SITAR SENSATION RISHAB RIKHIRAM SHARMA JOINS SYDNEY FESTIVAL AS GLOBAL CLUB SOUNDS AND A HUGE FREE PARTY DIAL UP JANUARY

Dates
7–25 January 2027 – selected exhibitions extend beyond these dates.

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Image — L-R: Rishab Rikhiram, 3ARSA, DJ ZAINAB, Dar Disku

Sydney Festival today adds another wave of music programming for January 2027, with Indian sitar sensation Rishab Rikhiram Sharma bringing *Sitar for Mental Health* to the Sydney Opera House, House of Mince and Sultry Group joining forces for the first time at The Cutaway, and Club Shetu unveiling a full international lineup for a dancefloor that crosses continents.

Born into Delhi's famed Rikhi Ram family of instrument makers, **Rishab Rikhiram Sharma** picked up the sitar at ten and became the youngest disciple of the legendary Pandit Ravi Shankar at just eleven. He has since become one of his generation's most distinctive talents, with millions of adoring fans.

Rooted in the ancient tradition of Raag Chikitsa, ***Sitar for Mental Health*** brings music and meditation together in an immersive experience: a collective and joyous deep breath, inviting audiences to pause and be present in the moment. Indian classical mastery and a pop sensibility meet a mission to bring healing through music, with Sharma moving from traditional ragas to his singular spin on *Game of Thrones* and *Harry Potter* themes.

Dynamic, soulful and playful, this is the sitar as audiences have never heard it before. Following sold-out runs across North America, Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and the United Kingdom, Sharma brings his global tour to the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall on 22 January for its Australian premiere.

House of Mince and **Sultry Group** are revealed today as the collaborators behind ***The Party***, Sydney Festival's massive, free opening-weekend celebration at The Cutaway on Friday 8 January. Working together for the first time, they bring two of

Sydney's distinctive music communities into a night of live improvisation, DJs and performance.

Conceived as a "blind date" between two of Sydney's distinctive music communities, the collaboration connects scenes and audiences through the shared pleasure of a great night out.

Peter Shopovski's **House of Mince** has built a reputation for connecting Sydney's queer underground with artists and communities from around the world, championing local talent and creating space for encounters between music, performance and dance**. Sultry Group** brings the spirit of Sultry & Sample, its live music series whose fully improvised performances and warm crowd culture have cultivated a devoted following.

Sultry Group opens with live band and DJ improvisation sessions before House of Mince takes over to bring the dancefloor to a close. Come for the music, stay for the community at the core of Sydney's party culture.

At City Recital Hall, **Club Shetu** today reveals its complete lineup with **Panjabi Hit Squad**, **Dar Disku** and **3ARSA** joining the lineup alongside previously revealed artists **ZAINAB**, **Surya Sen** and curator **Munasib**. Three Australian debuts and a long-awaited return bring international dancefloor sounds to Sydney for one night only.

Shétu in Bangla literally translates to "bridge", and that is what this night builds. Curated by Sydney/Dakhar-based DJ and promoter **Munasib**, **Club Shetu** connects sounds across Southwest Asia and North Africa, South Asia and their diasporas, travelling from Lahore to New York, Bangladesh to London, Bahrain to Bristol and Sydney to Syria. Shared drum patterns, family cassette collections and the influence of Western hip hop and pop form the musical connections running through the bill.

Returning to Australia for the first time in 18 years, **Panjabi Hit Squad** helped pioneer the British Asian "Desi Beats" sound following their formation in 2001. With appearances on Boiler Room and a BBC 1Xtra residency among their credentials, they bring more than two decades of dancefloor history to the night. Bahraini-born, British-based duo **Dar Disku** make their Australian debut, bringing the Arabic music and global club sounds they champion through their music and record label while Sydney-based DJ and producer **3ARSA** completes the newly announced additions.

They join NYC/Lahore **DJ ZAINAB**, whose sets have reached Boiler Room, Glastonbury, Coachella and Lollapalooza, and whose debut EP Canal View was released on Ninja Tune in 2026. Also making his Australian debut, British-Bengali producer and rapper **Surya Sen** has featured in the NME 100 and been tipped as one to watch by *The Guardian*, *Evening Standard* and *Mixmag*. Alongside Munasib, the six

Image — The Party



NOTES TO EDITOR

- Tickets for Rishab Rikhiram Sharma's Sitar for Mental Health go on sale at 10am AEDT on Friday 6 November.

- All other events are on sale now.

- Full program and bookings at www.sydneyfestival.org.au

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artists build a bridge between musical traditions and contemporary club sounds: a sonic road everyone can dance on.

In addition to his previously announced Australian live debut at City Recital Hall for Sydney Festival, Pakistani-American singer, songwriter and composer **Ali Sethi** joins the Festival for ***An Afternoon with Ali Sethi***. Part conversation and part listening session, the talk explores Sufism as a living artistic and spiritual practice, drawing on centuries of Urdu poetry and devotional music. Moving between fashion and nightlife, ghazal and electropop, faith and Queer resilience, Sethi considers how the sacred and sensual inform one another, asking whether art might still be a form of devotion - and attention an act of surrendering to love.

"These artists bring different musical worlds together, whether that's Rishab connecting classical sitar with a new generation of listeners or Munasib building bridges across the diaspora," says Sydney Festival Director **Kris Nelson**. "And what a way to celebrate our opening weekend: a huge free party in the newly reopened Cutaway, with House of Mince and Sultry Group bringing their communities and all of Sydney together for the first time. It's an invitation to discover something new, meet someone unexpected and dance into the early hours."

The newly announced events build on a music program that moves between worlds. Western Sydney hip hop icons **ONEFOUR** and the **Penrith Chamber Orchestra** unite for the first time at The Joan, while **Ali Sethi** makes his Australian live debut and British sibling duo **Wasia Project** bring their blend of pop, classical influences and jazz to City Recital Hall. At Metro Theatre, **Blak & Blues** connects First Nations voices with influential Black American songbooks, with **Budjerah** channelling Donny Hathaway, **MO'JU** reimagining Bill Withers, and **SOLCHLD** stepping into the fire and feeling of Etta James.

Across the wider Sydney Festival program, **Hannah Gadsby** returns with a new show at Roslyn Packer Theatre, while **Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels** brings leading international choreographers and companies to Sydney, including French collective **(LA)HORDE**, China's **TAO Dance Theater** and **Rachid Ouramdane**, whose tightrope ballet ***Outsider*** unfolds inside The Cutaway. Major highlights in the Festival's expansive Blak Out program include **ILBIJERRI Theatre Company**'s ***THE LINE,*** co-presented with Sydney Opera House, and **Marrugeku**'s **Ngurragabu** at Carriageworks, both world premieres.

And outdoors, ***waynapuni pools*** transforms old cars into plunge pools, hot tubs and saunas at Barangaroo Reserve, while around them, **The Yard** marks the return of an outdoor festival hub, bringing pop-up restaurants, art and harbourside gatherings together.

Sydney Festival runs from 7–25 January 2027, bringing theatre, dance, music, visual art and outdoor experiences to venues and public spaces across Greater Sydney.

For program information and tickets, visit sydneyfestival.org.au.

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