

News Release

V&A East announces tickets on sale for V&A East Museum's inaugural exhibition - *The Music is Black: A British Story*

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- Tickets are now on sale for **V&A East Museum's** first exhibition, ***The Music is Black: A British Story***, celebrating the voices, talent and stories of Black British music and its global impact
- The exhibition brings together hidden stories of early legends and contemporary artists through objects from groundbreaking musician **Winifred Atwell's piano** to the Nintendo **Jme** used for early music experiments, fashion worn by **Little Simz, Seal, Dame Shirley Bassey** and **Skin** and **newly acquired photographs of Kemistry and Storm, Mis-Teeq, and Skepta**
- A multi-sensory experience, the exhibition showcases **over 200 objects** – including **60 new acquisitions** – from musical instruments to soundtracks, artworks, fashion, and personal belongings of world-famed artists
- Spanning over 125 years, the exhibition unveils the origins of multiple genres including, **2 tone, Brit funk, lovers rock, jungle, drum & bass, trip hop, UK garage, grime** and more
- The exhibition includes a partnership with **BBC Music** and kicks off **The Music Is Black Festival**, a series of programming, displays and performances in collaboration with **East Bank partners** in summer 2026

Today, **V&A East** releases tickets for its first landmark exhibition, ***The Music is Black: A British Story***. Opening at **V&A East Museum** on **Saturday 18 April 2026**, on East Bank in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, this multisensory exhibition explores the profound impact of Black artistry on British music, culture and beyond.

The Music is Black: A British Story traces the roots of music descended from African musical practices that have influenced and transformed British identity over the past 125 years. Tracing an ever-evolving sound shaped by British colonialism, transatlantic enslavement, migration and innovation, this exhibition is a celebration of resilience, creativity and joy. It reveals how British-born Black music genres – from **lovers rock** and **Brit funk**, to **2 tone, jungle, drum & bass, trip hop, UK garage, grime** and beyond – have inspired and impacted lives across the UK and around the world.



Divided into four powerful acts, the exhibition brings together an **evocative sound experience** and **multimedia installations** with over **200 objects** from 1900 to today. Spanning fashion, photography, musical instruments and technology, personal writings, song sheets, sculpture, paintings and more, objects include **over 60 newly acquired items to the V&A collection**. New acquisitions on display for the first time include **clothing worn by Seal for his eponymous 1991 debut album**, **Eddie Otchere's vivid photographs of drum & bass duo Kemistry and Storm**, **Joan Armatrading CBE's childhood guitar** that sparked her love of music, and the **jacket that rapper and actor Nolay** wore when filming *Top Boy*.

For the first time, a series of personal items belonging to music-makers, DJs and producers, such as **DJ Target**, and those connected to **Jammer's Lord of the Mics created with Chad 'Ratty' Stennett**, which changed the trajectory for many MCs, go on display. Revealed for the first time is **Jme's Super Nintendo and Mario Paint game**, which he used for his first experiments with music-making in the 1990s, before founding grime collective and record label, **Boy Better Know (BBK)** with his brother **Skepta**.

The exhibition includes iconic fashion, from the striking dress worn in 2013 by **Dame Shirley Bassey to perform 'Goldfinger' at the 85th Academy Awards**, celebrating 50 years of the James Bond film franchise, to the **Comme des Garçons ensemble worn by rapper Little Simz** for British magazine *Dazed* in 2023, and a provocative **green suit and spiked headpiece worn by singer-songwriter Skin** – the first Black woman to headline Glastonbury in 1997. Also on show are ensembles worn by music-making pioneers from **Carroll Thompson** to **Janet Kay MBE**, **Pauline Black OBE**, **Sade**, and **Morcheeba's Skye Edwards**.

Visitors can also delve into hidden stories of musical figures across time through objects such as **musical batons from the early 1900s belonging to classical composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor**, who was commissioned to compose music for the first Pan-African Conference in 1900. A **piano belonging to Winifred Atwell**, the first Black artist to have a number one hit in the UK Singles Chart in 1954 is also on show, along with works of American icons who influenced Black British music-making including **Sister Rosetta Tharpe** and **Big Mama Thornton**.

Artworks by **Dame Sonia Boyce**, **Olayinka Burney-Nicol**, **Sokari Douglas Camp CBE**, **Denzil Forrester MBE**, **Fowokan George Kelly**, **Tam Joseph**, **Vicky Lindo** and **Bill Brookes**, and **Zak Ové** bring the exhibition further to life, including specially **commissioned new works** by **Sir Frank Bowling** and **LR Vandy**, unveiled for the first time.

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Jacqueline Springer, Curator of *The Music Is Black: A British Story* and Curator of *Africa and Diaspora Performance* at the V&A, said: *"Music reflects and feeds emotions. It inspires, comforts, offends and entertains. It also awakens memory and punctuates our present. This exhibition provides another dimension in our celebration and understanding of how social and political histories are responded to by people and their cultures to provide the art we all enjoy. This exhibition speaks to modernity and long deep histories; of the legacies of identity and to the music that furnishes our collective and individual memories. We hope that visitors will emerge with a broader appreciation of Black British music makers, the enormous influence of Black musicality - internationally and domestically - and the legacy of the influence of the African diaspora."*

Gus Casely-Hayford, V&A East Director, said: *"We've created V&A East Museum as a hub for collaboration, creativity and celebration, and our first exhibition, *The Music is Black: A British Story*, is the embodiment of this. Expertly curated by Jacqueline Springer and team, this is an important story, not just for Britain and British music, but for Black artistry globally, and it's an honour to spotlight this in east London, home to the creation of some of the most exciting musical genres and performances. We're thrilled to be collaborating with BBC Music, as well as our East Bank partners on the programming for *The Music is Black Festival*, inspired by this exhibition. My thanks go to our supporters, Ford Foundation, the Huo Family Foundation, GRoW @ Annenberg, and Sennheiser in helping make this a reality. We can't wait to welcome everyone to V&A East Museum this April."*

The exhibition begins with **Act 1: Origins of Music**, tracing the origins of Black music, uncovering its African foundations, how Black expression travelled through years of enslavement and inspired the music genres that would later arrive in Britain. **Act 2: 'Great' Britain: 1900-1969**, explores the rise of modern Britain, bringing to life how Black music flourished amid war, migration and technological change. **Act 3: British-Born Black Music** reveals how uniquely Black British genres began to emerge, from **lovers rock** to **grime**. The exhibition concludes with **Act 4: The British Sound Of...** looking at Black British music today and its future, across a variety of genres from **pop**, **dubstep**, and **drill**, to **gospel**, **jazz** and **afrobeats**.

BBC Music has partnered with **V&A East** on *The Music Is Black: A British Story*, providing access to archival materials, and releasing a season of content across its channels inspired by the exhibition. In summer 2026, **The Music is Black Festival** will take place in collaboration with East Bank partners, including the **BBC**, **Sadlers Wells East**, **UAL's London College of Fashion**, and **UCL East**. The festival will include a series of performances, displays, events and live performances across Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and beyond.



V&A East Museum opens on 18 April 2026, joining sister venue V&A East Storehouse, which opened in May 2025. Across two sites, V&A East is one of the UK's most ambitious new museum developments of the last decade. Both sites are part of East Bank, the new cultural quarter in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, as part of the Mayor of London's 2012 Olympic and Paralympic legacy.

Supporters

The Music Is Black: A British Story at V&A East Museum is supported by the Ford Foundation with further support from the Huo Family Foundation and GRoW @ Annenberg. Sound Experience supported by Sennheiser.

-ENDS-

For further PRESS information about ***The Music Is Black: A British Story***, please contact Michaila Otoo, m.otoo@vam.ac.uk / press.office@vam.ac.uk / 020 7942 2000 (not for publication).

A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk.

Notes to Editors

- Tickets for V&A East Museum's first exhibition, *The Music is Black: A British Story*, are available to purchase [here](#)
- The exhibition opens on Saturday 18 April and runs until 3 January 2027.
- Tickets for students and those under 26 from £10. Full price from £20.
- **Sadeysa Greenaway-Bailey** is the lead exhibition designer for *The Music is Black: A British Story*. Exhibition and Graphic Design is by **Reality is__**, AV Video Design by **Gino Ricardo Green**, Sound Design and Music Production by **Xana**, Lighting Design by **Jai Morjaria**, and Creative Production Management by **Mekel Edwards**.
- V&A East Museum opens to all on Saturday 18 April 2026. Opening hours are 10:00-18:00, seven-days-a-week, with late night openings to 22:00 every Thursday and Saturday.

About V&A East

V&A East is dedicated to creative opportunity and its power to bring change. V&A East Storehouse (opened 31 May 2025) and V&A East Museum (opening 18 April 2026) are two free cultural destinations that are part of East Bank, on Queen Elizabeth Olympic



Park. Both have been created in partnership with young people and inspired by east London's creative heritage. Working directly with the voices that are shaping global contemporary culture, V&A East brings the V&A collection and archive to life in new ways, celebrating making in all its forms and opening up new possibilities and discoveries for everyone.

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About East Bank

- East Bank is the UK's newest cultural quarter at the heart of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The place where everything happens – entertainment, inspiration and discovery – and open to everyone who visits, lives and works in east London.
- East Bank represents the biggest ever cultural investment by the Mayor of London, with support from HM Government and the four Olympic boroughs.
- East Bank is made up of BBC Music Studios; London College of Fashion, UAL; Sadler's Wells East; UCL (University College London); V&A East Museum & Storehouse.
- London College of Fashion, UAL, and UCL East (University College London) opened the doors of their new campuses in Autumn 2023 and Sadler's Wells East opened in February 2025. V&A East Storehouse opened on 31 May 2025. V&A East Museum opens 18 April 2026, and BBC Music Studios in late 2026/early 2027.
- A powerhouse for innovation, creativity and learning in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, East Bank is rooted in the diverse communities of east London and is a reflection of the creative spirit and the legacy of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.