



# Leicester

WORLD-CLASS  
ARTS & CULTURE

# FOREWORD

Leicester is bursting with talent and inventiveness. We perform, paint, print, and create. We take the world of imagination into every neighbourhood and community – and we export our life-affirming creativity to distant corners of the globe.

This collection is a snapshot. It features 19 of our best-known and most successful cultural organisations – the tip of a world-class artistic and cultural offer that is at last being taken seriously at a national level.

Two things stand out: the glorious diversity of our creative output and the ambition of those who want to release even more of the talent that lies within us. From my first days as City Mayor I have shared that ambition. I've supported local art and culture because it strengthens our identity and generates such strong economic benefits.

If you're unfamiliar with Leicester, this booklet is for you. It tells anyone who's thinking of living, working, or investing in Leicester that the city is alive with excitement and creative opportunity.

It's not the whole story, of course. There's much more going on, and so much more potential yet to be realised. In so many countless ways Leicester will move, challenge, and exhilarate you.



Peter Soulsby  
City Mayor





## RENAISSANCE CITY

**No city can have a renaissance if it hasn't enjoyed a golden past. The roots of Leicester's explosion of creativity reach far beyond the discovery of a king in a car park and the unexpected landing of a Premier League trophy.**

The city that hosts six active theatres and concert halls used to have many, many more. The Palace Theatre of Varieties (opened 1901) could seat 3,500, welcomed Charlie Chaplin and Marie Lloyd, and was the country's largest theatre outside London. Leicester Society of Artists has been promoting art since 1882, and Leicester Drama Society has been active since 1922.

True, there were dull years. When the playwright Joe Orton swapped Leicester's dreary post-war gloom for London, he was escaping a glitch in our cultural history. But even so, both he and his near-contemporary, the Oscar-winning film-maker Lord Richard Attenborough, still managed to absorb some of the Leicester stardust during their teenage, career-nurturing performances at The Little Theatre.

**Unconventional and unquenchable**  
Now we're on the rise, and the stardust is once again touching thousands of lives. Arts Council England's recognition of 16 National Portfolio Organisations in Leicester, including six recent additions, reflects our city-wide renaissance in arts and culture. These and the other class-leading cultural organisations gathered in this booklet are the uppermost tier in a creative ecosystem driven by our wild and unquenchable multiculturalism, by our underplayed heritage, and by minds unshackled by convention.

If you like the 19 organisations collected here, you'll love everything else that Leicester has to offer.

**“ Leicester is now ...  
the top destination for  
producing musicals  
outside London. ”**

**Cameron Mackintosh**



## FUNDING A NURSERY FOR NATIONAL TALENT

**Leicester is stirring the national consciousness. When Arts Council England announced its current round of funding in 2017, it chose Leicester's Curve for the launch event. In creative terms, no other city is growing so fast. Six of the Arts Council's 42 new National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) are in Leicester, which raises the city's NPO tally to 16.**

At that launch event, Darren Henley OBE, the Arts Council's Chief Executive, described our "extraordinary, ever-evolving, multi-ethnic local culture" as "a nursery for national talent". Cities like Leicester, he said, "are a testament to how a bold vision and sustained investment can kick-start local economies and inspire pride in the places we live."

As a result, Arts Council funding now reaches a much wider range of age groups, communities, and interests across the city. One Leicester-based partnership between De Montfort University and Arts Council England even takes the nursery concept literally. Talent25 is a ground-breaking research project to learn about the benefits to babies and young children of regular involvement in arts and creative activities.

In Leicester it doesn't matter who you are: if you want to express yourself through dance, theatre, art, or music – or see what happens when people like you let their own talents loose – you can do it here. Arts Council support is reaching the communities that count.

Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

**“** Leicester has been through a cultural renaissance in the past 15 years. It's a great example of cultural regeneration. The city has all the ingredients: a young and diverse population plus a local authority and a Mayor who believes in culture and its ability to drive a successful city. In Leicester, the strength of the local partnerships is crucial, together with council support and strong business models. Where we see these great ideas and genuine partnerships, our funding makes a difference. **”**

**Peter Knott**  
Midlands Area Director, Arts Council England

# AAKASH ODEDRA COMPANY



“ An exceptionally agile dancer who, it appears, has no trouble slipping between styles, effortlessly multilingual. ”

*New York Times*



**On stage, Aakash Odedra is mesmerising: beautiful, poetic, fluid as mercury, undulating like a flock of starlings at sunset. Trained since childhood in traditional Kathak dance, Aakash fuses classical and contemporary styles to create his own unique language of movement. His style has global appeal, but Belgrave Road is its natural home.**

Rooted in Leicester, Aakash Odedra Company blends the ancient and modern to tell stories through dance that are relevant to today's audiences. The company creates original dance productions that tour internationally, while at home its team of education producers, Moving Together, provides a wide programme of projects, classes, and activities for the local community.

From its studios in Belgrave, Aakash Odedra Company works to eliminate the barriers and inequalities that stop people accessing dance and culture. It makes dance available to everyone from age two upwards.

For Aakash Odedra Company, dance is a fundamental right. It uses the medium's transformational power to build communities and help people lead happier and healthier lives. The company partners with Shiamak, the global leader in Bollywood and Indo-contemporary dance, to offer classes throughout the UK.

From summer schools, Arts Award activities, and over-65s classes in Leicester to rapturous overseas audiences, Aakash Odedra Company never fails to bring people to their feet.

[akashodedra.com](http://akashodedra.com)

**AAKASH  
ODEDRA  
COMPANY**



“It’s beautiful and brings everyone together.”

Audience member  
*Night of Festivals*

**ArtReach turns your world upside-down. When its festivals come to town, the streets sparkle with light and colour, the beats are loud and compulsive, strangers dance, laughter etches your facial lines into carefree permanence.**

ArtReach is the driving force behind dozens of European street festivals that bring communities together – and get them thinking. There’s an edge to an ArtReach festival – freedom, democracy, cultural mixing – timely reminders that public art and performance can be meaningful and fun.

The annual *Journeys Festival International* (Leicester, Manchester, Portsmouth) brings together refugee artists and the asylum-seeking community into an artistic event celebrating their lives and creative talents.

As creative consultants, ArtReach has touched millions more lives through the commissioning of public art, evaluation, strategic planning, and organisational and capital-project development.

ArtReach understands that arts centres and illuminated stiltwalkers stay on their feet far longer when supported by fundraising, experience, and clear-sighted professionalism.

Across the country, cultural and community projects have flourished with ArtReach’s help and advice.

They include the New Art Exchange in Nottingham, Norden Farm Centre for the Arts in Maidenhead, the Curzon Community Cinema in Clevedon, Cornerstone Didcot, and Leicester’s very own Curve and Peepul Centre.

For the rest of us, ArtReach is just the wildest street party we’re likely to see all year.

[artreach.biz](http://artreach.biz)

**ArtReach**®

# ATTENBOROUGH ARTS CENTRE

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**Every city should have an Attenborough Arts Centre. This is the gallery, venue, workshop, and performance space that wears its culture as lightly as the silk parachutes and floor cushions in its experiential sessions. Stepping inside feels like coming home – and everyone's welcome.**

The AAC eliminates barriers to contemporary art. It's the great leveller that lifts everyone it touches; it delights in taking you out of your comfort zone but holds your hand every step of the way.

That's its ethos. As one of just five venues in the UK that are purpose-built for disabled artists and audiences, the AAC is art and culture for all, no questions asked.

The range and output are phenomenal: well over 200 shows and events a year, and nearly a thousand creative learning sessions.

From poetry to performance art, from life classes to live music, from mixed media to mixed messages, the AAC is as free-thinking, approachable, and down-to-earth as its inspirational first patron, Lord Attenborough.

As a champion of risk, diversity, and emerging talent, the AAC follows in his footsteps.

Leicester loves its AAC. When the venue needed funds for an extension, a thousand people put their hands in their pockets. Others enjoy its relaxed generosity as they settle into a free late-night performance in the coffee shop.

[attenborougharts.com](http://attenborougharts.com)



**“ I wanted to thank you all for making our residents feel so welcome, they truly had a fantastic time! ... The residents both said they were treated like VIPs, and they loved the fact they were treated like individuals ... You all made it a truly special day. ”**

**Emma**  
after a visit from her Leicester care home



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# A GREAT NIGHT (OR DAY) OUT

**As dusk falls, Leicester's cultural scene comes to life. Why stay in when the neon of night-time entertainment burns so brightly? This is the city for inventiveness and fun – for howling with laughter, roaring with the crowd, or holding your breath in awed, whatever-happens-next silence.**

## A night with the stars

In Leicester's cultural quarter, Curve dominates the skyline and the nation's West End connections. This is Cameron Mackintosh's top destination for launching musicals outside London. Every big show comes here; many of them began life on the Curve stage. At the nearby Phoenix you can catch just about any film you've ever wanted to see, or step into a thought-provoking future at a virtual-reality screening.

For the nation's most popular bands and liveliest entertainers, the De Montfort Hall offers a vast auditorium and pin-sharp acoustics. From spellbound Philharmonia Orchestra concert-goers to adoring rock and pop fans, everyone finds something to love in the De Montfort Hall's schedule. Down the hill at the Attenborough Arts Centre, the spaces are smaller and the mood is more intimate. It's as close as you can get to inviting a jazz or folk group into your home.

## City of festivals

Leicester enjoys more than 270 days of festivals each year. On any of the 19 days of Leicester Comedy Festival, you can choose from around 45 shows. And you'll share the venue – maybe even some banter – with comedy lovers from across Britain and beyond.

Other lively festivals include *Let's Dance International Frontiers* and *Black History Month* (both organised by Serendipity), *Bring The Paint* (Graffwerk), *Journeys Festival International* (ArtReach), *The Spark Festival* (The Spark Arts for Children), and the *Darbar Fringe* (Darbar).

## Children and young people

If you're young, you don't just want to watch others having fun, you want to get stuck in yourself. The Spark Arts for Children show what young children can do, The Mighty Creatives and *UK Kids' Comedy Festival* fire up children of all ages, while Soft Touch Arts gives young adults a chance to express themselves through any of their thousand-and-one extraordinary talents. Bamboozle takes theatre to children on the autistic spectrum or with learning disabilities, and Attenborough Arts Centre is purpose-built for disabled children to create or enjoy art.

The Philharmonia Orchestra invites young musicians from every community to take part in orchestral music; Leicester Museums and Galleries encourages children to get hands-on with history.

## Art and creativity for all

Sometimes the best night out is the one you throw yourself into. You can brush up your dance moves with Aakash Odedra Company, learn the most sophisticated print techniques at Leicester Print Works, or create digital art at Phoenix. In Leicester, artistic expression really is for everyone.

**“It was the most fun I've [had] in the whole year.”**

**Zakiyyah  
after seeing an Attenborough  
Arts Centre exhibition**

# BAMBOOZLE

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**In a Bamboozle show, children are at the heart of the action. Every child is acknowledged and valued; each one enjoys individual attention. The approach generates a spark or two of pure unscripted magic.**

Bamboozle are gentle, patient, immersive, and inspirational. They use interactive, multi-sensory theatre to unlock moments of joy in children on the autistic spectrum or with moderate to profound learning disabilities. For parents, those moments often reveal new possibilities for their child.

Success is no accident for Bamboozle. Its techniques and teaching style – the Bamboozle Approach – have developed into a solid, evidence-based programme of training that's making waves across the world. From Stevenage to Shanghai and Melbourne to Manchester, Bamboozle is helping teachers and performers bring theatre to an audience that generally gets a poor deal.

At home Bamboozle works with schools, theatres, and families to create fear-free environments in which children participate in their own way and at their own pace. While the shows are deceptively simple, the testing and thought processes behind them are rigorous. The outcome can be transformational, encouraging children to reach out in ways they've never done before and enabling whole families to play together, perhaps for the first time.

If you've ever wondered whether theatre really can change lives, Bamboozle proves that it does.

[bamboozletheatre.co.uk](http://bamboozletheatre.co.uk)

**bamboozle**

**“ Amazing. We have a child in our class who we have never heard laugh. This same child belly laughed through the performance. Brought tears to my eyes. Thank you so much. ”**

**Natasha Yull  
Breakspear School**



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**Curve is unlike any theatre you've ever visited. The award-winning design breathes excitement; the vast louvred face and canyon-like interior tell you that big things happen here.**

Curve's great unexpected feature is an island auditorium separated from the backstage areas by a circular public space. When a show's on, you can see actors in costume dashing between stage and dressing rooms.

The architecture reflects Curve's ethos that theatre isn't distant; it's here, now, and for absolutely everyone. The programme is eclectic: from cutting-edge original pieces to the biggest shows.

Cameron Mackintosh says it's "the top destination for producing musicals outside London".

In Leicester, Curve attracts around 330,000 people a year to performances, events, and workshops; on national and international tours its productions draw in another 400,000 wide-eyed fans. But Curve's heart lies in Leicester, and its diverse programme of work reflects the city it's built to serve.

The theatre is also a driving force for talent development. Each year over 2,000 local artists work with the Curve team to create new and original work, and 16,000 young people take part in youth theatre and learning programmes. And each year it pulls in thousands of new visitors through imaginative programming and dozens of free events. Curve brings out the best in Leicester.

[curveonline.co.uk](http://curveonline.co.uk)



**" There's no need now to travel to London to see big budget musicals because it's all here on the doorstep. "**

**Audience member**



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“The festival that opened a window not only on to an art form but on to a worldview.”

*The Guardian*



**A Darbar concert stirs the soul. The music is intricate, intense, and deeply hypnotic; the voices and the musicianship are spellbinding. This is Indian classical music at its most thrilling and authentic.**

Darbar is the UK's leading champion of Indian classical music, and its greatest showcase outside India. Darbar presents the world's finest practitioners – the living legends, the international maestros, and the breakthrough artists – and it makes their work accessible to the widest audience.

Darbar arranges concerts, runs a YouTube channel, operates a video streaming service, and organises the *Darbar Festival*, an annual celebration of music and dance staged in London's top venues and broadcast on Sky Arts and BBC Radio 3.

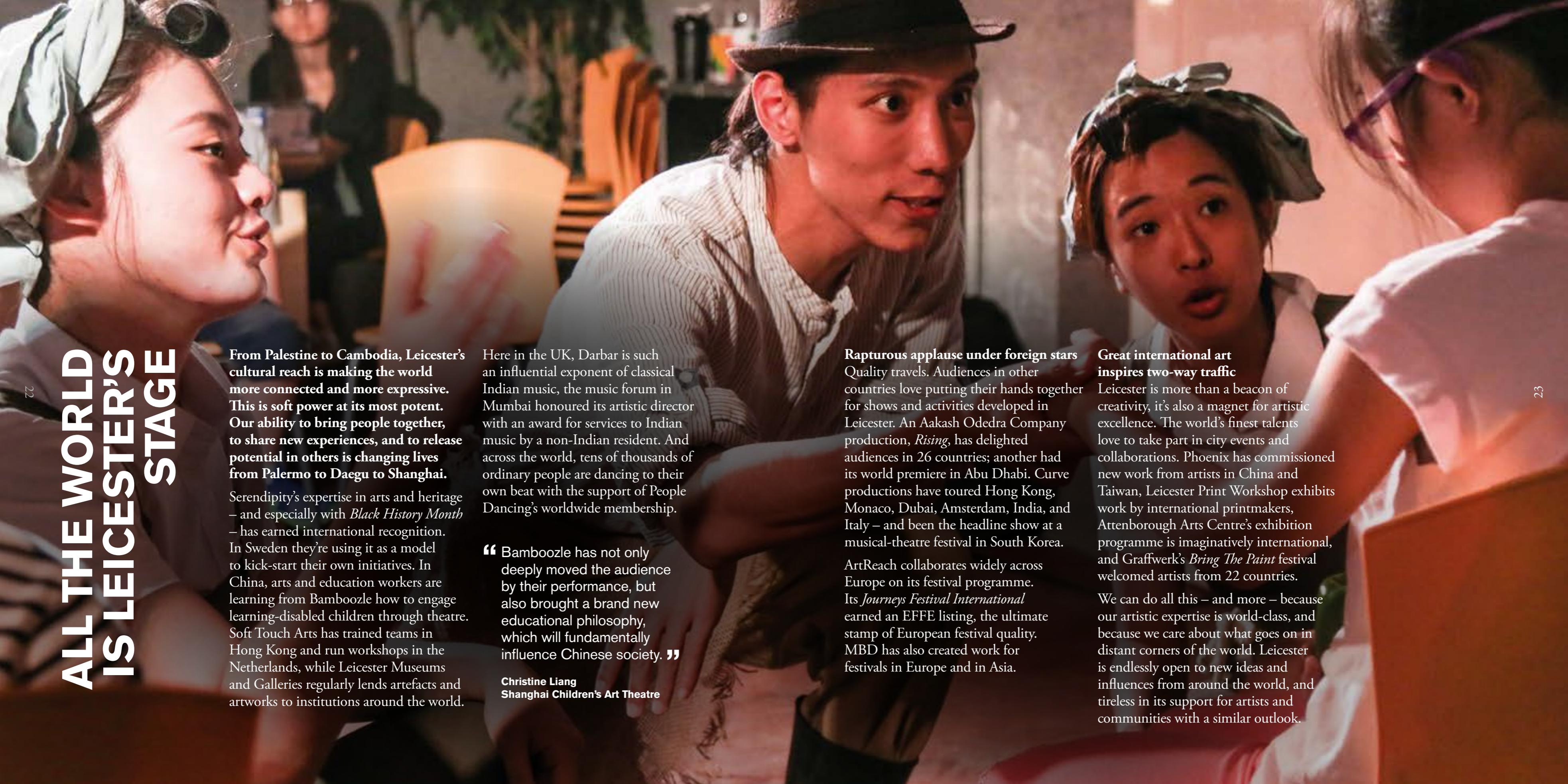
A second festival, the *Darbar Fringe*, takes place here in Leicester. It explores the magic that ensues when urban, contemporary, and classical styles come together.

Darbar is for everyone. If you're new to the genre, you can sign up to its Indian classical music appreciation course. If you're a child who's eager to learn, Darbar takes music education to local schools. And if you just want to experience the power of the music and the virtuosity of its leading proponents, a Darbar concert or digital presentation draws you into its world of spine-tingling improvisation.

[darbar.org](http://darbar.org)

 **Darbar**®

# ALL THE WORLD IS LEICESTER'S STAGE



From Palestine to Cambodia, Leicester's cultural reach is making the world more connected and more expressive. This is soft power at its most potent. Our ability to bring people together, to share new experiences, and to release potential in others is changing lives from Palermo to Daegu to Shanghai.

Serendipity's expertise in arts and heritage – and especially with *Black History Month* – has earned international recognition. In Sweden they're using it as a model to kick-start their own initiatives. In China, arts and education workers are learning from Bamboozle how to engage learning-disabled children through theatre. Soft Touch Arts has trained teams in Hong Kong and run workshops in the Netherlands, while Leicester Museums and Galleries regularly lends artefacts and artworks to institutions around the world.

Here in the UK, Darbar is such an influential exponent of classical Indian music, the music forum in Mumbai honoured its artistic director with an award for services to Indian music by a non-Indian resident. And across the world, tens of thousands of ordinary people are dancing to their own beat with the support of People Dancing's worldwide membership.

**“**Bamboozle has not only deeply moved the audience by their performance, but also brought a brand new educational philosophy, which will fundamentally influence Chinese society. **”**

**Christine Liang**  
**Shanghai Children's Art Theatre**

**Rapturous applause under foreign stars**  
Quality travels. Audiences in other countries love putting their hands together for shows and activities developed in Leicester. An Aakash Odedra Company production, *Rising*, has delighted audiences in 26 countries; another had its world premiere in Abu Dhabi. Curve productions have toured Hong Kong, Monaco, Dubai, Amsterdam, India, and Italy – and been the headline show at a musical-theatre festival in South Korea.

ArtReach collaborates widely across Europe on its festival programme. Its *Journeys Festival International* earned an EFFE listing, the ultimate stamp of European festival quality. MBD has also created work for festivals in Europe and in Asia.

**Great international art inspires two-way traffic**  
Leicester is more than a beacon of creativity, it's also a magnet for artistic excellence. The world's finest talents love to take part in city events and collaborations. Phoenix has commissioned new work from artists in China and Taiwan, Leicester Print Workshop exhibits work by international printmakers, Attenborough Arts Centre's exhibition programme is imaginatively international, and Graffwerk's *Bring The Paint* festival welcomed artists from 22 countries.

We can do all this – and more – because our artistic expertise is world-class, and because we care about what goes on in distant corners of the world. Leicester is endlessly open to new ideas and influences from around the world, and tireless in its support for artists and communities with a similar outlook.

# DEMONTFORT HALL

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You can't beat a big auditorium. Brilliant acoustics, electric atmosphere, a spellbound audience of more than 2,000 – jumping with joy, roaring with laughter, singing along to lyrics they know by heart, immersed in every note.

Leicester has been in thrall to its beloved De Montfort Hall since 1913. This is where the city comes face to face with the world's biggest performers. Glenn Miller, Frank Sinatra, the Beatles, the Stones, David Bowie – they've all put De Montfort Hall on their tour itineraries.

And still they keep coming. Whatever type of entertainment you're into, from opera to comedy, it'll be on De Montfort Hall's programme for the coming year. A particularly enthusiastic supporter is the Philharmonia Orchestra. It plays an annual series of classical concerts that make the most of the building's spine-tingling, hear-every-note acoustics.

**“ Excellent value, great attraction for top-level acts and shows. Been going to DeMont since the 1970s and love the place ... perfect sized arena.”**

Audience member

De Montfort Hall succeeds because it's versatile and in tune with its audience. The auditorium's lower level holds raked seating or becomes one massive dance floor. Above, there's always room for more in the circle. And outside, on a long and lazy, sunny summer's day, outdoor concerts can draw crowds of up to 7,000.

De Montfort Hall is for everyone. Its programme is populist and egalitarian. It's a showcase for just about anything you'd ever want to see.

[demontforthall.co.uk](http://demontforthall.co.uk)



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**Great street art stops you in your tracks. It makes you smile, it gets you thinking, it gives a city a fresh set of landmarks.**

Leicester's own thought-provoking landmarks multiplied with the arrival of Graffwerk and its *Bring The Paint* festival. Overnight, Graffwerk turned the city into Britain's hottest new landscape for international aerosol artists.

*Bring The Paint* was an award-winner in its inaugural year. With skateboarding, break-dancing, BMX, live music, and exhibitions, *Bring The Paint* encourages everyone to make the streets their playground.

Graffwerk's founders have long been bringing music, events, and street art to Leicester. Now they're on a bigger mission: to develop new artists, to make city landscapes more human and communicative, and to draw the community into the process.

**“**A great mix of styles. You and the Team have done an amazing job. You should be proud of what this event has brought to your city. Positivity, creativity and definitely one of the best citys in the uk for the culture. Absolutely smashed it!! **”**

**John Nation**  
leading street-art commentator

They manage artists, take commissions, run workshops, provide design and event-management services, and publish a guide to Leicester's street-art sites.

At The Mill, their Frog Island street-art centre, there's an aerosol-arts supply shop, a vegan café, and a community art space with legal walls.

You can't miss Graffwerk's influence on Leicester: rainforests team with life; cartoon characters morph into buildings; haunting faces stare down from on high; an old lady bakes a mad, life-of-its-own, jam-filled pie. It's a wild, free, and free-thinking show – and it's a joy to see.

[graffwerk.org](http://graffwerk.org)



# LEICESTER COMEDY FESTIVAL

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**Laughter and Leicester are an inseparable double-act. Since 1994, the world's funniest people have triumphed (or died) in front of a supportive (or merciless) Leicester Comedy Festival audience.**

Each year the crowds have grown and the acts have multiplied. It's now Europe's biggest and longest-running comedy festival, taking place over 19 days at more than 70 venues. A third of the audience comes from elsewhere in the UK. The nation's comedians and comedic consumers love it.

Leicester knows a good gag when it hears one. The festival began modestly as a De Montfort University student project; now it includes over 870 shows, a scheme to break new talent, and awards for punning, older comedians, and the *Leicester Mercury Comedian of the Year*.

A parallel *UK Kids' Comedy Festival* reaches out to the region's youngest jokers. There's a half-term comedy workshop for teenagers, an annual competition to find the county's funniest primary school, and a season of shows for children and their families.

Laughter is serious business. The festival draws more than 135,000 people to the city and contributes over £3m to the local economy. Tickets for the biggest acts sell out months ahead. Seasoned festival-goers shrug; with so much to see, they know they'll have the last laugh.

[comedy-festival.co.uk](http://comedy-festival.co.uk)



**“ I really, really love Leicester Comedy Festival ... The audiences are really nice; they are so comedy savvy, the venues look after you, everyone loves coming here. The city is really supportive. ”**

Romesh Ranganathan



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## LIFE-CHANGING CREATIVITY

Art is always life-enhancing; sometimes it's life-changing. For many of Leicester's cultural organisations, creativity is much more than entertainment: it's a boost to wellbeing, a route to better health, the antidote to social exclusion, or the doorway to a better life.

Soft Touch Arts is a shining example. It invites disadvantaged young people to get creative in ways that resonate with themselves and their peer groups. It creates opportunities and builds confidence so successfully that many participants go on to become peer mentors and project leaders. Soft Touch Arts puts lost lives back on track.

ArtReach works with the refugee and asylum-seeker community to create its *Journeys Festival International*. As artists, audience, and participants, the community is an integral part of a wide-ranging festival celebrating multicultural cities.

A Bamboozle production can transform entire families. Bamboozle's innovative theatrical techniques reveal new ways for children on the autistic spectrum or with learning disabilities to interact. Sometimes they open the door to new ways for families to play together.

The benefits of People Dancing's *dance for Parkinson's* online learning programme (created with US-based Dance for PD®/Mark Morris Dance Group) are incalculable. To date, 1,300 dance artists from 23 countries have completed the training. Who knows how many thousands of people living with Parkinson's those dance practitioners have reached.

### A career-changing moment in the spotlight

Often it's the work we do with children that has the longest-lasting effects. For the young musicians of Leicester who work directly with the Philharmonia Orchestra, the chance to create original music with the nation's finest musicians could be a turning point in their careers. It's the same with the young comedians who do stand-up at the *UK Kids' Comedy Festival* and the young actors who learn how to command an audience from the stage at Curve.

And all across the city and the county, many thousands more children get to express themselves in ways they never imagined through the tireless work of The Mighty Creatives and The Spark Arts for Children. These moments of discovery can change their lives for a day, perhaps for ever.

**“ With The Spark Arts for Children, audience development isn't a means to an end – a way to push ticket sales or please funding bodies – but the main reason for their existence. ”**

**Flossie Waite**  
[childrenstheatrereviews.com](http://childrenstheatrereviews.com)

# LEICESTER MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES (LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL)

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**Leicester has so much to share: 2,000 years of history and a fossil record from a time when Leicestershire was the floor of an ocean teeming with sharp-toothed plesiosaurs.**

The dinosaurs are the one thing that kids of all ages associate with the city's flagship museum on New Walk.

The museum's 15-metre sauropod is one of the most complete skeletons in the world. It towers over visitors, a constant reminder that Leicester's museums really are the city's most welcoming and family-friendly, free show.

Leicester City Council keeps its history authentic by housing its museums in historic buildings.

From the polished brass and remorseless steam power of the Abbey Pumping Station to the haunted 14th-century, timber-framed Guildhall, the buildings underpin Leicester's sense of place and identity. The collections – German expressionism, Egyptian artefacts, Picasso ceramics, for example – are outstanding.

**“ Experience like this is hard to come by in most places so it is beneficial to have such a great opportunity in such a friendly department. ”**

**Carys**  
photographic collection volunteer



Leicester  
City Council



Community engagement makes the past relevant to current generations, and ensures there's always something new. An inspirational programme of seasonal exhibits dips into the lives, passions, and achievements of Leicester's varied communities, while blockbuster exhibitions bring the nation's most talked-about collections to the city.

Hands-on activities for children put fresh life into distant stories, and pop-up museums take those stories out on to the streets.

Community engagement comes in many forms, not least the award-winning volunteer programme through which over 300 people give their time to help make Leicester's colourful past accessible to everyone.

[leicester.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/museums-and-galleries/](http://leicester.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/museums-and-galleries/)



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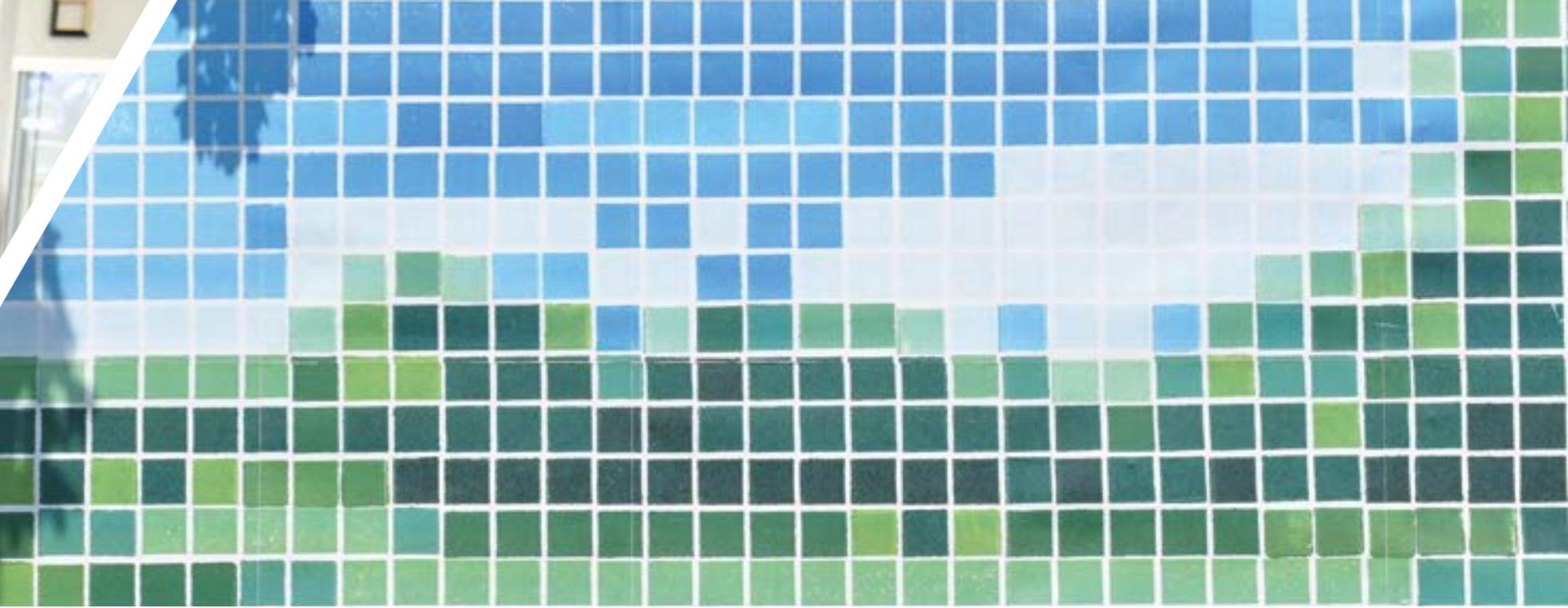
# LEICESTER PRINT WORKSHOP

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“Great workshop! Really enjoyed my day and learnt a great amount. Would highly recommend.”

Participant  
Joules staff event



**Leicester Print Workshop is the place to see, make, and buy contemporary prints. Here anyone can become a printmaker, gaining hands-on experience with a wide range of techniques. LPW also advances the practice of printmaking through professional-development activity for experienced artists.**

In LPW's light and well-equipped studio, the atmosphere is welcoming, calm, focused, and experimental. Beginners work alongside professional artists, while tutors and technicians pass on their skills, their knowledge, and their understanding of innovative processes and techniques. They provide the supportive environment in which everyone can push their creative boundaries.

LPW is a fully accessible space in which artists and printmakers at all levels can realise their ideas. And thousands do. LPW has 200 artist members, and runs courses for around 1,500 adults and more than 2,000 children each year, including groups with special needs.

Every year it organises around 30 free Pop-Up Print workshops around the region. It is the only large print studio to offer free technical support throughout its opening hours, and the only Arts-Council-funded studio that lets visiting artists work independently.

The LPW galleries are a showcase for original and unique prints and interdisciplinary work from LPW members as well as national and international artists. These curated exhibitions reveal the variety and inventiveness of contemporary fine-art printmaking.

[leicesterprintworkshop.com](http://leicesterprintworkshop.com)



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**MBD reinvents storytelling for a digital age. It brings the sights and sounds of the past and the present to life; it connects audiences to people and ideas that are best understood when you experience them for yourself.**

Through virtual reality and mixed reality, MBD lets you feel what it's really like – to be a Gunpowder Plot conspirator ... to stitch a string of DNA together ... to be a Caribbean soldier in the trenches of The Great War.

MBD blends storytelling with technology. The company's founders were theatre graduates who became interested in the way art and technology create more emotive and more engaging stories involving performance, projected images, or augmented reality.

**“** Their use of new technology, performance and soundtrack offers a uniquely atmospheric experience that truly engages. **”**

**Mark Bradshaw  
National Trust**

With 3D designers, animators, and games developers on the team, MBD has all the in-house expertise needed to retell any story digitally for use at exhibitions, installations, interactive tours, or public events. Live action still plays a part. Real actors appear in VR worlds or perform with large-scale animated images projected on buildings.

MBD's work is shaping a new generation of artists and audiences. It offers new career routes into the arts, and reaches people who wouldn't normally give art a second thought. The stories are meaningful, relevant, and rich with emotion; their appeal is universal.

**mbd.limited**



**MBD**

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**“**It has been a lovely event and I’m particularly impressed with it being multicultural. In these difficult and dangerous times, events which encourage social cohesion and unity are needed more than ever. **”**

Audience member  
*Journeys Festival International* by ArtReach



## ENTERTAINMENT AND INVOLVEMENT FOR AN INCLUSIVE CITY

**‘Art for all’ is a handy throwaway phrase. Easy to say, but not so easy to achieve. We have to work at it – to make sure we’re neither elitist nor unconsciously biased towards particular ethnic or socio-economic groups, and that we’re there for everyone who wants to experience, create, or take part in culture.**

By and large, we do it well in Leicester. For many of our arts organisations (ArtReach, Bamboozle, The Mighty Creatives, People Dancing, Serendipity, Soft Touch Arts, and The Spark Arts for Children, for example), inclusivity is fundamental to what they do. It’s perhaps more telling to look at what other organisations do to make art something an entire city can relate to.

**Elite quality without being elitist**  
When the Philharmonia Orchestra comes to town, your preconceptions evaporate. From symphonies to movie scores, the music is far from stuffy. The orchestra makes its music and its standards relevant in numerous ways, including working with local musicians to create urban-classical fusions. Leicester Print Workshop takes a similar approach through its four annual outreach programmes with groups that might not otherwise engage with printmaking. Leicester Museums and Galleries goes even further by taking art and history into the community via pop-up museums with hands-on sessions for children.

The work that Curve does to promote inclusivity has been so successful, it’s registered a 35% attendance rate for harder-to-reach audiences. And Phoenix reaches out by setting up digital arts workshops in local libraries.

### For all ages and all people

Age or ability are no bar to participation in Leicester – just ask the people who take part in over-65s Bollywood dance classes with Aakash Odedra Company, or who snap up subsidised places for participants with learning or physical disabilities.

De Montfort Hall may be over a hundred years old, but it’s been superbly adapted to let wheelchair-users enjoy a drink in the circle bar and fine views from the circle. Even better, Attenborough Arts Centre is a ready-made outlet for the city’s disabled creatives. It’s one of only five UK venues purpose-built for disabled artists and audiences. Here you’ll find weekly sessions for people with mental-health issues and magical events for children with profound and multiple disabilities.

### Still more work to do

Not everything is as it should be. When we look at the ethnic split of the teams who manage or volunteer for our arts organisations, we see that the city and its communities are not nearly as well represented as we’d expect. It’s the one big issue we need to put right.

Our gender split is better: roughly fifty-fifty. But not so equal for volunteers: more than two-and-a-half-times as many women volunteer as men.

# THE MIGHTY CREATIVES

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**The Mighty Creatives are all around you – in the voices, drum beats, drawings, dance moves, and unquenchable creative exuberance of the region's young people.**

You see their imprint in the broad grins and rapt expressions of more than 150,000 children and young adults at roughly 1,200 schools and cultural organisations across Leicester and the East Midlands. Barely a moment passes during which the region's young people don't enjoy the liberating self-expression unlocked by a Mighty Creatives project.

This is life-changing stuff in a harsh world. Since 2010, the number of arts teachers in schools has fallen by 11%; in England in 2017, four million children were living below the poverty line. But here in the East Midlands, The Mighty Creatives are leading the fight against the growing poverty of artistic opportunity.

Through its schools projects (Artsmark, Arts Award, Creative Schools Network, Arts Alliances, Splash!), Emerge festivals, and numerous partnerships, The Mighty Creatives are catalysts for change.

The work they facilitate increases cognitive ability, improves behaviour and attainment, and boosts health and wellbeing. It's also damn good fun.

In cultural expression there's no right or wrong, just brilliance and pure creative joy. The Mighty Creatives and their partners are masters at releasing it.

[themightycreatives.com](http://themightycreatives.com)



**“ Creative Schools Network meetings for me felt like a lifeline! A bit dramatic I know, but having the opportunity to meet like-minded people and learn new skills is invaluable, and I always look forward to each meeting – I just wish there was one each week! ”**

**Laura Poole  
Heathlands Primary School**



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# PEOPLE DANCING



**Everyone has a right to dance – and in any style or form they choose. That's the fundamental idea behind People Dancing, the Leicester-based, global leader in community and participatory dance.**

No other organisation works with so many dance artists, teachers, and leaders to encourage such a wide range of people to dance in all their wild, wonderful, and vital diversity.

People Dancing doesn't put on shows. It's a facilitator for thousands of dance practitioners and enthusiasts who get people tapping their feet, swaying their hips, and losing themselves in the joy of dance.

People Dancing supports them through online and face-to-face training and professional development provided by local, national, and international partners. The annual People Dancing summer school at De Montfort University attracts dancers from across the world, while numerous courses cover everything from early-years dance to working with people living with Parkinson's.

With a worldwide membership reaching 4,500 dance artists, People Dancing champions equality, diversity, and inclusion. Its landmark photographic exhibition, *11 Million Reasons to Dance*, attracted over half a million visitors on its international tour.

Step by step, People Dancing is boosting health and wellbeing, strengthening social relationships, and encouraging creative learning. It wants you to jump in and express yourself.

[communitydance.org.uk](http://communitydance.org.uk)



**People  
Dancing**  
the foundation for  
community dance

**“** Dance gives us all – professional and non-professional alike – the opportunity to share an experience that is intensely human and at the same time out of this world. **”**

**Deborah Bull DBE**  
from her introduction to the film *Dancing Nation*

# PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

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**“ I've just performed with the best orchestra in the world! ”**

Nidah  
*Symphonize* participant

**World-class, pioneering music happens in Leicester. For well over 100 days each year, the Royal Festival Hall's Philharmonia Orchestra works with the county's young musicians to create new music. The collaboration encourages the young musicians to play to a level of virtuosity they never thought possible.**

Leicester has been the Philharmonia's Midlands home since 1997. The most visible sign of this long-term connection is an annual series of nine full orchestral concerts at De Montfort Hall, involving leading international soloists.

The relationship goes far deeper. Across the city, Philharmonia musicians and local young people spend weeks together composing, creating, and playing. They learn how to listen to each other, how to play as an ensemble, and how to blend urban and classical styles.

More than anything, they grow in confidence as they discover they can thrill new audiences and play at the highest levels.

The Philharmonia's outreach programme takes musicianship and funding to the most deprived areas of the city.

And through installations such as *The Virtual Orchestra*, it connects newcomers to the world of classical music.

The Philharmonia loves to do things differently. In Leicester, it has a partner with the funds, the talent, and the enthusiasm to be so different, they're in a music-making class of their own.

[philharmonia.co.uk](http://philharmonia.co.uk)

philharmonia  
orchestra

# THE BEST IS YET TO COME

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**Creative excellence comes and goes. It can be transient or self-supporting – a fleeting moment of magic or the relentless cultivation of talent that makes next year better than the year just gone. In Leicester we choose the more rewarding path, the one towards fresh faces and endless improvement.**

In this collaborative and connected city, the most talented people love to pass on their skills and enthusiasm. They do it to inspire the next generation, to nurture those who already show promise, and to help fellow artists acquire the techniques that expand their own repertoires.

## Generation eager

Children thrive on new ideas. They enrol for Leicester Comedy Festival's *Laugh Term Comedy School*, take up traditional Indian instruments at the *Darbar Gurukul* (Darbar school of music), and start thinking big at Graffwerk's art workshops.

*Curve Young Company's* weekly sessions pass on vital theatrical skills to young people aged 7 to 19, while Leicester Print Workshop sets up mini print studios in local classrooms. The Mighty Creatives and The Spark Arts for Children exist purely to foster creativity in minds that can't get enough of it.

## Breaking good

We take our role as a nursery for national talent seriously. Aakash Odedra Company is taking its first cohort of British Asian dancers and choreographers through a tailor-made professional development programme. Leicester Museums and Galleries runs an award-winning volunteer programme offering young people valuable heritage-sector experience.

And there's plenty of space in city venues for emerging talent. Curve and Attenborough Arts Centre encourage new work from up-and-coming artists, while Leicester Comedy Festival supports new performers through its nationally unique *Circuit Breakers* programme.

MBD's approach to talent development is especially imaginative. By bringing in people with a background in computer-games design it blends styles and techniques to create something completely fresh.

## Expanding the creative universe

For experienced printmakers, Leicester Print Workshop is an invaluable professional resource for help with just about anything from writing proposals and funding applications to solving technical problems. Digital creatives who need a state-of-the-art production space head to Phoenix's studio with its VR equipment, 3D printers, and supporting hardware and software.

Bamboozle trains artists and practitioners in the Bamboozle Approach; Serendipity runs *LDIF+*, a year-round programme of conferences, workshops, courses, and masterclasses; and People Dancing is a worldwide source of professional development offering online learning and an annual summer school at De Montfort University.

## Working together for a future without limits

Through scores of partnerships and collaborations, our cultural organisations work together to make and create, to reach new audiences, and to support each other. The cross-fertilisation of ideas and techniques fuels the unexpected. Individually and collectively it sharpens up our act. It reminds us all that we've so much to learn and so much to give in return.

In this multicultural renaissance city, things are just starting to get interesting.

**“ People Dancing has been like a faithful friend to me all through my dance career. From my student days to now, a solid presence, a friendly listening ear, a sounding board, great for advice, for knowing the sector inside out. ”**

**Liz Clark**  
Leicestershire-based dance artist

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# PHOENIX

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**Phoenix takes you to other worlds. It shows you lives, places, and ideas that get you thinking, laughing, and applauding. Under its guiding hand you get to experience the best film and digital work the world has to offer.**

Phoenix is relaxed and immersive – a space to enjoy film projected in pristine, phone-free darkness. Everything from critically acclaimed masterpieces to low-budget, experimental oddities to black-and-white classics. Here you see work you're unlikely to find anywhere else.

In technological terms, Phoenix is at the cutting edge, helping you make sense of digital culture and the new ways of experiencing art made possible by technology. Through installations, virtual-reality screenings, and free shows in its gallery, Phoenix reveals alternative visions of the world.

**“ [Phoenix] is the digital arts network happening as we speak. More arts and culture to more people in more ways in more places. ”**

**Sir Peter Bazalgette**  
former Chair, Arts Council England

There are opportunities to try the technology for yourself. Phoenix has a hi-tech production studio, provides year-round workshops for children and young people, and runs a full programme of courses, talks, and workshops for adults.

Through its links with De Montfort University and leading international artists, Phoenix taps into the latest research and ideas in creative media and technology.

In this fast-changing cultural landscape, Phoenix is an unerring guide. It encourages you to explore ever further – and to come back wiser, ready for a drink in the here and now of its café bar.

[phoenix.org.uk](http://phoenix.org.uk)

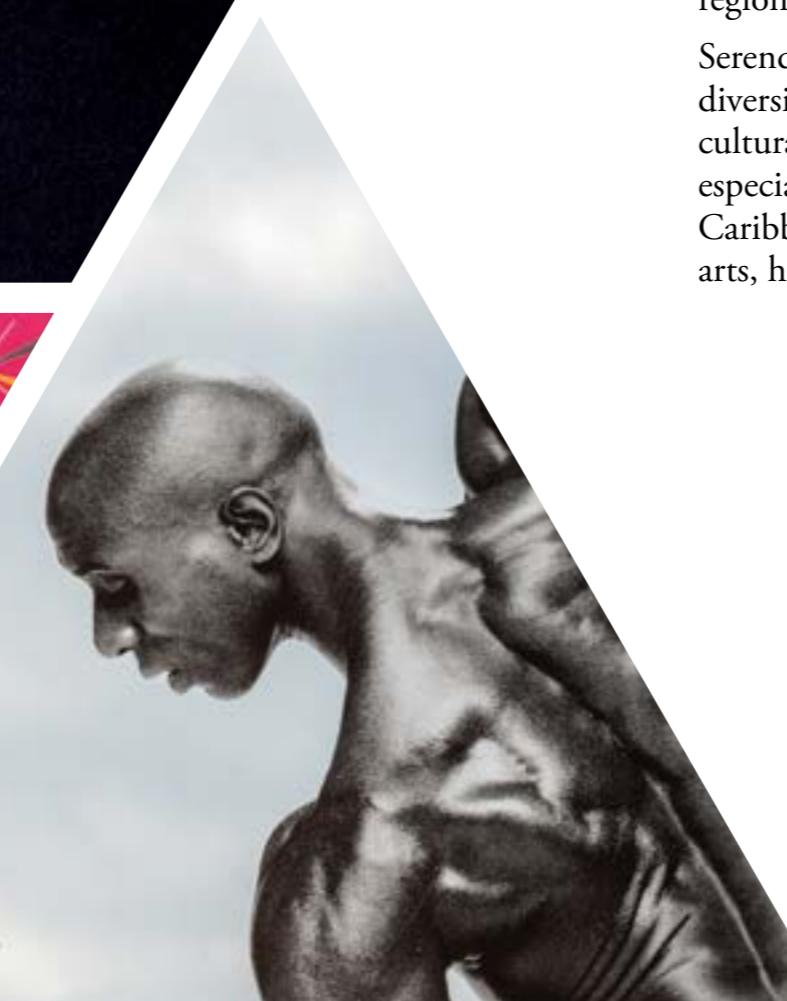
# Phoenix



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# SERENDIPITY

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**Serendipity is the unstoppable force behind Leicester's annual dance festival, *Let's Dance International Frontiers (LDIF)*, and LDIF+, a year-round training programme in high-calibre dance techniques from around the world.**

On behalf of Leicester City Council, Serendipity also coordinates the artistry and activism of *Black History Month*. A supporting digital archive logs the African and African Caribbean community's contribution to the region's arts, culture, and heritage.

Serendipity celebrates the richness of diversity. It's a showcase for work from culturally diverse international artists, especially from the African and African Caribbean diaspora. Its output sits where arts, heritage, culture, and politics meet.

Serendipity is an agent of change. It brings leading international practitioners, academics, and policymakers together for publications and conferences about dance and diversity. It's also a passionate supporter of new talent.

There are internships, apprenticeships, and volunteer roles for those who want to perform or work behind the scenes, plus plenty of commissions and collaborations.

Serendipity and LDIF put Leicester on the global cultural map. They draw international audiences for hidden talent – for dancers from countries such as Guadeloupe, Haiti, Norway, USA, Senegal, and Suriname. They add to the richness of cultural diversity that makes Leicester their most fitting home.

[serendipity-uk.com](http://serendipity-uk.com)



**“ LDIF is such a beautiful experience, as I’m sure all the participating artists will agree ... Serendipity is playing a direct part in providing life-changing experiences. ”**

**Cameron McKinney  
artist**

# SOFT TOUCH ARTS

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**Soft Touch Arts is the inviting, let's-give-it-a-go space that releases the untapped potential of Leicester's disadvantaged young people.**

Here, just about anything goes simply because anything is possible. Through music, arts, media, cooking, and other creative projects, Soft Touch's skilled team encourage young people to express themselves – and to do it so well others might even be prepared to pay for their output.

In a city in which 31,000 young people live in poverty, Soft Touch broadens life experiences and offers a route to a brighter future. Over the years it's given thousands of young people a chance to work on hundreds of creative projects. It passes on new skills, encourages experimentation, and builds self-belief; it makes the city more colourful and more caring.

**“ I just fell in love with Soft Touch ... the amount of respect you get as a producer and the amount of respect that you get back, and how close we all came as a family. ”**

**Muzi  
participant**

The process creates its own talent pool: many participants like to pass on their new-found skills and confidence by becoming peer mentors and project leaders.

Soft Touch nurtures talent in people who would otherwise be held back by their history, their disabilities, or their mental health. Through collaborations with Leicester's businesses, charities, and other arts and youth organisations, Soft Touch develops bold and memorable projects that let participants tap into the city's lively flow of ideas. It's an outlet for unfettered inventiveness in a city that thrives on it.

[soft-touch.org.uk](http://soft-touch.org.uk)



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# THE SPARK ARTS FOR CHILDREN

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“ I nearly fainted  
of excitement at  
the end. ”

Adnaan  
Medway Primary School

**The Spark Arts for Children is fearless. It taps straight into children’s innate ability to create and consume original material – to run with new ideas and imaginative forms of expression.**

That’s why more than 10,000 children and their families lose themselves in performances at the annual *Spark Festival*. And why thousands more experience the world differently at events held throughout the year at their schools and local libraries.

These awestruck audiences expect the unexpected from The Spark – something quirky, extraordinary, and brilliantly other-worldish. Not least because local children help shape the programme. The shows are right on their doorstep, too, pushing the boundaries of theatre, music, and poetry in locations where young audiences feel comfortable.

About a quarter of the output is original work of outstanding international quality; the rest is programming and facilitation. The Spark helps schools and libraries take risks to generate their own exceptional work. And through the *Vital Spark* programme, it helps artists who identify as BAME, deaf, or disabled develop their work for children.

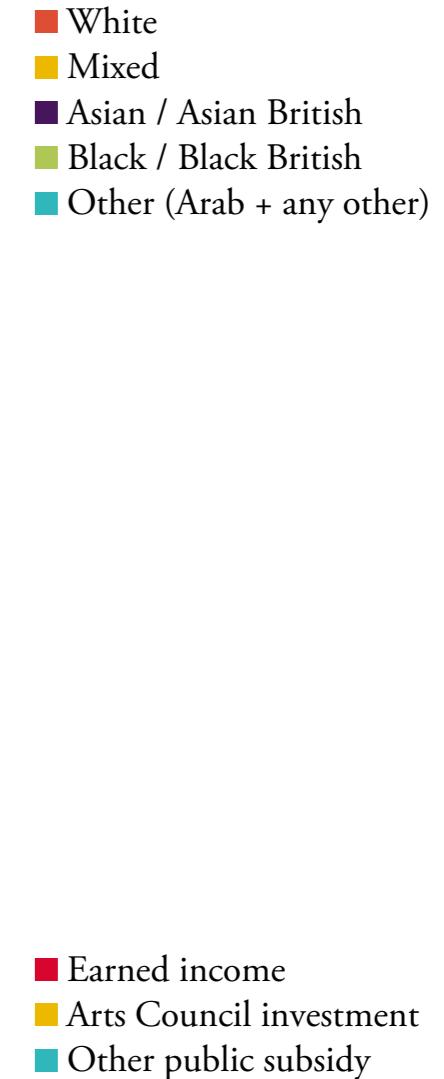
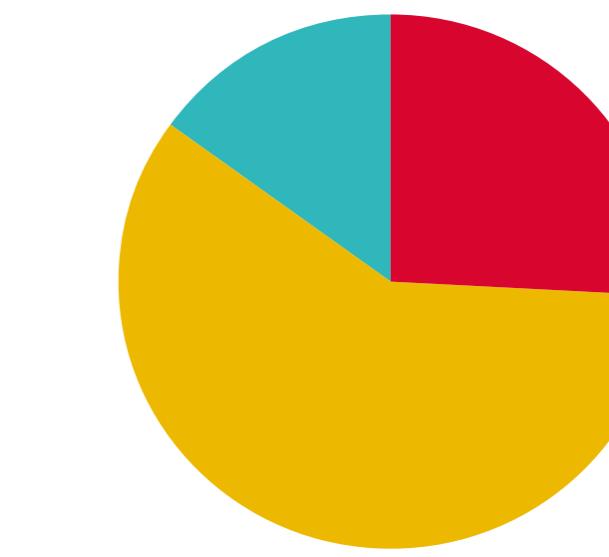
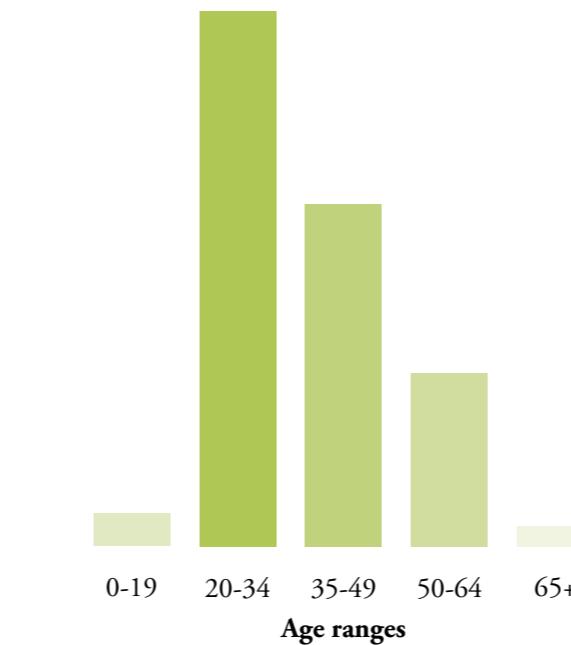
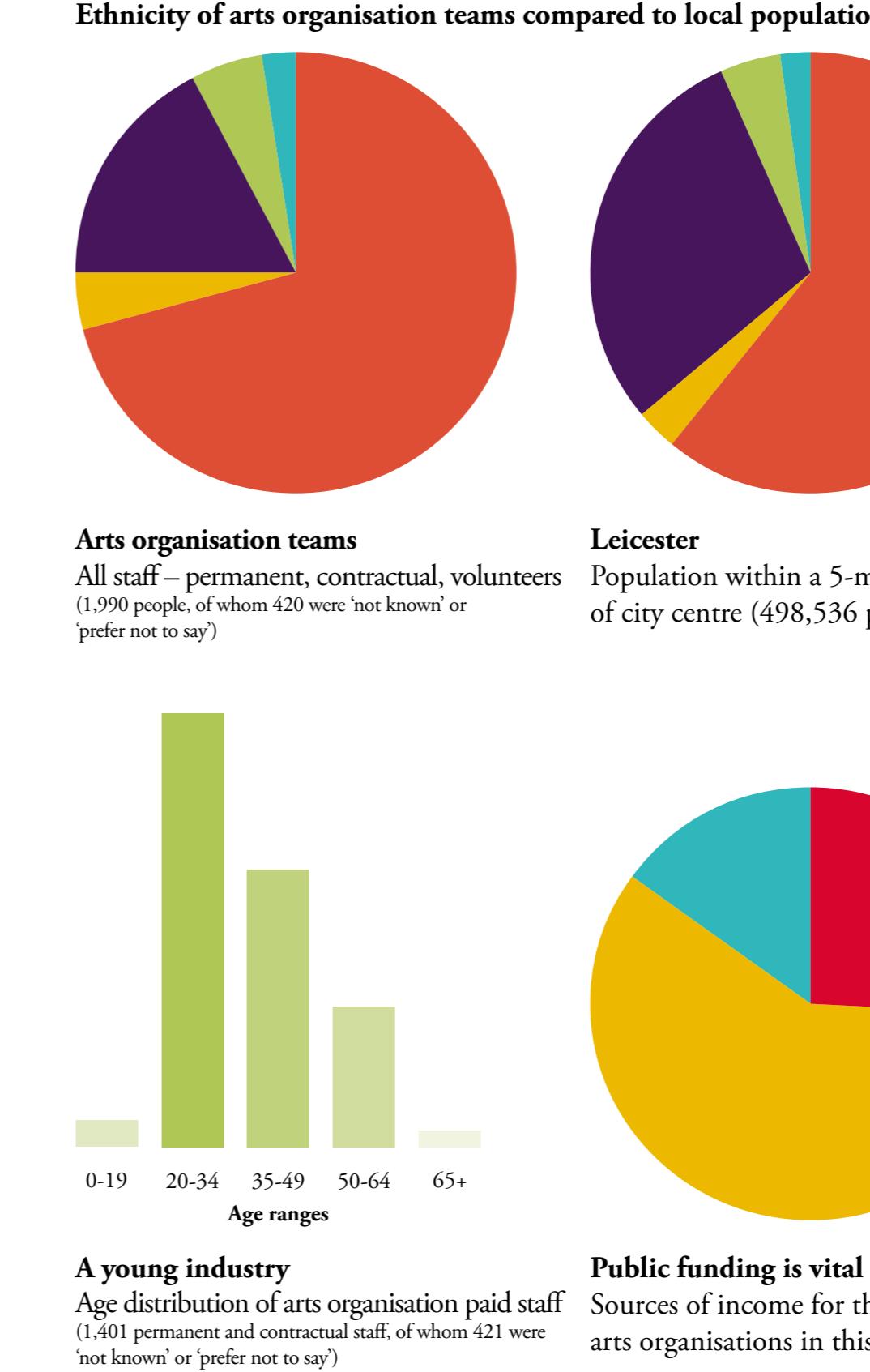
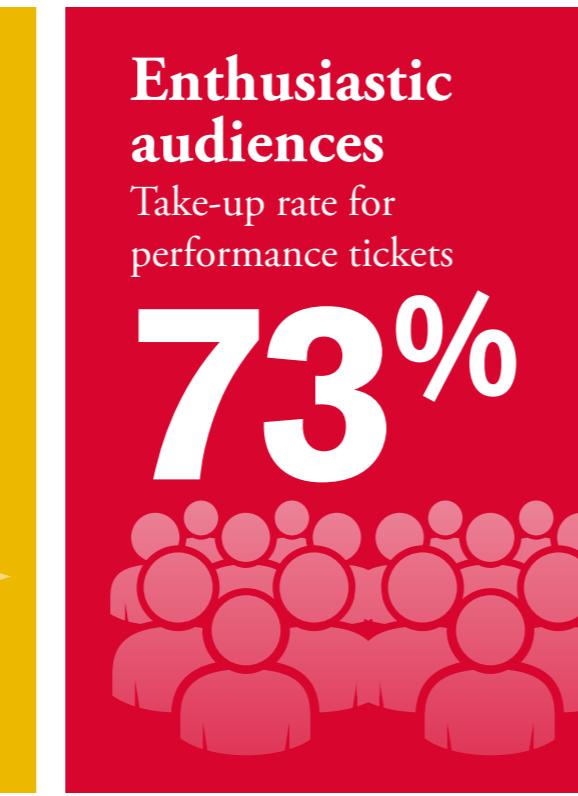
The Spark is all for building confidence among performers and audiences. For children, the work is as thought-provoking as it’s fun. It raises aspirations, boosts health and wellbeing, and helps develop emotional intelligence. The gasps of delight are a bonus – a sure sign they’ll be coming back for more.

[thesparkarts.co.uk](http://thesparkarts.co.uk)



# FACTS AND FIGURES

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# SO MUCH MORE TO DISCOVER

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You're never far from creativity in Leicester. Each February, 70 pubs, clubs, restaurants, halls, and theatres step forward to be Leicester Comedy Festival venues. Throughout the rest of the year they're buzzing with performance, art, and ideas. For the thousands of creative and colourful people who are not part of the 19 organisations in this booklet – and for their loyal fans – Leicester is a year-round cultural party.

For bookings and opening times, search online.

## MUSIC

Leicester's music clubs and venues are loud and lively: speakers throb, colours explode, the sound is blistering. Hunt down your musical genre at:

**The Shed, The Musician, The Cookie, Firebug, Dryden Street Social, 2Funky Music Café, O2 Academy, Sound House**

Classical music fans love Leicester's two symphony orchestras:

**Bardi Symphony Orchestra, Leicester Symphony Orchestra**

Both play at De Montfort Hall, while the three-day **Leicester International Music Festival** runs at New Walk Museum and Gallery.

## WHAT'S ON

Not sure what to do? **VisitLeicester.info** is the city's best guide to current events.

## VISUAL ARTS

In this city there's an eager audience and plenty of space for artists to create, to show, to share, and to gather critical feedback:

**The Gallery at DMU, Two Queens, studionAme**

## THEATRE

Leicester audiences love a good show. That's why we have so many more theatres:

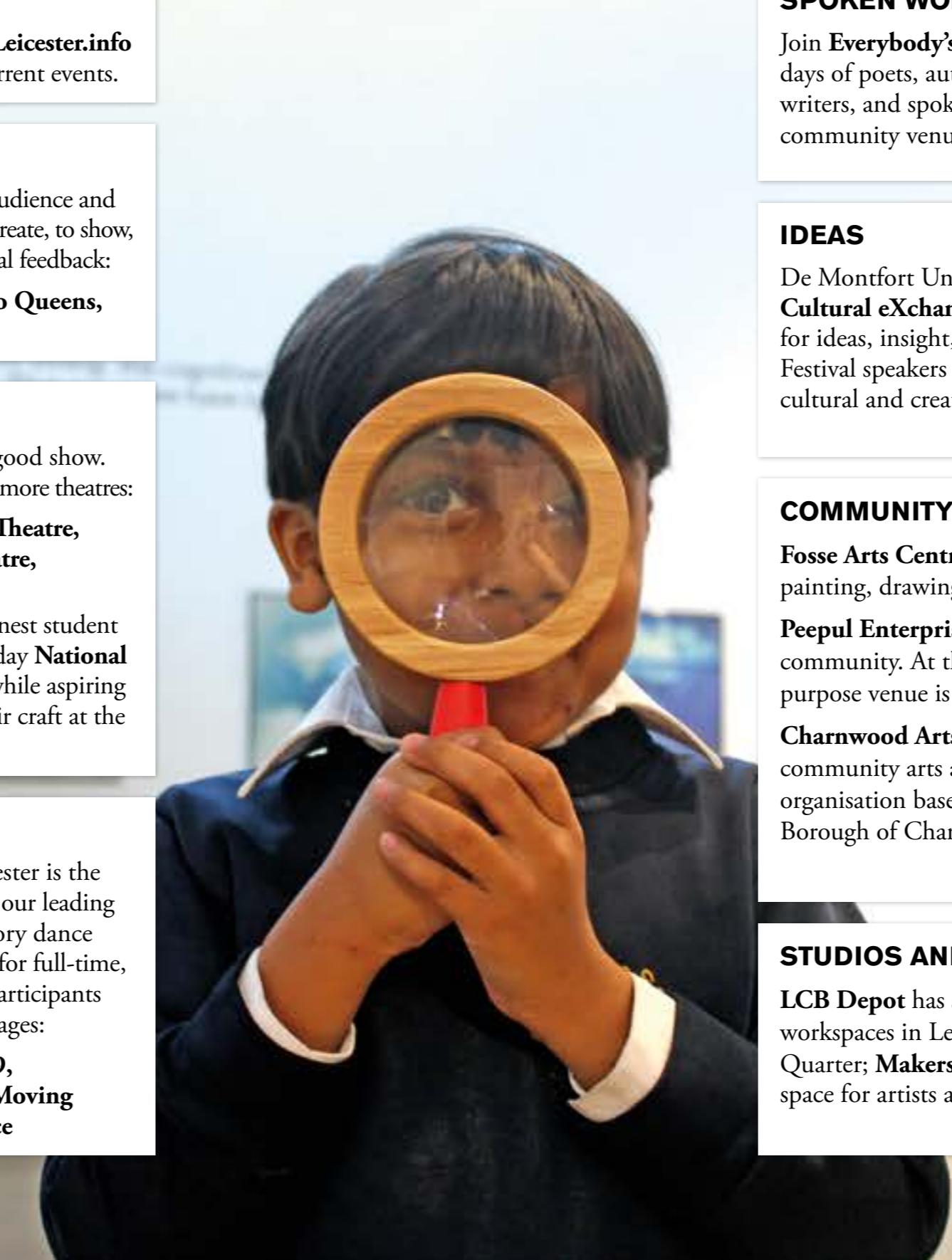
**The Little Theatre, The Y Theatre, Leicester Haymarket Theatre, Upstairs at the Western**

Each spring the country's finest student actors gather for the seven-day **National Student Drama Festival**, while aspiring young performers learn their craft at the **Ann Oliver Stage School**.

## DANCE

If you want to dance, Leicester is the place to be. Between them, our leading educational and participatory dance organisations offer sessions for full-time, part-time, and occasional participants – for all people and for all ages:

**Dupont Dance, Studio 79, Addict Dance Academy, Moving Together, Side Kick Dance**



## SPOKEN WORD

Join **Everybody's Reading** for nine days of poets, authors, community writers, and spoken-word artists in community venues across the city.

## IDEAS

De Montfort University's annual **Cultural eXchanges Festival** is for ideas, insight, and inspiration. Festival speakers come from the cultural and creative industries.

## COMMUNITY ARTS

**Fosse Arts Centre** offers drop-in painting, drawing, and pottery sessions.

**Peepul Enterprise** is for creativity and community. At the heart of this multi-purpose venue is a 314-seat theatre.

**Charnwood Arts** is an independent community arts and media organisation based in our neighbouring Borough of Charnwood.

## STUDIOS AND WORKSPACE

**LCB Depot** has studios and workspaces in Leicester's Cultural Quarter; **Makers Yard** has studio space for artists and designer-makers.

## FESTIVALS

Leicester's religious and cultural festivals draw us on to the streets and into our green parks all year round. Our 15-day **Diwali** festival is the world's largest outside India; our **Caribbean Carnival** organised by **EMCCAN** is second only to Notting Hill.

Other festivals include:

**Eid celebrations, Sikh parades, Leicester Belgrave Mela, Leicester Pride, Riverside Festival**

## TALENT DEVELOPMENT

**Writing East Midlands** is the region's literature-development agency. **UK Young Artists** supports creative diversity and intercultural collaboration across the UK. **Dance4** is an internationally recognised dance-development agency. **Phizzical** produces fresh, thought-provoking, colourful, and entertaining live experiences. **14/48** works at lightning speed: 14 plays written, directed, and performed within 48 hours.

**De Montfort University** and **University of Leicester** are wide-ranging champions of art and creativity. Leicester wouldn't be the same without their support.

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# CONTACTS

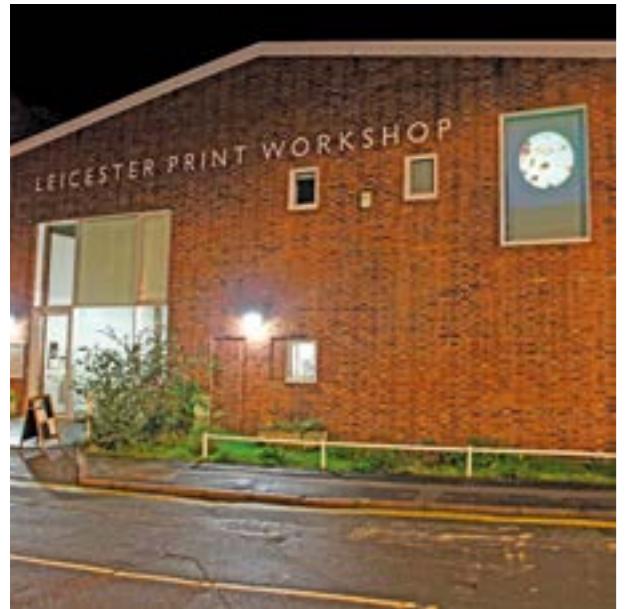
09

<b>Aakash Odedra Company</b>	<b>08</b>
0116 319 0733	
info@aakashodedra.com	
aakashodedra.com	
<b>ArtReach</b>	<b>10</b>
0116 261 6882	
admin@artreach.biz	
artreach.biz	
<b>Attenborough Arts Centre</b>	<b>12</b>
0116 252 2455	
arts-centre@le.ac.uk	
attenborougharts.com	
<b>Bamboozle</b>	<b>16</b>
0116 255 2065	
info@bamboozletheatre.co.uk	
bamboozletheatre.co.uk	
<b>Curve</b>	<b>18</b>
0116 242 3560	
contactus@curvetheatre.co.uk	
curveonline.co.uk	
<b>Darbar</b>	<b>20</b>
hello@darbar.org	
darbar.org	
<b>De Montfort Hall</b>	<b>24</b>
0116 233 3111	
dmh.office@leicester.gov.uk	
demontforthall.co.uk	

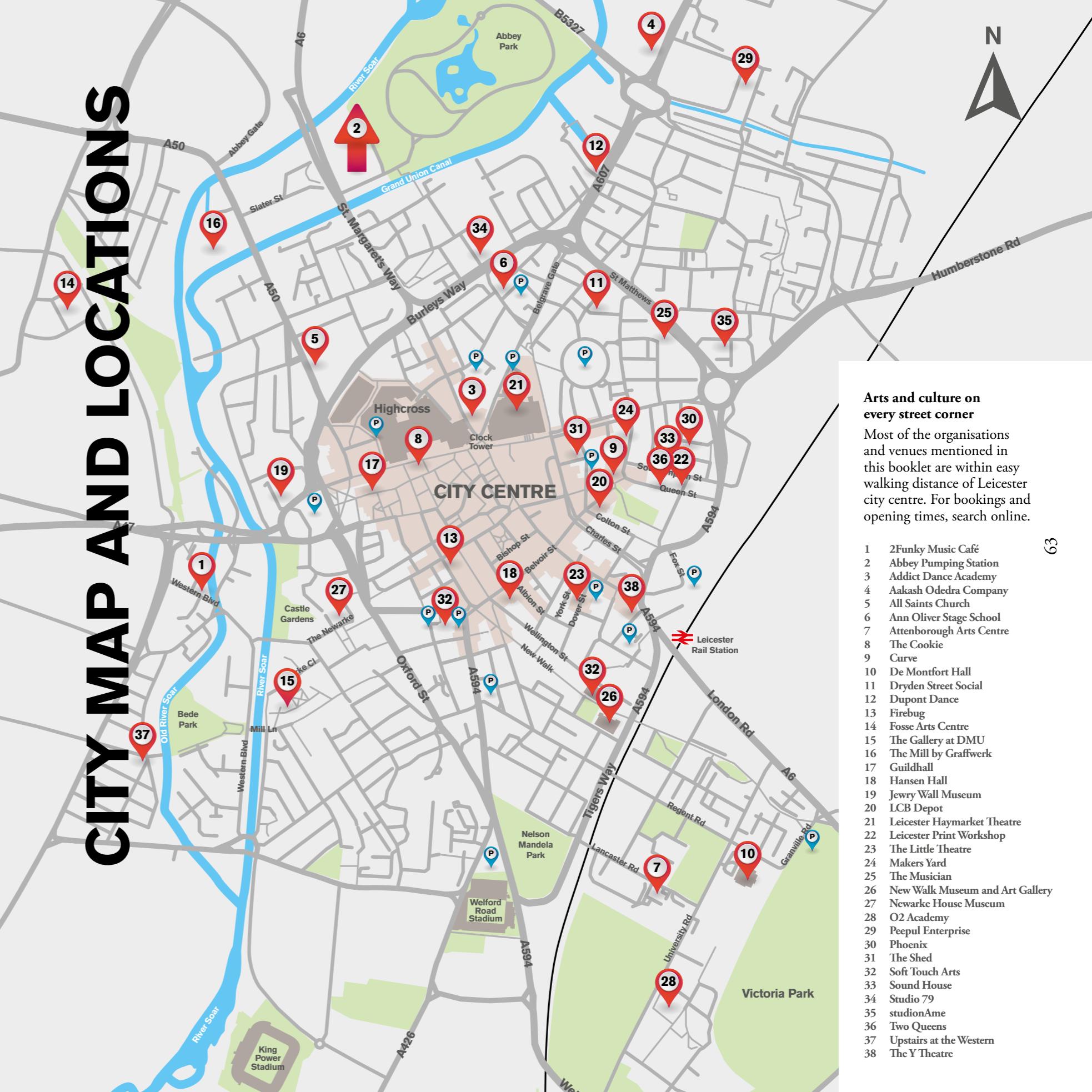
<b>Graffwerk</b>	<b>26</b>
07790 852062	
werks@graffwerk.org	
graffwerk.org	
<b>Leicester Comedy Festival</b>	<b>28</b>
0116 261 6812	
info@comedy-festival.co.uk	
comedy-festival.co.uk	
<b>Leicester Museums and Galleries</b>	<b>32</b>
0116 225 4900	
museums@leicester.gov.uk	
https://www.leicester.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/museums-and-galleries/	
<b>Leicester Print Workshop</b>	<b>34</b>
0116 251 4174	
info@leicesterprintworkshop.com	
leicesterprintworkshop.com	
<b>MBD</b>	<b>36</b>
0116 253 3439	
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<b>The Mighty Creatives</b>	<b>40</b>
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<b>People Dancing</b>	<b>42</b>
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<b>Philharmonia Orchestra</b>	<b>44</b>
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<b>Phoenix</b>	<b>48</b>
0116 242 2800	
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<b>Serendipity</b>	<b>50</b>
0116 257 7316	
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serendipity-uk.com	
<b>Soft Touch Arts</b>	<b>52</b>
0116 255 2592	
info@soft-touch.org.uk	
soft-touch.org.uk	
<b>The Spark Arts for Children</b>	<b>54</b>
0116 261 6893	
admin@thesparkarts.co.uk	
thesparkarts.co.uk	





# CITY MAP AND LOCATIONS



## Arts and culture on every street corner

Most of the organisations and venues mentioned in this booklet are within easy walking distance of Leicester city centre. For bookings and opening times, search online.

- 1 Funky Music Café
- 2 Abbey Pumping Station
- 3 Addict Dance Academy
- 4 Aakash Odedra Company
- 5 All Saints Church
- 6 Ann Oliver Stage School
- 7 Attenborough Arts Centre
- 8 The Cookie Curve
- 9 Curve
- 10 De Montfort Hall
- 11 Dryden Street Social
- 12 Dupont Dance
- 13 Firebug
- 14 Fosse Arts Centre
- 15 The Gallery at DMU
- 16 The Mill by Graffwerk
- 17 Guildhall
- 18 Hansen Hall
- 19 Jewry Wall Museum
- 20 LCB Depot
- 21 Leicester Haymarket Theatre
- 22 Leicester Print Workshop
- 23 The Little Theatre
- 24 Makers Yard
- 25 The Musician
- 26 New Walk Museum and Art Gallery
- 27 Newarke House Museum
- 28 O2 Academy
- 29 Peepul Enterprise
- 30 Phoenix
- 31 The Shed
- 32 Soft Touch Arts
- 33 Sound House
- 34 Studio 79
- 35 studionAme
- 36 Two Queens
- 37 Upstairs at the Western
- 38 The Y Theatre



**BE PART OF  
THE LEICESTER  
RENAISSANCE**

### **Colleagues, collaborators, sponsors, and investors welcome**

If you'd like to help us reach more communities, develop the breadth and quality of our creative output, and turn Leicester into an undisputed cultural capital, we'd love to hear from you. If there's a particular organisation you'd like to work with, contact them direct.

**For general city-wide collaborations, email us at [culture@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:culture@leicester.gov.uk)**