

LONDON

→ SOUNDING OUT



The Southbank Centre on the banks of the Thames



Europe's largest Carnival in Notting Hill

2012 will see the metropolis firmly in the spotlight as the Olympics come to town. A true global village, London has an unmatched nightlife. Nathaniel Handy give a flavour of what's on offer

Where do you start with London? The great gateway city to Europe is the continent's largest, and has a population to match. Yet unlike many a European nation, that population is a microcosm of the world. Browse Brick Lane's Bengali *sarees* on Monday. Tuesday, head to the Korean malls of New Malden. Take it easy limin' on Peckham Rye's main drag Wednesday. Practice your Kurdish over *kofte* in Manor House on Thursday. Friday, muscle a space at a Somali social club table in Kentish Town. Feel the *bhangra* beat in Southall on Saturday. And wind down with a *shisha* pipe and a Lebanese coffee on Edgware Road come Sunday.

London can be breathtaking and bewildering. Getting the most out of any visit to the UK capital takes insider knowledge. There are the obvious – and physically unmissable – cultural and artistic heavy weights, of course. The sprawling Southbank Centre opened in 1951 for the post-war, morale-boosting Festival of Britain. Its modernist concrete corridors alongside the River Thames

have had a recent facelift, with new plazas of restaurants, bars and cafés giving it a less austere character. It houses the vast Royal Festival Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall, and the more intimate Purcell Room. Its programme includes the annual *Meltdown* festival – curated by a different musical giant each year (most recently, English folk legend Richard Thompson and iconoclastic Kinks frontman Ray Davies) – and September's London African Music Festival.

Counterbalancing the Southbank Centre on the other side of the city is the Barbican Centre – the largest performing arts centre in Europe – built on the site of earlier Roman city defences. It too is a modernist concrete masterpiece – or monstrosity, depending on your tastes – and the two centres divvy up most of the world music stars who tour to London, often whole gaggles of them in regular annual festivals. The Barbican calendar includes the midsummer Blaze festival and Transcender focusing on devotional music in the autumn.

The one gripe with these large, airy, comfortable and well-programmed

venues is that, rather like a forlorn football fan at the shiny new Emirates Stadium in North London, you find that you are so far away from the action that some of the spark of magic goes out of the occasion. No eager standing up and dancing – however danceable the music might be – before the encore is well under way. It's why the more interesting gigs often take place at London's multitude of smaller venues, the equivalent of a pie and Bovril League Two game watched in the terraces at East End minnows, Leyton Orient.

It's worth checking out the *Songlines Gig Guide* (www.songlines.co.uk/gigs) to see where's hot and who's playing. The listings here – by no means definitive – are a mix of venues, small and large, that have a roster of mainstream, world and folk fare. Some are the little backstreet places that you need to follow your nose to find, offering the chance to see acts up close and personal in an often highly atmospheric setting, such as old music halls and churches. You will often hear music surrounded by an expat community from its home country. »



The capital's skyline is sprawling and ever changing, very much like its gig scene



The Roundhouse in Chalk Farm, North London



Recent gigs here have included Fatoumata Diawara and Dele Sosimi



Gypsy jazz at Quecumbar



London's newest arts complex, Kings Place

MORLEY VON STERNBERG

VENUES

Barbican

Europe's largest multi-arts complex is the venue of choice for most of the big world music acts who come to London on tour. Recent highlights have been Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares, Ravi Shankar and Gurrumul. **Silk Street, EC2Y 8DS, +44 (0)20 7638 8891**
 Tube: Barbican
www.barbican.org.uk

Southbank Centre

One of the world's premier arts centres which recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. It's home to four resident orchestras and numerous artists-in-residence, including *Songlines* fave folkies Bellowhead. There are three performance spaces: the Royal Festival Hall, the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Purcell Room. **Belvedere Road, SE1 8XX, +44 (0)20 7960 4200**
 Tube: Waterloo, Embankment
www.southbankcentre.co.uk

KOKO

This Grade II-listed venue opened as the Camden Theatre in 1900 and has seen a huge variety of artists across the century, including Charlie Chaplin, the Clash and Madonna. Coming up are gigs from Euro-pop-Balkan maverick Shantel and his Bucovina Club Orkestar, Touaregs *du jour* Tinariwen and Afro-beat's Seun Kuti. It's also

home to the biggest and most glittering disco ball in the capital. **1A Camden High Street, NW1 7JE, +44 (0)870 432 5527**
 Tube: Camden or Mornington Crescent
www.koko.uk.com

Roundhouse

This Grade II-listed former steam engine repair shed has an annual roster of star names to suit all musical tastes. Only five years on from a £30 million redevelopment, the centre focuses on new music, and recent events include everything from Arabic hip-hop to Mexican wrestling. **Chalk Farm Road, NW1 8EH, +44 (0)20 7424 9992**
 Tube: Chalk Farm, Camden Town
www.roundhouse.org.uk

Kings Place

Brand spanning new venue in the heart of the massive regeneration area of Kings Cross, offering oodles of world and folk music in week-long events curated by different musicians and staged in its acoustically superb concert halls. Festivals include the inaugural *Songlines Encounters Festival* in June 2011. **90 York Way, N1 9AG, +44 (0)20 7520 1490**
 Tube: Kings Cross St Pancras
www.kingsplace.co.uk

Rich Mix

An ambitious cultural centre in the East End that programmes stacks of world sounds with an emphasis on black and ethnic minority musicians. Regular monthly events include the Dash Arabic Series, Global Local and Movimientos club nights. **35-47 Bethnal Green Road, E1 6LA, +44 (0)20 7613 7498**
 Tube: Shoreditch High Street, Old Street
www.richmix.org.uk

Union Chapel

A working church on Islington's hip eating and drinking hub, Upper Street. Perfect for intimate, delicate music with atmospheric lighting and the audience arranged in the pews or the gallery – and there's even a village hall-like bar upstairs. **Compton Avenue, N1 2XD, +44 (0)20 7226 1686**
 Tube: Highbury & Islington
www.unionchapel.org.uk

St Ethelburga's

Having been partly destroyed by an IRA bomb in 1993, this church has been resurrected as a Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. It now holds regular world music concerts as part of its mission to deepen ties and understanding across cultures. Small, low key and intimate. **78 Bishopsgate, EC2N 4AG, +44 (0)20 7496 1610**

Tube: Bank, Liverpool Street
www.stethelburgas.org

Wilton's Music Hall

One of London's secret gems, this is one of the East End's original music halls from the 1850s, and the oldest one surviving in the world – an imposingly atmospheric crumbling film set of a venue, like Havana indoors. **Graces Alley, E1 8JB**
 Tube: Aldgate East, Tower Hill
www.wiltons.org.uk

Cecil Sharp House

The spiritual home of English folk, this is the English Folk Dance & Song Society HQ, named in honour of the man who did so much to revive a tradition on the brink of extinction. Regular concerts and exhibitions make this a must for all folk music lovers. **2 Regent's Park Road, NW1 7AY, +44 (0)20 7485 2206**
 Tube: Camden Town, Chalk Farm
www.efds.org

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan

The UK branch of the organisation founded in Bombay in 1938 to promote Indian arts and culture offers regular Indian classical music and dance events within the fine acoustics of a 295-seater auditorium set inside an old church building, as well as summer schools, workshops and even

an Indian music degree course. **4a Castletown Road, W14 9HE, +44 (0)20 7381 4608**
 Tube: West Kensington
www.bhavan.net

Sadler's Wells

The UK's premiere dance venue, featuring everything from tango to *kathak*, is known for commissioning bold new shows and presenting world class performers. It stages the annual London Flamenco Festival, a highlight of the city's music and dance calendar. **Rosebery Avenue, EC1R 4TN, +44 (0)20 7863 8198**
 Tube: Angel
www.sadlerswells.com

Cargo

This dark, urban live music venue is a firm fixture on the East End club scene and is housed within brick railway arches, offering everything from dance to folk, rock to roots.

83 Rivington Street, Shoreditch, EC2A 3AY, +44 (0)20 7749 7840
 Tube: Shoreditch High Street, Old Street
www.cargo-london.com

Jazz Café

Despite its name, this long established venue on the central crossroads of Camden Town is a surprisingly intimate place to see live world music. The ambience is dark and moody and the venue has a small balcony restaurant that's a great vantage point for watching the stage.

5 Parkway, Camden, NW1 7PG, +44 (0)20 7485 6834
 Tube: Camden Town
www.meanfiddler.com

One of the capital's most atmospheric venues, Union Chapel



Bush Hall

This restored dance hall is located in Shepherd's Bush, offering West-enders a space in which to hear alternative and world sounds with an emphasis on avant-garde and folk music acts from the UK and the US. **310 Uxbridge Road, W12 7LJ, +44 (0)20 8222 6955**
 Tube: Shepherd's Bush Market
www.bushhallmusic.co.uk

Café OTO

Hyper-trendy café music venue that is relatively new to the scene having opened in 2008 and now offers highly eclectic live music getting on for seven days a week. You may not have heard of the varied global acts playing here, but you are very likely to hear something unlike anything you have ever heard before.

18-22 Ashwin Street, E8 3DL, +44 (0)20 7923 1231
 Tube: Dalston Junction
www.cafeoto.co.uk

Green Note

A contender for the smallest venue in London, this vegetarian café-bar programmes everything from folk and blues to roots, world, jazz and bluegrass. **106 Parkway, NW1 7AN, +44 (0)20 7485 9899**
 Tube: Camden Town
www.greennote.co.uk

Le Quecumbar

A French-style brasserie that specialises in the music of Django Reinhardt and all things Gypsy swing. **42-44 Battersea High Street, SW11 3HX, +44 (0)20 7787 2227**
 Station: Clapham Junction
www.quecumbar.co.uk



World City Music Village in the verdant setting of Hyde Park

FESTIVALS

Notting Hill Carnival

Held every August Bank Holiday since 1966, this is Europe's largest carnival with its roots in the Trinidadian community of West London. It fills the streets of Notting Hill with over 40 sound systems, Caribbean food stalls galore and parades of hip-shaking dancers. www.nottinghillcarnival.com

La Linea

Every April the capital's top Latin music festival plays host to a wide range of the continent's top musicians, as well as some of the best new collaborations involving Latin music. www.comono.co.uk

London Jazz Festival

Running throughout November, this long established festival first emerged as the Camden Jazz Week in the 1970s, and now plays host to a wide range of world music. 2011 will see Zakir Hussain, Toumani Diabaté and Alison Krauss on the bill. www.londonjazzfestival.org.uk

Celebrating Sanctuary London

This annual free festival launches

London's Refugee Week in mid-June on three stages set up in the Bernie Spain Gardens on the Southbank. The one-day festival brings a host of world music talent, as well as food, theatre and dance, to the riverside. www.refugeeweek.org.uk

World City Music Village

This project is famous for bringing the music of diaspora communities to London's green spaces, such as Kew Gardens and Hyde Park. The next event is on the eve of the Olympics. www.culturalco-operation.org

Darbar Festival

The UK's leading festival of Indian classical music has now made its home at Kings Place. The seventh edition of the festival will take place next September 27-30. www.darbar.org

LIFEM

The London International Festival of Exploratory Music doesn't need any explanation. It takes place at various venues in East London every autumn. www.lifem.org.uk

RECORD SHOPS

With the demise of Stern's, Borders and Virgin, the choice of places to go and buy music is on the decline. Here's a selection of the best places where you can still pick up those Top of the World albums:

Rough Trade

Rough Trade East, Old Truman Brewery, 91 Brick Lane, E1 6QL
 Rough Trade West, 130 Talbot Road, W11 1JA
www.roughtrade.com

Honest Jons

278 Portobello Road, W10 5TE,
www.honestjons.com

HMV Oxford Street

150 Oxford Street, W1D 1DJ, hmv.com

Rays Jazz

113-119 Charing Cross Road, WC2H 0EB
www.foyles.co.uk/rays-jazz-music