

Darbar Emerging Artists Programme

Summer Cohort 2026 · Delivery window: June – September 2026

Programme	Darbar Emerging Artists Programme — Summer Cohort 2026
Delivery window	June to September 2026
Cohort size	6–8 emerging Indian classical musicians
Primary venue	Darbar Arts Lab, Hayes, West London (plus partner concert venues)
Artistic Director	Sandeep Virdee OBE
Participant fee	None — the programme is fully funded for selected artists

1. Programme Overview

The Darbar Emerging Artists Programme is a structured support initiative for outstanding emerging Indian classical musicians in the UK. It exists to close a well-documented equity gap: while Western classical musicians progress through a funded pathway of specialist schools, conservatoires and emerging-artist schemes, comparable infrastructure for Indian classical music has historically not existed. The programme provides a clear, fee-free route through advanced learning, real performance platforms, professional development and financial support.

This syllabus sets out the Summer 2026 cohort, delivered between June and September 2026 at the Darbar Arts Lab in Hayes and at partner venues. It is built around six core components, each described in full below, and maps to Darbar's established Four Pillars model.

The Four Pillars

- ❑ **Advanced Learning** — intensive skills training, mentorship and access to Darbar's archive.
- ❑ **Performance Platforms** — curated opportunities to perform at Darbar Festival ancillary events, in Leicester and at partnership concerts.
- ❑ **Professional Development** — the working musician, marketing and brand, sound technology, wellbeing, and funding readiness.
- ❑ **Financial Support** — guided support to access external funding, including the Arts Council England DYCP grant.

Programme aims

1. Equip emerging artists with the practical, professional and entrepreneurial skills needed to build sustainable performing careers.

2. Provide genuine, high-quality performance platforms beyond the conservatoire bubble.
3. Build each artist's funding readiness, with a live application to a national funder during the programme.
4. Recognise achievement formally through Darbar certification, creating a credential and an alumni network.

2. Who Should Apply

The Darbar Emerging Artists Programme is for outstanding Indian classical musicians in the UK who are approaching the threshold of a professional performing career. The criteria below set out who is eligible. Places are limited and the programme is competitive.

Essential eligibility

Requirement	Detail
Residency	Resident in the UK. Please see the note on the DYCP funding element below, which has a narrower geographic requirement.
Age	Aged 18 to 30 at the point of application.
Art form	Indian classical music only. Open to all recognised traditions — Hindustani, Carnatic and Dhrupad — and to percussionists. Vocalists and instrumentalists are equally welcome. Dance is not included in this programme.
Experience & CV	Demonstrable experience, with a CV that shows serious commitment to your art and that you are on the cusp of performing professionally.
Right to participate	The right to live and work in the UK, so that paid performance opportunities can be taken up.
Availability	Able to attend the full one-week intensive (August) and the key programme dates across June to September 2026.

What we look for

Beyond the essential criteria, the selection panel will be looking for:

- ☐ Evidence of serious, sustained practice and study — ideally with a recognised teacher or guru, reflecting the guru-shishya tradition.
- ☐ A body of performance experience appropriate to your stage — recitals, accompaniment, competitions or recordings.
- ☐ Readiness to take the step from advanced student to emerging professional, with clear motivation to use the programme to do so.
- ☐ The potential to benefit from, and contribute to, a small peer cohort of 6–8 artists.

How to apply

Applicants will be asked to submit:

1. A current CV or artistic biography.
2. A short personal statement covering your training, your goals, and why now is the right time.

3. A performance sample (audio or video — a recent live or studio recording). Some applicants may be invited to a short live audition.
4. One or two references, or a letter of support speaking to the quality of your practice. This also mirrors what Arts Council England asks for in a DYCP application.

A note on the DYCP funding element

Module 5 supports a live application to Arts Council England's DYCP. ACE is unable to accept applications from individuals based (living) outside England, and applicants must hold a UK bank account in their own name. You also cannot apply if you have already had one successful or two unsuccessful DYCP applications since 9 November 2021. Artists who are UK-resident but based outside England are welcome on the programme and will receive the same funding-readiness support, but for this particular grant should look to their own national funder (Creative Scotland, the Arts Council of Wales, or the Arts Council of Northern Ireland). Darbar will confirm each artist's DYCP eligibility individually during onboarding.

We particularly welcome

In line with Darbar's commitment to equity and Arts Council England's Let's Create strategy, we especially encourage applications from talented musicians who face financial or structural barriers to developing their practice. The programme is fee-free and we will work to make participation as accessible as possible. Access requirements can be discussed in confidence at any stage of the process.

Selection

Applications are assessed by a selection panel, which may include an audition or interview. Places are limited to 6–8 artists per cohort and the programme is competitive. There is no fee to apply or to take part.

3. Programme at a Glance

The schedule below is indicative and may be adjusted by the Artistic Director. Note the deliberate front-loading of the funding module: the Arts Council England DYCP round closes at midday on Thursday 2 July 2026, so funding guidance is delivered during onboarding in June, well before the August intensive.

When	Component	Focus
June (wks 2-4)	Module 1 — Onboarding	Welcome, induction, individual development plans, cohort agreement.
June (wks 2-4)	Module 5 — DYCP funding guidance	Begins immediately. ACE profile registration (allow up to 10 working days), then 1:1 application support.

By 2 July (midday)	DYCP applications submitted	Hard external deadline — Round 24 closes.
June – Sept (rolling)	Module 3 — Performance opportunities	Festival ancillary events, Leicester and partnership concerts, scheduled to suit each artist.
June – Sept (rolling)	Module 4 — Mentoring	3 hours of 1:1 mentoring with Sandeep Virdee OBE, scheduled across the window.
August (1 week)	Module 2 — Essential Skills Intensive	Six-day residential-style intensive at the Arts Lab, Hayes.
September	Module 6 — Certification & ceremony	Completion assessment, certification and showcase ceremony.
8 October	DYCP decisions (external)	ACE communicates funding decisions — after the programme concludes.

4. Core Syllabus

Module 1 — Onboarding

Timing: June 2026 (first two weeks of the programme).

Delivered by: Programme team, led by the Emerging Artists Programme Producer, with the Artistic Director.

Format: One in-person induction session at the Arts Lab, plus a 1:1 planning meeting per artist.

Onboarding orients each artist to the programme, sets expectations and establishes the individual goals that the rest of the programme will support. It is also the point at which the time-critical funding work begins (see Module 5).

Content

- ☐ Welcome and introduction to Darbar, the Arts Lab and the wider faculty and team.
- ☐ Overview of the Four Pillars and how the six modules fit together.
- ☐ Individual Development Plan (IDP): each artist completes a short plan capturing career stage, goals for the programme, and the development opportunity they will pursue (this doubles as the foundation for their DYCP application).
- ☐ Cohort agreement: attendance, conduct, commitment, safeguarding and communication channels.
- ☐ Practical induction: scheduling, venue access, points of contact, and the programme calendar.
- ☐ Early flag of the DYCP deadline and the steps required before 2 July.

Outcomes

- ☐ Each artist has a written Individual Development Plan and a clear schedule.
- ☐ Each artist understands the DYCP timeline and has begun ACE registration if eligible.

Module 2 — One-week ‘Essential Skills for Indian Classical Musicians’ Intensive

Timing: One week in September 2026 (proposed: week commencing Monday 7 September), Monday to Saturday.

Venue: Darbar Arts Lab, Hayes.

Structure: A four-day core (Days 1–4) with a two-day extension (Days 5–6: studio day and showcase).

The intensive is the centrepiece of the programme: a concentrated week covering the non-musical essentials that working Indian classical musicians need but rarely receive training in. Craft and artistic development (riyaz, repertoire and one-to-one coaching) run as separate modules at other points in the year and are intentionally kept outside this week.

Daily structure

Day	Theme	Focus	Lead
Day 1	The working musician	Management and planning — diary, bookings, contracts, fees, tax basics and career planning.	Sandeep Virdee OBE
Day 2	The musician as a brand	Marketing and fundraising — positioning, audience building, digital presence and storytelling.	Sana Ejaz (Marketing Executive)
Day 3	The amplified instrument	Sound technology — microphones, monitoring, the PA chain and working with sound engineers.	Christoph Bracher (Sound Engineer, 20+ yrs)
Day 4	The sustainable body and mind	Health and wellbeing — posture and yoga for floor-seated performance, stage anxiety, sustaining concentration across long improvised sets, and wellbeing on tour.	Kanwal Ahluwalia (Yoga Teacher)
Day 5	Studio day	Recording, film and photography — a professional capture of each artist's work for promotional use.	Expert photography & film crew
Day 6	Showcase concert	Performance for the Platinum Donors Club in the Arts Lab mini-theatre.	Programme team

Days 1–4 form the core; Days 5–6 (studio day and showcase) are the extension, giving each artist a professional recording and a live performance to a supportive donor audience to close the week.

Module 3 — Performance Opportunities

Timing: Rolling across June – September 2026, scheduled around availability.

Delivered by: Programme team, in partnership with host venues and promoters.

Real performance experience is central to the programme. Each artist is offered a curated set of platforms appropriate to their instrument and stage, with the aim of building stagecraft, audience experience and professional credits.

Platforms

- **Darbar Festival ancillary events** — supporting and fringe performances connected to the Festival, offering exposure to Darbar's audiences and networks.

- ☐ **Leicester concerts** — performances delivered through Darbar's Leicester activity and partners, reaching audiences beyond London.
- ☐ **Partnership concerts** — slots at concerts run with partner organisations and venues across the programme window.
- ☐ **Donors Club showcase** — the Day 6 intensive showcase for the Platinum Donors Club (see Module 2).

What each artist receives

- ☐ At least one programmed performance opportunity during the window (additional slots offered where suitable).
- ☐ Pre-performance preparation and, where relevant, a sound check informed by Day 3 of the intensive.
- ☐ Professional documentation (photo/film) of at least one performance for portfolio use.

Module 4 — Mentoring with the Artistic Director

Allocation: 3 hours of one-to-one mentoring per artist with Sandeep Virdee OBE, Artistic Director.

Timing: Scheduled flexibly across June – September 2026 (typically as three 1-hour sessions).

Each artist receives dedicated, personalised mentoring time with the Artistic Director. This is distinct from the Day 1 group session in the intensive: it is tailored to the individual's goals, the artistic and career questions in their Individual Development Plan, and their live funding application.

Typical use of the three hours

- ☐ Session 1 (June): career direction, goal-setting and refining the Individual Development Plan; sense-checking the DYCP development opportunity.
- ☐ Session 2 (July–August): artistic and repertoire questions, performance preparation, and reflection on early performance experiences.
- ☐ Session 3 (September): next steps, sustaining momentum after the programme, and connecting to Darbar's wider network.

Sessions can be reallocated to suit each artist; the three hours are a guaranteed minimum.

Module 5 — Funding Readiness: Arts Council England DYCP

Timing: Begins in June during onboarding — this is the most time-critical element of the programme.

Delivered by: Programme team, with 1:1 input from the Artistic Director and external guidance where helpful.

Key deadline — act in June

DYCP Round 24 closes at midday, Thursday 2 July 2026. ACE applicant-profile approval can take up to 10 working days, so eligible artists must register in early-to-mid June. Decisions are communicated by 8 October 2026 — after the programme ends.

Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) is Arts Council England's grant for individual creative and cultural practitioners to focus on their own career development. It is well-matched to emerging Indian classical

musicians and to this programme's aims. This module gives each eligible artist hands-on support to prepare and submit a strong application within the round.

DYCP at a glance

Round	Round 24
Opens	Midday, Thursday 4 June 2026
Closes	Midday, Thursday 2 July 2026 (hard deadline)
Decisions by	Thursday 8 October 2026
Grant range	£2,000 – £12,000 per individual
Purpose	Focused on your development as a practitioner — not project delivery or community-engagement work
Key requirement	A clear development opportunity, plan and budget; a letter of support; and why now is the right time
Eligibility note	You cannot apply if you have had one successful or two unsuccessful DYCP applications since 9 November 2021

How the module is delivered

1. Briefing (June, in onboarding): what DYCP is, eligibility check, and the timeline. Each artist confirms whether they can apply this round.
2. Registration: eligible artists register and create an applicant profile on the ACE grants system immediately — allowing up to 10 working days for approval.
3. Shaping the development opportunity: using the Individual Development Plan, each artist defines a meaningful, fundable shift in their practice.
4. Drafting support: 1:1 guidance on the application questions, plan and budget, plus sourcing a letter of support (allow plenty of time).
5. Review and submit: a final read-through before submission, well ahead of the midday 2 July deadline.

Note: this module builds funding-readiness skills that transfer to other funders even where an individual is not eligible for this particular round. Darbar provides guidance and support; the application remains the artist's own, and artists are encouraged to use ACE's official guidance and webinars.

Module 6 — Darbar Certification & Completion Ceremony

Timing: September 2026, at the close of the programme.

Venue: Darbar Arts Lab, Hayes.

The programme concludes with formal recognition. Darbar certification provides each artist with a credential, marks their transition through the programme, and inducts them into the Darbar emerging-artist alumni network.

Completion criteria

To receive Darbar certification, an artist is expected to have:

- ☐ Completed onboarding and an Individual Development Plan (Module 1).
- ☐ Attended the core of the Essential Skills Intensive (Module 2).
- ☐ Taken up at least one performance opportunity (Module 3).
- ☐ Completed their mentoring sessions (Module 4).
- ☐ Engaged with the funding-readiness module and, where eligible, submitted a DYCP application (Module 5).

The ceremony

- ☐ Presentation of certificates by the Artistic Director.
- ☐ A short showcase or reflective performance by the cohort, where appropriate.
- ☐ Audience of faculty, the programme team and invited guests, including Platinum Donors Club members.
- ☐ Formal welcome into the Darbar alumni network, with signposting to ongoing opportunities.

5. Programme Learning Outcomes

On successful completion, each artist will be able to:

1. Plan and manage the practical side of a performing career — bookings, fees, contracts and basic financial admin.
2. Present themselves professionally through clear positioning, marketing and a credible digital presence.
3. Work confidently with amplification and sound engineers in live settings.
4. Sustain physical and mental wellbeing for the specific demands of floor-seated, long-form improvised performance.
5. Deliver a professional live performance and use high-quality recorded assets to promote their work.
6. Identify, plan and apply for external funding, including a live application to Arts Council England's DYCP.