

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## THE SOUTHBANK CENTRE'S LITERATURE & SPOKEN WORD SPRING 2026 PROGRAMME

**FORWARD PLANNER:** Tuesday 9 December 2025, 9am

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Images: [HERE](#)



L-R Clockwise:; *Leila Slimani*, Image © Catherine Hélie; *Emma-Lee Moss*, Image © Alex Lake; *Ece Temelkuran*, Image © Joanna Paciorek; *Gisèle Pelicot*, Image © Christophe Simon.

The **2026 Spring Literature & Spoken Word Season** opens with an inspiring programme spotlighting the very best established and emerging literary talent. On the 75th anniversary of the pioneering Festival of Britain, the Southbank Centre continues to place the next generation of writers and thinkers at its heart with world-class cultural experiences available to all.

**Ted Hodgkinson, Head of Literature & Spoken Word**, says: *“From Indie Night - a new quarterly series celebrating the radical power of independent publishers - through to Letters Live, to the words of Gisèle Pelicot and Deborah Levy, the Southbank Centre’s Spring 2026 Literature season platforms many of today’s most salient voices alongside some of the most exciting emerging writers out there. More so than ever, we’re proud to spotlight the essential role the written and spoken word takes in reflecting our most pressing societal issues, while*

*also celebrating the immense power of great writing to captivate, provide space for debate, and inspire positive change.”*

**Mark Ball, Artistic Director at the Southbank Centre, says:** “*Since the doors of the Royal Festival Hall first opened during the Festival of Britain in 1951, the Southbank Centre has been a home to boundary-pushing art and a place to nourish artists at every stage of their career. Within the Spring 2026 Literature & Spoken Word Season, we’re particularly proud to support independent publishers and their writers through our new series, Indie Night, demonstrating our commitment to the artists of the future”*

Tickets go on sale to Southbank Centre Members on **Wednesday 10 December** and to the general public on **Friday 12 December**.

Press Images [HERE](#). The press release is available in a range of formats. Please email [press@southbankcentre.co.uk](mailto:press@southbankcentre.co.uk)

### **LITERATURE SPRING 2026 PROGRAMME INCLUDES:**

#### **Letters Live**

*Thu 22 Jan, 7.30pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall. For ages 15+.*

Hear remarkable letters brought to life by an all-star cast in this hugely popular event that spotlights the beauty and depth of prose – and people. Since its debut in 2013, *Letters Live* has become one of the UK’s most talked-about literary events: a celebration of the written word that has moved and surprised audiences around the world. This special edition draws inspiration from the sea, from travel, and from the unexpected shifts in perspective that journeys can bring.

#### **Out-Spoken Masterclass: February**

*Sun 8 Feb, 1pm, Sunley Pavilion, Level 3, Royal Festival Hall. For ages 18+.*

Out-Spoken’s poetry masterclass is a monthly workshop facilitated by leading poets from the United Kingdom and the United States. Anyone with an interest in poetry is welcome to take the chance to work with the country’s most revered writers while learning some of their methods and approaches to crafting beautiful and original verse. Presented in association with Out-Spoken.

#### **Gisèle Pelicot: A Hymn to Life**

*Fri 20 Feb, 8pm, Royal Festival Hall. For ages 16+.*

Join Gisèle Pelicot for the UK launch of her extraordinary memoir, *A Hymn to Life: Shame Has to Change Sides*, as she tells her story for the very first time. Gisèle Pelicot inspired and moved millions of people with her astonishing courage and dignity when she chose to waive her right to anonymity in her legal fight against her husband and the 50 men accused of her sexual assault. Gisèle Pelicot’s call for shame to change sides in cases of sexual abuse, and the power of the messages she has sent out to the public, have generated an extraordinary response and moved both women and men all over the world.

#### **Indie Night: February**

*Wed 25 Feb, 7.45pm, Purcell Room. For ages 16 +.*

Known for taking creative risks and championing fresh perspectives, independent publishers

bring vital, boundary-pushing books into the world. Indie Night is our brand-new quarterly series celebrating these presses and the brilliant authors they publish. Each event showcases a handpicked, eclectic mix of four writers – fiction and nonfiction, established names and emerging voices – united by the same independent spirit as their publishers. One by one, the authors read from their work and sit down for a conversation with our hosts, Okechukwu Nzelu and Eliza Clark. This month's edition features readings and discussion from Deepa Anappara, Khairani Barokka, Vigdis Hjorth and Tim MacGabhann.

### **Mary Berry: My Gardening Life**

*Wed 25 Feb, 7.30pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall. For ages 15+.*

See Dame Mary Berry in conversation as she presents her new book on her lifelong love of gardening, *My Gardening Life*. Mary Berry's love for gardening started in childhood, when she saw her father grow vegetables, and has been a constant source of joy since. As well as providing first-hand commentary, she also explains the vital role that being outside, connecting with nature and celebrating the seasons have played in her life for 90 years. From times of personal solace to those of celebration, moments of sheer joy to gardening frustrations, Berry reveals her deep love of plants and gardens.

### **Ece Temelkuran: Nation of Strangers**

*Thu 12 Mar, 7.45pm, Purcell Room. For ages 13+.*

Join journalist and author Ece Temelkuran for a wide-ranging discussion about her new book, *Nation of Strangers*, in conversation with Brian Eno. In the decade since she left her own home of Türkiye, Ece Temelkuran has been a political Cassandra, warning those convinced it couldn't happen in their country that fascism is coming.

As oppression spreads and temperatures rise – as we face competing crises and learn, again and again, that no institution is so concrete it can't turn to dust, and no home is too strong to be destroyed – she has written *Nation of Strangers: Rebuilding Home in the 21st Century*. Politically attuned and deeply personal, this poetic and heartening book takes the form of letters from one stranger to another. This correspondence shows how, as we all become strangers, our home will depend on the strength we find with one another.

### **Out-Spoken Masterclass: March**

*Sun 22 Mar, 1pm, Sunley Pavilion, Level 3, Royal Festival Hall. For ages 18+.*

Elevate your poetry skills in a three-hour weekend workshop led by an acclaimed poet, focusing on techniques to refine your work. Elevate your poetry skills in a three-hour weekend workshop led by an acclaimed poet, focusing on techniques to refine your work.

### **Special Edition: East of the Sun, West of the Moon**

*Wed 1 Apr, 8pm, National Poetry Library, Level 5, Royal Festival Hall. For ages 15+.*

Landscapes, journeys and making sense of belonging to multiple cultural identities connect the poetry of Maggie Harris and Taz Rahman. Join them as they discuss shared influences and read their work aloud. Both poets have spent significant periods of their writing lives in Wales, and their respective Guyanese and Bengali heritages have uniquely informed their poetry. Both writers are influenced by the work of St Lucian poet Derek Walcott. In Harris's 'I Sing to the Greenhearts' (2025), Guyana's greenheart tree serves as a powerful symbol of the environment. Similarly, fellow Seren Books poet Taz Rahman writes about a deep affinity

to the flora and fauna at the confluence of the Welsh rivers Taff and Ely in his jazz-improvisation-inspired 2024 debut poetry collection *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*.

### **An Evening with Akala: State of the Nation**

*Tue 7 Apr, 7.30pm, Royal Festival Hall. For ages 15+.*

Step into an unflinching night of truth, history and hope, with one of the country's most formidable voices. Akala focuses his razor-sharp intellect and lyrical power on the forces that shape modern Britain: race, class, identity, memory and justice. While he sees a country haunted by its colonial legacy, structural inequality and class divisions, Akala also believes that Britain is capable of awakening, reimagination and real change. Drawing from his bestselling book *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*, and decades of personal experience, Akala promises an evening of hard-hitting insights, deeply felt stories, sharp analysis and an urgent call for solidarity.

### **Out-Spoken Masterclass: April**

*Sun 12 Apr, 1pm, Sunley Pavilion, Level 3, Royal Festival Hall. For ages 18+.*

Out-Spoken's poetry masterclass is a monthly workshop facilitated by leading poets from the United Kingdom and the United States. The class is open to members of the public of all abilities, from beginners to the more advanced. Anyone with an interest in poetry is welcome to take the chance to work with the country's most revered writers while learning some of their methods and approaches to crafting beautiful and original verse.

### **Deborah Levy: My Year in Paris with Gertrude Stein**

*Wed 15 Apr, 7.45pm, Purcell Room. For ages 15+.*

Prize-winning novelist, playwright and memoirist Deborah Levy returns to our stage to celebrate the publication of her new novel. The narrator of Deborah Levy's latest fiction story, *My Year in Paris with Gertrude Stein*, has gone to Paris to write an essay on Gertrude Stein, a writer who has baffled readers and critics for a century. This is a book about how we put ourselves together – an exhilarating, witty, cosmopolitan meditation on the pleasures and challenges of friendship, desire and living with other people. But it also crashes through genre to create an inspired portrait of Gertrude Stein herself: a writer who experimented fearlessly with a new way of living and who wrestled herself free from the nineteenth century to invent a brand-new way of looking at the world.

### **A Poet in Every Port**

*May-September 2026, 11 coastal locations*

Inspired by the Festival of Britain's coastal exhibition by boat and the Land Travelling Exhibition, which took 5,000 exhibits transported in over 100 lorries around the UK, *A Poet in Every Port* visits ten coastal locations nationwide. Led by the Southbank Centre's National Poetry Library, the project celebrates different dialects, languages and approaches to poetry across the coastline of our nations. Taking to the road in a mobile poetry library, *A Poet in Every Port* will visit every nation of the UK, from North Uist in the Outer Hebrides, to Great Yarmouth in Norfolk; Bangor in Northern Ireland to Caernarfon in Wales. For *A Poet in Every Port* the National Poetry Library takes to four wheels with a selection of the world's largest collection of post-War poetry in a new mobile library that travels around the UK. A programme of public events will be organised in each location in partnership with local libraries and arts groups. It will also collect new poetry and spoken word for its national collection from each of the *A Poet in Every Port* locations.

### [The Moth London GrandSLAM Championship](#)

*Thu 7 May, 7.30pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall. For ages 15+.*

Be the judge at The Moth's GrandSLAM storytelling event – where the audience chooses the winners. The Moth StorySLAM is an open-mic storytelling competition in which anyone can share a true, personal, five-minute story on that night's theme. Themes can range from 'family matters' or 'that's a wrap!' to 'good vibrations'. Ten UK locals – and former winners from the monthly London StorySLAMs hosted at RichMix – share new stories in competition before the crowd judges each storyteller, and ultimately crowns the London GrandSLAM champions.

### [The International Booker Prize 10th Anniversary](#)

*Fri 8 May, 7.30pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall. For ages 15+.*

Join us to celebrate a decade of the International Booker Prize, which has become the world's most influential prize for translated fiction. The first winner in 2016 was *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang, translated from Korean by Deborah Smith. Since then it has promoted ten winners in ten original languages from Arabic to Polish, Bulgarian to Kannada. The prize has also helped to drive a boom in translated fiction in the UK: sales have doubled since it launched. This event features special guests, to be announced in due course.

### [John Robins: Thirst - In Conversation](#)

*Wed 13 May, 7.30pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall. For ages 15+.*

Hear stand-up comedian, *Taskmaster* champion and award-winning broadcaster John Robins in a discussion about his moving new memoir, *Thirst: Twelve Drinks That Changed My Life*. The book tackles his alcohol addiction and journey to sobriety, looking at his life through the lens of alcohol, the drinks that made him and those that broke him. This event includes a special guest interviewer and features a rare opportunity for you to put your own questions to the author and to purchase a signed copy of *Thirst*.

### [Ruth Ozeki: The Typing Lady](#)

*Fri 22 May, 7.45pm, Purcell Room. For ages 15+.*

Experience an event celebrating Ruth Ozeki's *The Typing Lady*, the first story collection from the Booker Prize finalist and winner of the Women's Prize for Fiction about the lives we almost lived, the people we can't quite forget and the stories that shape us long after the last page is turned. Exploring childhood ambition, youthful desire, midlife reinvention and the unsparing clarity of old age, Ozeki brings us 11 richly imagined stories of characters standing at life's thresholds.

### [Out-Spoken Masterclass: May](#)

*Sun 24 May, 1pm, Sunley Pavilion, Level 3, Royal Festival Hall. For ages 18+.*

Out-Spoken's poetry masterclass is a monthly workshop facilitated by leading poets from the United Kingdom and the United States. The class is open to members of the public of all abilities, from beginners to the more advanced. Anyone with an interest in poetry is welcome to take the chance to work with the country's most revered writers while learning some of their methods and approaches to crafting beautiful and original verse.

### [Counterpoints x Footnote Prize Readings](#)

*Sun 31 May, 7.45pm, Purcell Room. For ages 15+.*

Meet the finalists for this £15,000 fiction prize for writers from refugee and migrant backgrounds who shine a light on today's most pertinent topics. The writers reflect on themes of displacement, belonging, courage and creativity both in the selected works and more broadly, touching on highly relevant themes that shape our lives and society. This event brings together the shortlisted authors ahead of the announcement of the winner in June, who will be selected by a judging panel composed of prominent writers. Presented in association with Counterpoints Arts and Footnote.

### **Indie Night: June**

*Wed 3 Jun, 7.45pm, Purcell Room. For ages 15+.*

Toast to independent publishers in our new quarterly events celebrating the independent presses taking creative risks, championing fresh perspectives and bringing boundary-pushing books into the world – works that often wouldn't find space in the mainstream. Each event showcases a handpicked, eclectic mix of four writers – fiction and nonfiction, established names and emerging voices – united by the same independent spirit as their publishers. One by one, the authors read from their work and sit down for a conversation with our hosts, Okechukwu Nzelu and Eliza Clark.

### **Leila Slimani: I'll Take the Fire**

*Thu 6 Jun, 7.45pm, Purcell Room. For ages 15+.*

The international bestselling author of *Lullaby* discusses the daring final novel of her *The Country of Others* trilogy. *I'll Take the Fire* is a haunting story of self-discovery, truth and power, sex and lies. It follows two sisters, Mia and Inés. Two girls enveloped in love, trapped by social conventions of Casablanca at the dawn of the 21st century and silenced by the political 'truths' that encompass their lives.

### **Out-Spoken Masterclass: June**

*Sun 7 Jun, 1pm, Sunley Pavilion, Level 3, Royal Festival Hall. For ages 18+.*

Out-Spoken's poetry masterclass is a monthly workshop facilitated by leading poets from the United Kingdom and the United States. Anyone with an interest in poetry is welcome to take the chance to work with the country's most revered writers while learning some of their methods and approaches to crafting beautiful and original verse. Presented in association with Out-Spoken.

### **Emma-Lee Moss: My Cantopop Nights**

*Sun 7 Jun, 7.45pm, Purcell Room. For ages 15+.*

The singer-songwriter Emma-Lee Moss, also known as Emmy the Great, reflects on her career, influences, childhood and more as she launches her debut memoir, *My Cantopop Nights*. In contemplating a childhood in Hong Kong, moving to the UK and the influence of Cantopop's icons upon her work as Emmy the Great, Moss reconciles the dual nature of her heritage and artistry. The evening also features a short musical performance.

For Moss, the sound of the summer of 1995 is Cantopop. The Cantopop stars she idolises, at the height of their stratospheric fame, are seen on every billboard and heard on every street corner in Hong Kong. Later that year, she and her family leave for England, pushing Moss's love of Cantopop underground. *My Cantopop Nights* is the story of how she began listening to Cantopop again as an adult, following its close harmonies and stadium-rock guitars back to Hong Kong, and to the person that she used to be.

## European Poetry Festival

*Fri 26 Jun, 8pm, National Poetry Library, Level 5, Royal Festival Hall. For ages 15+.*

The European Poetry Festival returns for its ninth year as the UK's biggest celebration of continental poetry in performance, experimentation and collaboration. Come along to the National Poetry Library to hear new work by international poets and their British-based counterparts. Hosted by festival director SJ Fowler, this is an exploration of the performative, literary and cross-lingual potential of 21st-century European poetry. The festival spotlights contemporary European poetry and features three of the continent's most exciting writers performing their work, as well as brand-new British–European collaborations created specially for this event.

## Imagine the Future

*Summer 2026*

Renowned poet Lemn Sissay leads Imagine the Future, a national project for over 3,500 schoolchildren, with 2,000 from Lambeth schools, who are invited to share hopes and dreams for the future through poetry and creative writing, with their words displayed in a site-wide installation, launching at Poetry International in Summer 2026.

**ENDS**

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

For more information about the Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary celebrations, visit [southbankcentre.co.uk/our-75th-anniversary](https://southbankcentre.co.uk/our-75th-anniversary)

### **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).

Website: <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk>

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