



GemArts launches 10th anniversary Masala Festival

A mix and blend of the finest South Asian arts and culture

13th – 19th July 2026

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION

“This year, we’re delighted to be celebrating the 10th anniversary of GemArts Masala Festival – marking a decade of South Asian arts, culture and creativity! This milestone year brings an extraordinary programme of bold new commissions, unforgettable performances, and an exciting mix of music, dance, visual arts, literature, film, food and family events across the region from 13-19 July. From trailblazing international artists to rising local voices, this year’s festival presents South Asian creativity in full colour, celebrating the people and stories that continue to shape this award-winning festival.”

Vikas Kumar MBE DL, Director of GemArts

Over the last decade, GemArts Masala Festival has become a much-loved fixture in the North East’s cultural calendar, bringing the finest South Asian arts and culture to venues across the region every summer. Now, as the festival marks its 10th anniversary, there’s a very special programme in store with something for everyone – from music and dance, to poetry, film, visual arts and much more.

The festival launches on 13th July at Dance City, with a stunning new production from internationally acclaimed Kathak artist, Gaurav Bhatti. After that, there’s a whole week of events to look forward to across Newcastle and Gateshead, culminating in a lively Mini Mela filled with fun for all the family on 19th July at Bensham Grove Community Centre.

A platform for world-class dance

Dance has always played a key role at Masala Festival, and this year, it’s right at the heart of the action. The festival will begin on Monday 13th July with [Bulleh Shah: Seeker of Light](#) – a compelling new solo show created by Gaurav Bhatti, whose work sits at the intersection between North Indian classical Kathak and contemporary dance.

Later in the week, the Sonia Sabri Company presents [Mughal Miniatures: The Awakening](#) – a vibrant outdoor dance performance inspired by the art of Indian and Persian miniature painting. Enjoy free 15-minute performances at Newcastle’s Monument at 12pm, 1pm and 2pm on Saturday 18th July. These performances will be presented in partnership with Nexus Tyne and Wear Metro.

A week filled with music

It wouldn't be Masala Festival without music, and this year's line-up is not to be missed. First up, head to The Cluny on Tuesday 14th July for [Free Flow Classikal](#) - a moving exploration of South Asian classical music through the medium of free improvisation. Then, it's over to The Glasshouse International Centre for Music on Friday 17th July, as [The Mohan Brothers, Sanju Sahai and Jasdeep Singh](#) bring the finest Indian classical music right here to Gateshead. Alongside live music, this year's festival will also feature a club night for the very first time. Head to Zerox on Saturday 18th July for [Bijlee / बिजली / Electric](#) – where Bollywood, Ghazal and Qawwali classics will be reimagined through contemporary club edits of Oldskool Hardcore, 90s Jungle, Footwork, Garage, Bassline, Dubstep, Baile Funk and more.

Something for the film buffs

This year's festival will include a carefully curated programme of South Asian cinema, including Tribeny Rai's debut feature film, [Shape of Momo](#), at Tyneside Cinema on Thursday 16th July, and Jude Ratnam's 2017 documentary film, [Demons in Paradise](#), at Newcastle University Fine Art Lecture Theatre on Saturday 18th July. Both films have powerful stories to tell, which are sure to stay with you long after the closing credits have rolled.

Literature & spoken word

On Wednesday 15th July, head to Live Theatre for the return of [Freespill](#) – a powerful night of spoken word, spotlighting South Asian voices and stories of heritage, resistance and joy. Hosted by Newcastle's own Tahmina Ali, the evening brings together an exciting blend of local and national talent, including award-winning poet Jaspreet Kaur, Australian Poetry Slam Champion Zohab Zee Khan and poet and human rights activist, Chandni Chopra. Then on Saturday 18th July, it's time for [An Evening with Nikesh Shukla](#), who'll be celebrating the 10th anniversary of his groundbreaking anthology, *The Good Immigrant*, alongside the festival's own ten year celebrations.

Learn something new

If you like to get stuck in, there are workshops for everyone at this year's festival. Gateshead Central Library will be hosting a [puppet making workshop](#) for young people aged 10-14 on 18th July, as well as a [printmaking workshop](#) for retired participants on 14th July, so there are creative opportunities no matter what your age. There's also a [creative writing workshop](#) on 14th July at DiverCity Hub, and a [movement and meditation session](#) on 16th July at Yoga X Life Studios. Each workshop is just £5 plus booking fees.

Free exhibitions

This year's Masala Festival features not one, but three free exhibitions. Over at Gateshead Central Library, you can catch [Playback / Rewind: South Asian Sound & Memory](#) – a specially commissioned exhibition by renowned graphic artist and videographer Jimmy Turrell. This new body of work draws on research into Bollywood vinyl, printed ephemera and South Asian histories in Gateshead, exploring how music carries memory, identity and connection across generations.

Also at Gateshead Central Library, [Through the Lens: Photographs by Anna Miller](#) is a chance to celebrate Masala Festival's 10-year history, with some of the best images captured over the last decade. Both library exhibitions will run from Saturday 4th July to Saturday 10th October.

Over at Vane, just a stone's throw from the centre of Gateshead, you can see [Care / Work: An Exhibition by Nayeema Ahmed](#). Using unconventional media, Northumbria University graduate Nayeema's paintings explore the relationship between gender, ethnicity and labour. This exhibition runs from 9th July – 1st August (open Wednesdays to Saturdays 12-5pm).

Mini Mela

On Sunday 19th July, the festival will close with the return of the spectacular [Mini Mela](#) at Bensham Grove Community Centre in Gateshead. Enjoy a colourful mix of activities inspired by the rich traditions of the Indian sub-continent, including Bollywood dance workshops, block printing, Rangoli art, kite making, pottery, face painting and beautiful henna designs. With delicious Indian food on offer too, it's the perfect way to spend a summer Sunday.

Bringing the flavour

Throughout the week, Dabbawal, Newcastle's original street food pioneers, present a specially created menu celebrating 10 years of Masala Festival. Inspired by the spice bazaars of Sri Lanka, the coastal kitchens of Kerala and the street-side grills of Lahore, expect a flavour-packed selection of dishes served with Dabbawal's signature flair and warmth.

The 10th anniversary of Masala Festival is a celebration of all the artists, audiences, volunteers, partners, funders and sponsors who have played a part in making the festival possible over the last decade. The festival is going from strength to strength, and this year's programme offers something for everyone. Explore the full line-up in the [GemArts Masala Festival 2026 Brochure](#) or visit www.gemarts.org.

NOTE TO EDITORS

GemArts is an award-winning arts organisation based in the North East of England. A leader in the South Asian and diversity arts sector, GemArts creates and programmes high-quality concerts, performances, events, festivals, workshops, and commissions with regional, national, and international artists across all art forms.

GemArts Masala Festival is possible with thanks to Arts Council England.

Interviews and images are available upon request.

Contact Vikas Kumar MBE DL, Director.

Email – vikas@gemarts.org

Phone – 0191 440 4124 / 07957 668774