MCR. Culture Awards 2026



The Manchester
Deansgate Hotel

Saturday
14 November 2026

#MCRCultureAwards

MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

#MCRCultureAwards

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Foreword

Councillor Shazia Butt



As the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Libraries for the city, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2026 Manchester Culture Awards.

The Awards are a highlight in the city's calendar – a moment to showcase and celebrate the valuable contribution that culture, heritage and the arts make to our city through the amazingly diverse work that takes place across Manchester engaging both residents and visitors.

As my first year as a judge, I was impressed with the number and quality of the nominations. My fellow judges and I had a hard job, but we felt very inspired by the range of work and the dedication of those nominated. In this programme you will find 49 amazing finalists represented here this evening, selected from nearly 400 nominations.

The activities, events and exhibitions we shall learn about this evening demonstrate the city's cultural strategy – Always, Everywhere – in action. They demonstrate how the culture sector contributes to Manchester's reputation as a standout city for arts and culture, and also supports important priorities for the city and society, including education, health, environment and cohesion.

We couldn't hold these Awards without the backing of our supporters and sponsors, and I want to offer my thanks to you all for making tonight possible.

I also want to congratulate all the finalists and hope everyone has a great evening.

Please do shout out about all the achievements we'll hear of tonight, using #McrCultureAward and tag us on Instagram at MCR Culture.

Hosts

AFRODEUTSCHE



AFRODEUTSCHE is a Manchester-based composer, DJ, broadcaster and cultural leader whose work effortlessly connects electronic music, orchestral composition and contemporary storytelling. A self-taught artist of Ghanaian, Russian and German heritage, she has built an international reputation for her distinctive sound, earning a BAFTA nomination and Oscar shortlist recognition for her acclaimed score to the documentary ***Kamali***.

Widely known for her BBC Radio 6 Music and BBC Radio 3 programmes, AFRODEUTSCHE is equally at home behind the microphone, in the concert hall or on the global festival stage. Her creative collaborations span major cultural institutions, fashion houses and international commissions, including work for Factory International, the BBC Concert Orchestra and World Expo Osaka. Alongside her artistic achievements, she is a passionate advocate for music education and emerging talent, serving as an ambassador and trustee for Brighter Sound. From pioneering compositions to electrifying DJ sets, AFRODEUTSCHE continues to shape and champion contemporary culture on a global stage.

Jake Hardman



Jake is an artist from Blackley. He writes, produces and performs music and has had a few spins on BBC Radio Introducing as well as performing live on Radio Manchester. He performs in hilarious plays with MaD Theatre Company as well as working full time as a drama workshop facilitator in schools, hospitals, youth centres and places of worship.

Despite iPods being very unfashionable when he was in high school, he listened to The Smiths, Joy Division, New Order, James, the Happy Mondays, The Stone Roses, 10cc and the Hollies every day on an iPod during his school commute. He grew up on Alan Partridge and subsequently became a big fan of Steve Coogan, as well as loving the work of Bernard Hill (Yosser Hughes) who was a Blackley boy himself! For Jake, and for many, Manchester is the home of creativity.

Lekhani Chirwa



Lekhani is a Manchester-based actor, writer, facilitator and theatre maker originally from Cumbria. As a queer, working-class, and neurodivergent creative, she champions community and activism through storytelling. Lekhani won a 2024 Manchester Culture Award for her play Senses of Responsibility, which has been adapted into a filmed resource used across Greater Manchester schools to empower and champion young carers.

A graduate of the Channel 4 New Writers Scheme, her extensive stage and screen credits include Everyone Else Burns (C4), Doctors (BBC), and touring her acclaimed one-woman show Can I Touch Your Hair? She regularly collaborates with charities as a creative facilitator to drive social change through the arts.

Marie Greenhalgh



Marie Greenhalgh is the recently elected Chair of Manchester Age Friendly Board and the founder and a director with Wythenshawe Good Neighbours. She is a committed community advocate with a strong connection to Wythenshawe. Through her community responsibilities and achievements, she works to ensure that older people are heard, valued and able to influence the decisions that affect their lives. She has a particular interest in women's health as they grow older, championing greater awareness, better support and stronger connections within the community.

Lived experiences and storytelling are at the heart of her creativity. Marie's achievements include being a 2025 Manchester Culture Award nominee for her play, Dark Beautiful and Chaste, and, most recently, a nominee for a 2026 National Community Radio Award. Marie is driven by a belief that every person deserves a voice and the opportunity to remain active, informed and involved.

Judges

Councillor Shazia Butt



As one of the city's senior elected members with Executive responsibility, Shazia Butt has become a prominent figure in local government in Manchester. Her career demonstrates a commitment to public service, local representation, and ensuring that cultural and community services remain accessible to residents across the city.

Shazia was born and grew up in Manchester, completing an LLB Hons and Post Graduate DipLPC at Manchester Metropolitan University, then practised as a legal practitioner from 2009 until the present. Shazia was elected as a Councillor for the Cheetham ward in 2019 and then elected as the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Libraries in 2026. Shazia is passionate about public service, community engagement, and social inclusion.

Ruth Denton



Ruth Denton is the Child Friendly City Lead for Manchester, where she leads the city's commitment to ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of decision-making and have opportunities to thrive, participate, and have their rights respected. Manchester gained recognition as a UNICEF UK child friendly city earlier this year.

Having worked for Manchester City Council for 21 years, Ruth loves her job especially working with others to improve outcomes for children and communities across the city.

An advocate for children's rights and participation, Ruth has a particular interest in the importance of play in children's lives and the role it plays in supporting wellbeing, development, creativity, and social connection. Ruth enjoys working closely with partners, communities, and young people to help make Manchester a place where every child can grow up feeling valued, included, and heard.

Outside of work, Ruth enjoys travelling, camping, spending time in Mid Wales with her family, and attending Old Trafford to watch Manchester United (although she says not a particularly enjoyable experience over recent years!)

Dan Jarvis



Dan Jarvis is a Senior Relationship Manager at Arts Council England, working with places and cultural organisations across the North West. He leads relationships in Manchester, Salford, Rochdale, Stockport and Cheshire & Warrington, alongside North-wide work on Individuals & Freelancers and Engagement & Communities, including Creative People & Places (CPP). He has over 17 years' experience across theatre and the wider cultural sector.

Before joining Arts Council England, he worked with organisations including The Lowry, Manchester Jewish Museum, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art (now esea contemporary) and Z-arts, across audience development, marketing and evaluation. Alongside this, he has worked as a freelance theatre producer, director and dramaturge.

He founded and co-directed Green Carnation Theatre, an independent LGBTQ+ theatre company, and has worked as an arts project manager and funding and evaluation consultant. Away from work, he's usually hiking, birdwatching or singing in a choir.

John Rooney



John is originally from Belfast and has lived and worked in Greater Manchester since 1990. He has widespread experience of working in a variety of local government roles with partners and communities to transform services and neighbourhoods. As Director of Neighbourhood Delivery at Manchester City Council, John's responsibilities include overseeing Libraries, Galleries, Events, Leisure, Contracts, Parks and Operational Services.

As part of his role at the City Council, John is the Council's senior lead for the Bridgewater Hall and is a Board member of the Manchester Libraries Trust, Manchester Museums Partnership Oversight Group and Sports City Management Company.

John is passionate about the world of culture and has been a strong advocate for the role that it can play in communities, improving wellbeing and supporting the visitor economy. John felt privileged to again be invited to be on the judging panel and was so impressed by the quality and outcomes of all the shortlisted entries.

Callum Shallcross



Callum won the Bright Spark: Young Creative of the Year at the 2025 Manchester Culture Awards. At 16 he founded Flip the Script with a determination to reshape who leads and tells stories in theatre. As CEO and Artistic Director, he delivers workshops to GCSE students and mentors young creatives, empowering them to lead with confidence, creativity, and purpose.

Performers

Louise Thomson



Winner of the Harp Finals at the 2003 Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales Competition, and finalist in the 2005 London International Harp Competition, Louise Thomson has earned a reputation as a versatile and accomplished harpist, with an innovative and virtuosic approach that enables her to fully explore the instrument's capabilities. Her playing has taken her to concert halls around the UK including the Royal Albert Hall, Cardiff's St David's Hall and the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, as well as the Buxton, Ryedale, Ripon, and Whiddon Autumn Festivals.

She has performed live on Radio 3, and on BBC Television with soprano Katherine Jenkins. In addition to her solo work, Louise collaborates with young vocal ensemble the Corvus Consort, and together they released their album 'Welcome Joy', a celebration of women's voices, on Chandos in 2024. Louise performed at the 2022 World Harp Congress in collaboration with presenter Polly Ives, and in January 2024 she directed and curated the inaugural MANCHESTER HarpFestival and Competition, which will return in 2027. Louise takes great pride in her teaching, which includes posts at the Royal Northern College of Music and Chetham's School of Music.

SoulBeats Dance Troupe



SoulBeats Dance Troupe brings together diverse communities through the vibrant expression of Bollywood, Indian folk, and fusion dance. From representing South Asian culture at the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in London to performing at the Manchester Day Parade and local festivals, the group celebrates unity, diversity, and artistic passion on every stage.

Finalists

Igniting Creativity: Culture, Education and Talent Development



Facilitate Z-arts

The Facilitate programme at Z-arts provided ten paid internships, training and mentoring for ten young people from underrepresented communities. Participants gained practical arts facilitation experience while supporting inclusive creative activities for hundreds of children and families. The programme built skills, confidence and real creative career pathways. What stood out was the tangible opportunity combined with a commitment to diversify Manchester's next generation of creative talent.

Mindgames SICK! Productions

SICK! Productions' Mindgames invited young adults experiencing poor mental health to explore their love of video gaming. With the support of a mental health practitioner and creative professionals, including illustrators, script writers, musicians and a game developer the group created prototype video games, gained employability skills, explored their creativity and gained confidence. One group member remarked: "Mindgames is so important to me. I can't believe I'm actually making a game!"





Artworks in Schools

Manchester Art Gallery

Artworks in Schools brings modern and contemporary art from Manchester's civic collection into education settings. It works with teachers and pupils to select art for display in classrooms and shared spaces that reflects local needs and interests. Pupils explore artworks with artists and report it inspires curiosity, reflection, self-expression and a sense of pride.

Hope Mill Theatre

Hope Mill Theatre has grown from a small local venue into a vibrant cultural hub, offering youth theatre, amateur dramatics, a community orchestra and choir, and a new musical theatre degree programme. Through inclusive outreach and talent development opportunities, the theatre nurtures young people and emerging professionals, creating pathways into theatre careers while providing a welcoming, high-quality and community-focused environment.



Champions of Equality and Social Justice



Our Queer Future

LGBT Foundation

Our Queer Future brought together over forty LGBTQ+ people and allies to explore the north west's queer heritage and co-create a vision for queer life in 2050. Through workshops, participants generated more than 700 ideas, resulting in 14 aspiration statements and an illustrated roadmap that celebrates diversity, amplifies underrepresented voices, and inspires a more inclusive future.



Deaf Digital Productions

Reform Radio CIC and Bolton Deaf Society

Deaf Digital Productions was a content creation and digital skills training programme for Deaf people aged 18–30 across Greater Manchester. It worked in partnership with Manchester Deaf Centre, Walthew House and cultural and creative organisations to produce accessible visual content. This Deaf-led programme equipped participants with industry skills, secured paid-work opportunities, improved sector accessibility, and reached over 50,000 people.

ANEW Way to Peel an Orange

Castlefield Gallery, Portraits of Recovery and ANEW

ANEW Way to Peel an Orange was a collaborative exhibition by artist Joe Hartley and ANEW recovery and homelessness service. Co-created with recoverists, it featured ceramics, photography, film, murals, and a gallery garden. Reaching over 8,000 people through the exhibition, events, workshops and wider programme, it demonstrated how creative co-production and cross-sector collaboration strengthen community voice and support wellbeing.





Black in the Game

National Football Museum

Black in the Game was a three-year National Lottery Heritage Fund project, celebrating and exploring the experiences of people of Black heritage in football. Co-created with a lived-experience steering group, it delivered major exhibitions, public programmes and lasting institutional change for the museum, increasing Black heritage visitor engagement by 150% while embedding Black stories within collections, displays, staff training and future opportunities.

Bright Spark: Young Creative of the Year



Sam Wright

Sam Wright joined First Story's Young Creatives Collective, a national group of ten young creatives, in April 2025. They developed and delivered ***Inkling***, a youth-led zine featuring 23 creative submissions from young people. Sam contributed to planning, editing, production, launch, and nationwide distribution to schools and partners. He was lead designer and created the original YCC logo. Since joining the YCC, Sam has become a confident, creative young person and is excited to continue with the collective this year.



Demereece Green

Demereece Green is a young creative from Harpurhey who uses creativity to empower others. Through his part in the North Manchester Youth Collective to co-creating The Home We Made at HOME, and leading creative sessions for at-risk young people, Demereece has created a safe space for young people to explore issues such as knife crime, racism and community identity through writing and the spoken word. In The Home We Made, Demereece said: "No one chooses the council estate kid from a single-parent household who became a dad at 15," telling other working-class young Mancunians they can overcome adversity and achieve their aspirations.

Marques Jones

Marques Jones is a young musician, performer and facilitator from Wythenshawe. He is inspiring other young people through live performances, music production, songwriting and youth arts sessions, helping young people access creative opportunities and develop their own potential. Marques has been involved in Wythenshawe Live Nights, Civic Sounds of the Summer and the BRITs fringe programme, among others.



Making it Happen: Best Business Partnership



Odd Arts Corporate Development Committee

Odd Arts Corporate Development Committee brought together Manchester businesses to deliver practical support, including refurbished creative spaces, food and refreshments for beneficiaries, legal expertise, apprenticeship funding, technology, volunteering and event sponsorship. Through sustained collaboration and in-kind investment, the partnership expanded cultural opportunities, strengthened organisational capacity and provided a powerful model of business support for the cultural sector. Members include Tyler Grange, Hip Pop, Browne Jacobson, Shoosmiths, The Co-operative Bank, Sodexo, Growth-hub, Auto-trader, Elle R Leisure, Alvarez & Marsal, Zola Systems and Innovestech plus many more!

Venture Arts and Sheila Bird Studio

Venture Arts and Sheila Bird Studio collaborated to design and deliver a significantly expanded, fully accessible studio space for learning-disabled artists. Through extensive in-kind expertise, project leadership, material donations and collaborative design, the partnership transformed Venture Arts' facilities, creating a high-quality creative environment that supports artistic ambition, accessibility and future growth.

Factory International, Aviva and Manchester City Council

Aviva and Factory International, with support from Manchester City Council, developed a wide-ranging partnership that supported audiences, artists and future creative professionals through affordable ticket schemes, skills programmes, industry training and digital learning resources. Combining investment, expertise and cultural leadership, the partnership expanded access to culture, strengthened Manchester's creative ecosystem and enhanced the city's international cultural profile.





Cheetham Cultural Festival and Manchester Fort Shopping Park

Cheetham Cultural Festival and Manchester Fort Shopping Park worked together to deliver a four-day celebration of Cheetham Hill's cultural diversity through arts, music, food, and community activities. By combining funding, marketing support, community space and ongoing collaboration, the partnership strengthened a valued local festival, broadened participation and fostered connection across diverse communities.

Excellence in Creative Health and Wellbeing



Mindgames

SICK! Productions

SICK! Productions' Mindgames invited young adults experiencing poor mental health to explore their love of video gaming. With the support of a mental health practitioner and creative professionals, including illustrators, script writers, musicians and a game developer the group created prototype video games, gained employability skills, explored their creativity and gained confidence. One group member remarked: "Mindgames is so important to me. I can't believe I'm actually making a game!"

Home from HOME

HOME

Home from HOME is HOME's creative engagement programme that takes place across Gorton, Hulme and Moss Side. Focusing on women and young people, the programme strives to improve health and wellbeing, foster connection and increase access to creativity for residents. One participant commented: "It has drastically improved my mental health; Home from HOME feels like a family."



The Creative Drop-In

The Horsfall, 42nd Street

42nd Street's Creative Drop-In addresses a gap in mental health provision, offering a free flexible creative space for young people to explore creativity and connect, supporting mental health and emotional wellbeing. The Horsfall is a gallery and space for creative engagement, where a programme of activity centred around art and nature is designed to support positive mental health and wellbeing for young people.



Man Made Men

Contact Theatre

Man Made Men engaged young men experiencing mental health challenges in an eight-month programme of music therapy, theatre and storytelling, culminating in a public performance at Contact. The project demonstrated the transformative potential of creative wellbeing support, building confidence, resilience and lasting peer networks. It also empowered participants to pursue new opportunities, support others and become positive role models within their communities.

Our Planet: Acting on Climate Change



The Power Hall: The Andrew Law Gallery

Science and Industry Museum

Transforming a historic industrial landmark into a living showcase for low-carbon technologies powerfully demonstrates how cultural heritage can drive climate action. The Power Hall combines significant carbon reduction with inspiring public engagement. Extensive education, skills and volunteering programmes foster future green innovators, while broad visitor reach and biodiversity improvements create lasting environmental impact.



EarthSonic Live at Manchester Museum

In Place of War and Manchester Museum

This event brought together more than 3,000 people for a day of talks, workshops and performances that explored nature, biodiversity and climate change through music and sound. Combining creativity, science and environmental action, the event engaged audiences in meaningful climate conversations, fostered new partnerships, and inspired confidence, motivation and hope for positive change.



The Herds

Factory International and The Walk Productions

The Herds brought 70 life-sized puppet animals to Manchester city centre as part of an ambitious international public art project highlighting climate-driven displacement. Through a powerful combination of spectacle, storytelling and community participation, it engaged thousands of people, successfully raising awareness of the climate crisis and inspiring reflection, conversation and action.

Remember Nature Manchester 2025, Nature Remembered

Castlefield Gallery

Artist Yu-Chen Wang worked with United Creatives, environmental groups, and residents to produce a citywide walk, pop-up exhibitions, screenings, demonstrations, broadcasts, and digital takeovers, which all focused on nature recovery. The strong partnership approach and reach successfully demonstrated how culture can inspire collective action, lasting impact, and increased environmental engagement. Hulme Community Garden Centre, Manchester Art Gallery, Unity Radio, and Venture Arts all contributed to the project.



Independent Creative of the Year

Josh Wilkinson

Josh is a theatre maker, director and cultural leader who champions opportunities for young people and working-class communities across Manchester. Co-founder of award-winning creative company Malandra Jacks, Josh tells authentic stories through film, theatre and immersive installation. He works with arts organisations and charities across the UK, developing work that reflects society and celebrates everyday people.



Hawwa Alam

Hawwa Alam has a clear conviction: that art is a form of resistance, and she says her art reflects the communities it speaks for. Every project she chose during the year was made with, for and alongside Manchester's Muslim, Black and Brown communities. Hawwa treats creativity as a discipline and a responsibility, and Manchester's cultural landscape is sharper, braver and more beautiful for it.



Michael Beard

In 2025, Michael Beard became the first learning-disabled, non-verbal artist commissioned by Manchester International Festival. During a residency he created 80 metres of paintings featuring repeated and layered text inspired by places he loves, including Manchester. This work was developed through a live collaboration with Company Chameleon and Manchester Camerata, bringing together visual art, dance and music in three unique performances. Michael is a member of Venture Arts studios.





Sam Edwards

Sam Edwards' commitment to make art accessible for everyone runs through the heart of her work creating high-quality, creative sessions that include textiles, painting, printing and ceramics. She has worked hard to create exhibition opportunities for participants across Manchester, curating Ripples of Arty Joy at HOME and supporting groups and individuals to submit artwork to the Manchester Open. She also helped relaunch the Big Burnage Parade, co-creating a lamp post installation of 40 artworks made by over 200 participants from the local area.

Outstanding Storytelling

40 Years of HIV Activism: The Movie

George House Trust

To mark its 40th anniversary, George House Trust commissioned a short film that celebrated its role in supporting people living with HIV and documenting Manchester's response to the AIDS crisis. It combined personal stories, archive material and community voices, also highlighting activism, resilience and collaboration. The film reached thousands locally and internationally, inspiring audiences to recognise the power of collective action.



BLOOM

From the Other with AFRODEUTSCHE, The Hallé, Belladonis, Company Chameleon

Fusing music, fashion and dance, BLOOM was a brand-new performance that debuted at EXPO Osaka in June 2025, ahead of three performances in Manchester and Oldham during Japan Week in September 2025, which celebrated Greater Manchester and Osaka's relationship across history. For this project, From The Other brought together composer and DJ AFRODEUTSCHE, dance troupe Company Chameleon, and queer-led fashion brand Belladonis to create a brand-new performance. This also featured a string ensemble from the world-renowned Hallé orchestra, including virtuosic violinist Roberto Ruisi.





The Corinthians: We Were The Champions

Film Not Words

The Corinthians: We Were The Champions is a Manchester-made documentary celebrating the pioneering Corinthians Ladies FC, who defied the FA's ban on women's football to become world champions. Featuring surviving players' stories, unseen footage and animation, it sparked national attention, prompted an FA apology, inspired a statue, and created a lasting legacy promoting equality in football.



There's a Lot I Haven't Asked Podcast

Hannah Donelan

Co-created with Manchester's Irish community, this immersive podcast combines personal testimony, documentary storytelling and original music, weaving together poignant stories of migration, identity, and resilience. Supported by community outreach and accessibility initiatives, the project has strengthened cultural connection, challenged stereotypes and created a lasting and vibrant archive of Irish Mancunian experiences.

Partners included Consulate General of Ireland Manchester, Blueprint Studios and Michael McGoldrick Music.

The Marcus Rashford Wall of Hope – An Educational Resource

Manchester Libraries and Withington Walls

The Marcus Rashford Wall of Hope: An Educational Resource is an immersive digital learning experience that tells the story of the Withington mural and the community's anti-racist response following Euro 2021. Created by Manchester Libraries and partners, it combines more than 100 items from the archive, including film, oral histories and classroom activities. The engaging narrative allows schools and communities to explore empathy, solidarity and local history.

LIBERATION

Royal Exchange Theatre Company and Manchester International Festival

LIBERATION, commissioned by the Royal Exchange Theatre and premiered at Manchester International Festival 2025, brought the story of the 1945 Fifth Pan-African Congress to life through a powerful new play by Ntombizodwa Nyoni. Performed by ten actors mainly from global-majority backgrounds, it combined exceptional storytelling, historical research and community engagement. The play reached over 10,000 people, broadening access through inclusive performances, and deepening understanding of Manchester's role in global liberation movements.



The Best Exhibition



The Beginning of Knowledge

Santiago Yahuarcani at The Whitworth

Santiago Yahuarcani's first international solo exhibition brought Uitoto ancestral knowledge into vivid focus. An indigenous artist and leader from the Peruvian Amazon, he creates monumental paintings using natural pigments on bark cloth, sharing stories of his people and exploring humanity's relationship with the natural world. Partners included Ampersand Foundation, Museo Universitario del Chopo and Museu de Arte de São Paulo.



Adventures in Wonderland

Z-arts

Z-arts' gallery was transformed into a fully immersive Wonderland where children passed through interactive environments featuring hands-on installations inspired by Lewis Carroll's classic story. Rather than simply observing the exhibition, children became part of the story. Since opening, it has welcomed more than 11,000 visitors, including over 2,000 school pupils.

Recoverist Curators: Reimagining the World We Live In

Portraits of Recovery and The Whitworth

The exhibition demonstrated how cultural institutions can listen, share power, and work alongside marginalised communities. Six people in recovery reinterpreted works from The Whitworth collection through a Recoverist lens. One visitor who described themself as in recovery, said seeing themself 'so wholly in one space' was 'emotional and life affirming'.





Roots in the Sky

HOME

Roots in the Sky brought together works by ten local, national and international artists in an exhibition exploring Black diasporic experiences, heritage and cultural connection. Combining commissioned and existing work, the show delivered a powerful and accessible artistic experience, attracting strong visitor engagement and generating deeply personal responses that demonstrated its lasting impact.

The Best Event



The Success of Moss Side

SNE Studios

The Success of Moss Side transformed a film premiere into a unique community-led celebration, bringing Moss Side's stories, achievements and voices to a major cultural venue – Aviva Studios. Through inclusive programming, local partnerships and civic dialogue, the event challenged perceptions, celebrated community identity and demonstrated the power of culture to place communities at the heart of the narrative.



Manchester Jazz Festival 2025

Marking its landmark 30th year, Manchester Jazz Festival 2025 delivered an ambitious programme of performances, commissions, community celebrations and public engagement activities across the city. The festival's enduring legacy of championing diverse artists, supporting emerging talent and providing accessible cultural experiences has made it a valued and influential part of Manchester's cultural life.



Balkan Erotic Epic

Factory International and Marina Abramović

Balkan Erotic Epic reimagined Aviva Studios as an immersive, large-scale performance environment, bringing together internationally renowned artist Marina Abramović, a multidisciplinary creative team and a predominantly Northern cast. Through its artistic ambition, innovative staging and international reach, the event elevated Manchester's profile as a centre for world-class contemporary art and cultural production.



Music for the Senses

Wild in Art

Music for the Senses brought art, music and creativity into public spaces across Manchester through an ambitious citywide trail of installations, murals and artworks. By removing barriers to engagement, attracting diverse audiences and reinvesting funds into grassroots music and local artists, the event delivered both an immediate impact and a lasting cultural legacy.

The Best Performance



ROAD

Royal Exchange Theatre Company

Opening the Royal Exchange Theatre's 50th anniversary season, ROAD was a bold revival of Jim Cartwright's classic, directed by Selina Cartmell. Selling out before the opening date, this immersive production transformed the theatre into a Northern street, earned widespread five-star acclaim and captivated 22,759 theatregoers with humour, humanity and relevance.



The Home We Made

HOME

The Home We Made was an ambitious HOME and Malandra Jacks co-production rooted in Manchester's identity. Blending theatre, film, projection, spoken word and live performance, it celebrated local stories through authentic collaboration with artists and residents. Strong audience feedback highlighted its emotional impact, artistic excellence, and lasting resonance with Manchester communities.



Philharmonia Orchestra with Marin Alsop and Alisa Weilerstein

The Bridgewater Hall

Held during the week of International Women's Day as part of The Bridgewater Hall's International Concert Series, this performance brought together internationally acclaimed cellist Alisa Weilerstein and conductor Marin Alsop for a programme featuring a new work by leading composer Gabriela Ortiz. Audiences praised the orchestra, conductor and soloist, describing the experience as a privilege. Many highlighted the significance of celebrating these outstanding women in music so soon after International Women's Day, calling the concert inspiring and thrilling.

The Hallé Presents: Honey Dijon

The Hallé Orchestra and Honey Dijon

In a night of stunning orchestral arrangements, anthemic House and unapologetic celebration, the Hallé Orchestra and Chicago-born DJ Honey Dijon joined forces for a unique concert in Manchester. Welcoming 1,387 fans from across genres, the event celebrated how extraordinary collaborations can bring people together through a shared love of music.

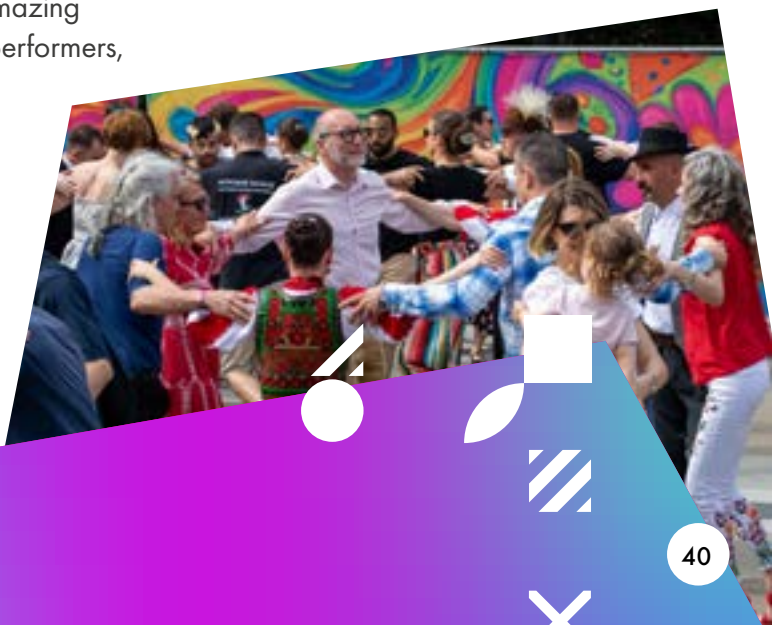


The Cultural Welcome Award

Góbéfest

Beat Bazaar

Beat Bazaar, led by Ottilia Ördög, is the organisation behind the annual Góbéfest. This international festival of culture and joyous celebration gives people the opportunity to experience new music and dance, discover new food, and connect with diverse cultures through live performances, creative workshops and hands-on activities for all ages. Góbéfest involves an amazing range of partners and performers, including MIRO, Salford University World Music Department, Manchester City Council, Polonez, TK Ripni-Ka North West Bulgarian Dance Group, Podilya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble, Hunique Hungarian Dance Ensemble, Unity Radio, Gorse Hill Studios, Liszt Institute, and Kalinka Balalaika Orchestra.





The Circus House

The Circus House, based in Longsight, represents the very best of Manchester's community spirit, creating opportunities for people to take part in circus, creativity and performance. It is an inclusive community space where everyone is welcome, including neurodivergent participants, families, first-time visitors, people experiencing poor mental health, and those facing social isolation. Staff and members work together to create an environment where people feel comfortable, supported and able to take part at their own pace.

One person remarked: "It's got me doing things I never believed in a million years I would be able to. It just makes me feel completely alive."



The Edge Theatre and Arts Centre

The Edge is a busy, thriving theatre, arts centre and cinema, offering award-winning programmes for a large community of learning-disabled and neurodivergent actors. They all cherish The Edge as their own, and for many, it's their second home.

"I am appreciated, valued and seen for being just who I am," one participant said.

53two

53two Theatre is an independent cultural venue in the city centre that has made accessibility and inclusion central to everything it does. As Manchester's only fully accessible independent theatre, it removes barriers that often prevent people from participating in the arts, including access to a Changing Places toilet. This ensures that disabled visitors with complex needs can attend performances and events with dignity and confidence. The friendliness of the staff and volunteers is consistently outstanding; they are approachable, informed and passionate, welcoming visitors as individuals.





Hope Mill Theatre

Since opening in 2015, Hope Mill Theatre in Ancoats has become a beloved and inclusive venue. It is one of the most successful and reputable independent theatres in England, well known for its extraordinary and award-winning productions. Comprising an amateur dramatic company, a theatre school for local children, and a community choir and orchestra, the theatre is a safe and inclusive home for audiences and artists alike. It is also a welcoming LGBTQ safe space.

A reviewer wrote: "Hope Mill Theatre Arts is a little piece of heaven on earth; you'll find it hidden away in a mill in the heart of Manchester, serving the local community but attracting those from far and wide."

blachere illumination

AFTER 10 YEARS...

ZIPPY RETURNS

TO ALBERT SQUARE WITH A SPECIAL SURPRISE IN STORE

This year he's found himself a brand-new perch, designed and brought to life by Blachere Illumination UK. Zippy's set for a **cracking Christmas in Manchester,** and you're invited to step inside the fun. An immersive experience awaits...



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- Improved energy efficiency
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