partners, and this report highlights the impact of their work locally, nationally, and internationally. We're proud of the strong relationship between the council and the Southbank Centre, and it's great to see that commitment strengthened through the dedicated Community Connector for Lambeth and our neighbours in Southwark.

'The Southbank's work aligns closely with the ambitions of Lambeth's Creative Economy Strategy, supporting opportunities for residents, creative health and wellbeing, and the continued growth of Lambeth's cultural sector. We're incredibly excited to continue working with them to mark the 75th anniversary of the Festival of Britain, with opportunities for schools and communities across Lambeth to get involved.'

Nic Durston, CEO of South Bank Employers' Group, said: 'The Southbank Centre is one of the cultural anchors that helps give the South Bank its distinctive character. As a valued member of South Bank Employers' Group, it plays an important role not only in delivering world-class arts and culture, but in supporting the wider economic and social ecosystem of businesses and residential communities, and that make this neighbourhood thrive. Culture has always been central to the South Bank's identity and authenticity, drawing millions of

people here each year and sustaining our vibrant mix of commercial operators, visitors and those that work, live and study here.'

Bernard Donoghue OBE, Director of ALVA, The Association of Leading Visitor

Attractions, said: 'These figures clearly show that visits to much loved destinations and attractions are the last thing that people sacrifice in a cost of living crisis. We know that people are prioritising spending special time with special places, like the Southbank Centre. These figures also demonstrate the social and economic impact of the Southbank Centre - its work, programming, outreach creates wealth, creates jobs and sustains local economies, but they also benefit the health, wellbeing and add to the happiness of people and in times of unpredictable geopolitics, economic stress and uncertainty, that is more valuable than ever.'

The achievements of 2025 serve as the launchpad for the Southbank Centre's **75th anniversary this year in 2026**. Channelling the founding spirit of the 1951 Festival of Britain, a moment of national renewal and optimistic energy, the landmark year features the return of the *Multitudes* festival; a massive takeover event titled *You Are Here* which is co-created, directed and designed by Danny Boyle, Carson McColl, Gareth Pugh and Paulette Randall, with Sabrina Mahfouz and Natasha Chivers; and major exhibitions from icons including Anish Kapoor.

You can download the report on the website: [HERE](#)

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Notes to editors:

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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) 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