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Barbican announces Darbar as official Artistic Associate ahead of 2024 festival and groundbreaking performances in 2025

Today (Thursday 26 September) the Barbican is delighted to announce that Darbar Arts, Culture and Heritage organization (Darbar) will become one of its official Artistic Associates with immediate effect. The announcement comes ahead of this year's Darbar Festival of Indian Classical Music, which will take place at the Barbican from 24-27 October 2024.

Formalising the Barbican's long-running collaboration with Darbar comes alongside the announcement of new performances taking place in the Barbican Hall in 2025. These include a concert by virtuoso sitarist **Niladri Kumar** on 11 February 2025, and **Guru Nanak's Message of Peace through Music**, a celebratory performance inspired by the founder of the Sikh *dharam*, Guru Nanak (1469-1539), on 6 April 2025, alongside workshops, lectures and films taking place across the Centre.

Darbar, which will celebrate its landmark 20th anniversary festival in October 2025, is the first new Artistic Associate to be announced at the Barbican since 2014. The cultural organisation joins a family of Associates which includes Resident Orchestra London Symphony Orchestra, Artistic Associates the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Academy of Ancient Music, and Associate Producer Serious.

Sandeep Virdee OBE, Artistic Director and Founder Trustee of Darbar Festival, said: "We are thrilled to bring year-round Indian classical music programming to the Barbican Centre, one of the world's most prestigious cultural venues. This partnership allows us to present a decolonised perspective of one of the world's most evolved, improvisational, and holistic art forms, one that profoundly nurtures both mental and spiritual well-being."

Helen Wallace, Head of Music at the Barbican, said: "We are thrilled to welcome Darbar to the Barbican, the first new Artistic Associate for 10 years. Darbar connects our audiences with a huge family of world-class classical musicians from India and its diaspora, from legendary artists to exciting emerging talent. Moreover, Sandeep offers audiences a holistic vision for experiencing music, embracing listening, learning, and participation, uniquely suited to our Barbican spaces, and very much in the spirit of our purpose as a civic arts centre in the heart of our diverse city.'

DARBAR FESTIVAL 2024: 24-27 OCTOBER

Founded in 2005 and managed by the Darbar Arts Culture and Heritage Trust, Darbar Festival has been hosted by the Barbican since 2018. Beginning life in a small Leicester theatre, it has expanded over its 19 editions to become the largest festival of its kind in the UK, and now

showcases a mix of emerging young talent, world-class legends and master performers over a jam-packed weekend of concerts and events.

Reflecting the embeddedness of Indian classical music in nature (*ragas* and *talas* being closely associated with animals, birds, weather and seasons), this year's Darbar Festival has broadened its programme to include wellbeing sessions – from yoga with live music to breathwork, sacred sound baths to mantra and guided meditation sessions. To enrich audiences' experience of the festival, the Barbican's foyers will host small independent culturally diverse businesses, including food stalls selling a range of Indian food.

The full Darbar Festival programme can be found [here](#).

DARBAR EVENTS AT THE BARBICAN IN 2025

Darbar – India's Music of Today: Niladri Kumar

Tuesday 11 February 2025, 6:30pm

Barbican Hall

Tickets from £20 plus booking fee

This performance will unite dazzling sitar playing and evocative romanticism in the hands of one of today's most maverick performers, Niladri Kumar.

With his signature sitar sound, Kumar works regularly with stars including Shankar-Ehsan-Loy, A.R. Rahman, Pritam, Louis Banks, Trilok Gurtu, John McLaughlin and Ustad Zakir Hussain.

This concert unites Kumar with the tabla player Satyajit Talwalkar, whose playing is marked by his acute musical sense and masterful improvisation based on several generations of knowledge passed to him by his legendary father Pandit Suresh Talwalkar.

The programme will consist of evening ragas and talas.

This concert is produced by Darbar Arts Culture Heritage Trust, producers of the Darbar Festival.

Performers

Niladri Kumar – sitar

Satyajit Talwalkar – tabla

Produced by the Barbican and Darbar

[Find out more](#)

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DARBAR: IN CELEBRATION OF GURU NANAK'S 555th BIRTH YEAR

On Sunday 6 April 2025 at the Barbican, Darbar will present a landmark concert alongside a series of workshops, films and lectures in celebration of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak's 555th birth year. Full details of each event follow below.

Darbar: Guru Nanak's Message of Peace through Music

Sunday 6 April 2025, 5pm

Barbican Hall

Tickets from £20 plus booking fee

To mark Sikhism founder Guru Nanak's 555th birth year, this performance pays homage through *kirtan*, *qawwali* and *bhajans*, performed for the first time under the same roof.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) founded the Sikh *dharam* and provided a pathway to liberation through profound new ideology which sought to break down prejudices such as those based on race, gender and religious practices. Guru Nanak was accompanied by Bhai Mardana, a prolific master musician and together they sang *kirtan* through their many long interfaith travels.

On the evening, three respected kirtanias (vocalists who perform Kirtan - **Anantvir Singh**, **Gurinder Singh Batala** and **Amrita Kaur** - will perform together with their powerful lyrical voices and world-wide following. They will be joined by award-winning star Aruna Sairam, one of India's finest Indian classical singers, lauded for her dynamic vocal abilities as well as her performances on Coke Studio and her duets with Shankar Mahadevan. Also performing is Zeeshan Ali, a virtuoso whose voice moves between classical intricacies and contemporary vibrancy.

In addition to the concert, a keynote address will be given by **Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia OBE KSG**, a global leader and humanitarian. Bhai Sahib's work in promoting harmony transcends cultural and religious boundaries. His speech will inspire leaders, change-makers, and individuals dedicated to creating a more just and peaceful world.

With the spiritual nature of this performance, and in line with Sikh codes of conduct, all audience members are invited to cover their heads with a shawl or similar covering on entering the Barbican Hall. While this isn't mandatory, light scarves will be available to borrow from the Barbican foyer ahead of the performance. In addition, no beverages except still water will be allowed into the Hall.

This concert is produced by Darbar Arts Culture and Heritage Trust, producers of the Darbar Festival.

Performers will include:

Anantvir Singh *gurbani kirtan*

Dr Gurinder Singh Batala *gurbani kirtan*

Amrita Kaur *gurbani kirtan*

Aruna Sairam *abang/bhajan*

Zeeshan Ali *sufi singer*

Momin Khan *sarangi*

Gurdain Rayatt *table*

Surdarshan Chana *jori/table*

Patri Satish Kumar *mridangam*

Giridhar Udupa *ghatam*

Produced by the Barbican and Darbar

[Find out more](#)

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LECTURES, FILMS AND WORKSHOPS

Darbar: The Rababis of Lahore Film

Sunday 6 April 2025, 9:30am

Auditorium 1, Barbican

Tickets from £15 plus booking fee

The Mardana Project celebrates the profound musical legacy of Guru Nanak and his lifelong companion, Bhai Mardana. This event will shine a spotlight on the rababi tradition, a vital but often overlooked aspect of Sikh and Indian classical music history.

The Rababis of Lahore is a short film about the *rababis*, a community of Pakistani Muslim musicians with deep-rooted ties to the Sikhs by way of a centuries-old music tradition that originated with Guru Nanak and his disciple Bhai Mardana. Rababis were the original custodians of Sikhism's kirtan tradition, playing a key role in performing hymns composed by Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus. The word "rababi" comes from the rabab, a stringed instrument used during devotional singing.

The **Mardana Project**, led by **Kirit Singh** and **Jasdeep Singh**, seeks to revive the rababi tradition. Kirit, a vocalist and researcher, explores Sikh music history, while Jasdeep, a sitar player and composer, brings deep knowledge of Indian classical music.

Produced by Darbar

[Find out more](#)

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Darbar: Exploring Guru Nanak's Philosophy of Oneness

Sunday 6 April 2025, 9:45am

Frobisher Rooms, Barbican

Tickets from £15 plus booking fee

This lecture explores the universal aspects of Guru Nanak's experiential philosophy of oneness exemplified by terms such as *ik oankar* or *ek-anek*. This philosophy underpins Guru Nanak's entire teaching about the nature of consciousness and reality.

It will draw from source compositions by Nanak such as Japji (the daily Sikh prayer), a spiritual verse in Raga Maru, and Sidh Gosht (dialogue by Guru Nanak and masters of haṭha yoga and alchemy). In different ways, these compositions provide lessons on the intrinsic inter-relationship between cosmos, psyche and society.

Through interactive sessions, participants will learn how this important spiritual tradition negotiates urgent contemporary issues such as the need for cross-cultural dialogue, ideas about health and wellness, and ecology.

Arvind-Pal S Mandair is a professor at the University of Michigan, holding the Chattha, Brar, Singh Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies. With dual doctorates in science and philosophy, he is the author and editor of numerous works, including *Religion and the Specter of the West* and *Violence and the Sikhs*. He is also a founding editor of the journal *Sikh Formations*.

This lecture is presented by Darbar Arts Culture Heritage Trust, producers of Darbar Festival.

Produced by Darbar

[Find out more](#)

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Darbar: Mool Mantra Workshop

Sunday 6 April 2024, 12pm

Frobisher Rooms, Barbican

Tickets from £15 plus booking fee

This immersive workshop brings together ancient wisdom, consciousness, and cutting-edge science, focusing on personal and transpersonal health, healing, and well-being. It invites participants on a transformative journey into the heart of Gurmat Therapy through a holistic approach that integrates psycho-spiritual health with modern metaphysical science.

Designed to explore and align with higher consciousness through the foundational principles of the Mool Mantra, the session offers guided self-inquiry and reflective practices that foster deep inner awareness. By the end of the session, attendees will have a profound understanding of how the Mool Mantra and Gurmat Therapy serve as gateways to self-discovery and personal growth. This experience lays the groundwork for ongoing spiritual development and integration into daily life, making it ideal for those seeking to enhance their mental, emotional, and spiritual health through a comprehensive and experiential approach.

Presented by **Davinder Singh Panesar**, a renowned expert in mind science, consciousness, and transpersonal health, with over 35 years of experience. As a visionary author and speaker, he bridges science and spirituality, offering advanced self-healing techniques rooted in ancient traditions.

This lecture is delivered by Gurmat Therapy Limited and presented by Darbar Arts Culture Heritage Trust, producers of Darbar Festival.

Produced by Darbar

[Find out more](#)

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Darbar: Guru Nanak's Message of Peace and Forgiveness

Sunday 6 April 2024, 1pm

Auditorium 1, Barbican

Tickets from £15 plus booking fee

The short film *Guru Nanak's Message of Peace and Forgiveness* by **Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ji** is a deep dive into Guru Nanak's timeless teachings on peace and forgiveness.

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ji is a globally respected Sikh leader, spiritual guide, and chairman of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha. Renowned for his efforts in promoting peace and unity, Bhai Sahib has been instrumental in fostering interfaith dialogue and cooperation across religious communities. Under his leadership, the Nishkam Centre in Birmingham has become a hub for community service and interfaith initiatives, and his work has been recognised with numerous awards, including the Papacy Knighthood for his contributions to interfaith understanding.

This film and Q&A will offer invaluable insights into how these timeless teachings can guide us toward a more peaceful and compassionate world today.

Produced by Darbar

[Find out more](#)

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Darbar: Guru Nanak and Indian Classical Music

Sunday 6 April 2025, 2:30pm

Frobisher Rooms, Barbican

Tickets from £15 plus booking fee

As part of Darbar's 'Guru Nanak's Message of Peace Through Music' series of events, this event explains that for Guru Nanak, music was a means of connecting with almighty, not merely entertainment. He saw it as a powerful tool to open the heart to the divine, a concept central to Sikh practice, especially through kirtan - the devotional singing of hymns. Kirtan, set to Indian classical ragas (raga/tala is the universal music system of India), is considered a meditative act, helping worshippers transcend ego and connect with the universe.

Guru Nanak's bani (sacred verses) in the Guru Granth Sahib is largely set to raga, a melodic framework that evokes different spiritual moods. Out of his 974 hymns, many are linked to specific ragas, enhancing the emotional tone of his teachings. This use of raga reflects the importance of music in his message, creating a rhythmic meditation aligned with *naam simran* (remembrance of God), deepening spiritual experience.

Kirpal Panesar demystifies the philosophy of Guru Nanak's synergetic connection between spiritual verses and music. He will present practical demonstrations of the sacred verses and some of the 31 ragas. Through his training under HH Sri Satguru Jagjit Singh, Panesar embodies a musical identity that intricately weaves together diverse experiences. His skillful playing brings the ancient art form to life, transporting audiences on a musical journey that is both meditative and profound.

Produced by Darbar

[Find out more](#)

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All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communications team's contact details are listed on our website at www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room

About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), and a London base of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other associates and partners including the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [the BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Britten Sinfonia](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), [Darbar Festival](#), [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#),

[Drum Works](#), [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), [Serious](#), and [Trafalgar Entertainment](#).

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