

Club Kali
NETWORK

Club Kali
Celebrating
30 Years

WHERE

EAST WEST

MEETS

A CLUB KALI project documenting
and showcasing the rich history of the
legendary club night over 30 years



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"When I co-created Club Kali in 1995, by that point, I was very clear that there was an appetite and a demand for a music club whereby East meets West."
DJ Ritu



Foreword

Welcome to Club Kali, our home. We're excited about sharing our space, our experience and our memories with you here. We've been a secret, hidden away, and decided after 30 years to open our doors to you so you can experience the joy, journey, and love that exists within our chosen family and global community.

This brochure forms part of the 'Where East Meets West Project', showcasing the rich history of Club Kali from its inception in 1995 to the present day. Club Kali is the UK's first ever safe space welcoming all LGBTQ+ people to connect and celebrate their diverse South Asian heritage. It was set up by DJ Ritu MBE and Rita Hirani OBE as a London based club night, and grew into an inclusive, welcoming LGBTQ+ community.

The groundbreaking multimedia exhibition 'Our Legacy, Our Home: Club Kali at 30' was created as part of this landmark project. This exhibition showcases 30 years of LGBTQ+ South Asian heritage: Joy, Unity and Community, featuring voices, visions, memories and mementoes of Club Kali and its supporters and friends. The project has collected over 30 oral histories and precious memorabilia from Club Kali stakeholders across three decades – from those involved in setting up the club night to those who have only recently found a home for their LGBTQ+ story within Britain's South Asian heritage communities.

The Club Kali collection will be deposited at Bishopsgate Institute as a historical resource documenting Club Kali for future generations.

The exhibition 'Our Legacy, Our Home: Club Kali at 30' was produced with Islington Museum and Islington Heritage.

Introduction

Club Kali is unique and still going after 30 years. Despite threats, objections, discrimination, this secret tight knit club grew, people shared about it by word of mouth across the world. Battles with Section 28, HIV/AIDS were added to the mix of racism and attitudes toward minority LGBTQ+ people. Club Kali emerged in this landscape of divisions and took on, as the name suggests, a battle against forces demonising LGBTQ+ people and Black communities which at the time included all People of Colour communities.

Walking up those steps and through those doors at Club Kali felt like a real home, one big colourful community united. Although held initially only one night a month, you came away stronger, knowing you belonged, you were part of a family that cared, that accepted you, allowed you to grow and escape. That sense of connectedness stayed with you long after you left Club Kali at the end of the night. The faces of individuals walking in for the first time, often lit up with exclamations of

“OMG, there are other people like me!”

At Club Kali, people opened up, shared their fears, worries, stories, hopes, wishes around coming out, or not, and about life and struggles as a LGBTQ+ person.



The Club Kali co-founders: DJ Ritu, MBE & Rita, OBE

“

“There are so, so many individual stories within Club Kali that constantly remind me of the power of safe spaces and unity. On one hand it was exhausting emotionally but on the other hand, it was invigorating and so special, what kept me going were the stories of people.”

Rita



The Dome venue, in an off the beaten track North London location became our Home. A genuine sprung wooden dancefloor big enough to do all the Bollywood and Bhangra moves you could desire, to really let your hair down, to discover and be your true self. Club Kali's Chutney Queens (gender diverse people and drag performers) were born and came out on stage, along with professional mainstream artists who also performed, there was a lot of coming out on stage!

Club Kali drew a multi-cultural, cross generational, global following. Differences in faith, culture, language all blended and united on the dancefloor, where Eastern beats mixed with Western classics, and everyone celebrated festivals from Eid, Diwali, Halloween to Christmas. This was and remains a privilege to witness, and a blessing.

Over time, we spread our wings and forged collaborations with high-profile organisations including ICA, Victoria & Albert Museum, Tate, British Museum, and BFI Flare. We had mainstream South Asian artists performing and doing album launches.

“

“There are at least 200 brilliant memories of being in that DJ booth, that Club Kali. So many, so many beautiful moments, so many celebratory moments. That's generally how I would describe the atmosphere at Club Kali, is that it is really celebratory on the dance floor and on the stage, people absolutely let their hair down.”

DJ Ritu

30 Years of Club Kali magic – Here are some of our milestone moments:

1995

Club Kali opens at The Dome: "Black, Beautiful, and Powerful", a space welcoming all LGBTQ+ people to celebrate South Asian culture and heritage. We chose the name Kali to symbolize the destruction of prejudice and oppressive norms.



2018

Dancing in the Street in the Pride London Parade with our community partners, supported by friends, Kala Kala in his car, with the familiar call of the Dhol! Then party time at Tate Britain.



2021

Our 25th Birthday in Lockdown. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, we kept going: hosting online wellbeing sessions, socials, Bingo, and virtual dancing and parties.



2009

The world's best kept secret finally came out on the World Wide Web: a website and social media, with closed channels to protect members.

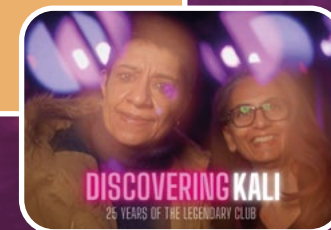


2022

Islington's Pride: Club Kali was awarded a Pink Plaque recognising the contribution Club Kali has made to Islington's heritage and LGBTQ+ communities.

2023

We world premiered our Silver Jubilee documentary 'Discovering Kali' at the London Indian Film Festival on the 23rd June 2023, hosted at the BFI.



1999

Club Kali float at London Pride: the first London Pride appearance featuring Chutney Queens and Bollywood tunes, adding colour to Pride Parade.



2012

Branching Out: Club Kali swept different cultural and social spots around London, from Bollywood dance classes to events at the British Library, BFI, and Battersea Park for the Olympics.



2015

We loved our Pizza Party, Bowling Nights, Karaoke, explored new spaces with Kali in the City, and fun competitions at our Queer Quiz nights.



2025

Club Kali Celebrating 30 Years

Where East Meets West launches: The National Lottery Heritage Fund recognises Club Kali's impact by funding a project to collect, archive, and share memories and stories about Club Kali's 30 year journey.



About Where East Meets West project

Club Kali's 'Where East Meets West' heritage project launched with Pride in June 2025, made possible by the amazing support of The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Take a peek at our first year in action: from fun & vibrant community events to hands-on volunteering activities, we have had an incredible journey... and we are just getting started! Here is what some of our wonderful project volunteers and Club Kali stakeholders have to say about our project:

“

Our East Meets West Heritage Project is an excellent idea and it's a very necessary idea and initiative because when I talk to younger people, no matter what I'm talking to them about, they often feel that there is nowhere that they can go to understand where they've come from, that there's a very big lack of information out there.” DJ Ritu



“

It's been an amazing opportunity to learn about the South Asian queer community in London!”



“

It bridges the gap between different communities. I gained a better understanding of the South Asian community in the UK.”



“

I feel more connected to my community... because I'm bi. So, it made me want to engage more with queer communities of colour.”



“

It helps me connect by learning about South Asian queer history in the UK.”



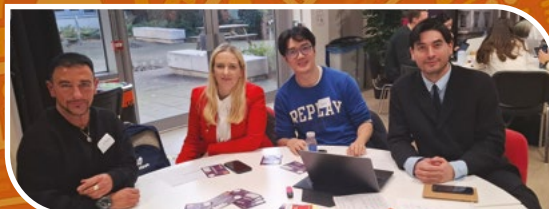
“

It's very emotional, and I think the more I hear about [WEMW], the more I get into it. This is like the most exciting project I've ever done.”



“

Club Kali has already been bridging the gap between different communities, since it first started, initially for South Asians, different nationalities went and found refuge, this really important safe space for South Asians, but other people came, found friends and were able to grow.”



Club Kali turns 30!

Celebrating our 30th Birthday, on 28th June 2025 at the Dome, with people flying in from all over the world was a massive achievement.

The 'Where East Meets West' project has enabled us to pause, reflect on the difference we have made, the lives we have connected, and saved, and the power of people uniting through music, against all differences. This truly is the power of Club Kali - where music, joy and celebration speak to the heart, and love, kindness and solidarity prevails.

Here's a look back at our birthday bashes through the years:



Once Upon a Dancefloor

From Shadows to Spotlight – the making of Club Kali. The World's best kept secret came out during a time when South Asian LGBTQ+ people needed a safe space to come together.

“

“The Black community. We had our commonness to fight fascism and racism, for me, Kali meant Black and there was a unity in that. So, Club Kali was the name, that sense of fighting oppression, prejudice, eradicating, eliminating evil, which is what she did. And secretly, I really admired the fact, she went to war and chopped off the heads of this evil army and made a necklace out of them. I mean, talk about recycling.” **Rita**

“When I used to go, they used to hold a dance class before the club event, to get everyone relaxed. I was just like, how amazing is this? just before a club night.” **Anish**

“They were trailblazers in terms of the queer South Asian community in London. There was no space like that, it was much needed. To see that vision at that time was quite amazing, they created Club Kali. They filled the gap.” **Joshua**

“There used to be dance-offs and big dance circles. You would do your bhangra moves, a circle would form because people think, this guy's a good dancer. And then suddenly people make room for you.

And then there'd be somebody else who'd want to join in or challenge you or take over the circle.” **Lakhs**

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“

Rhythm & Roots

Discovering a safe space where everyone was welcome, where South Asian culture and music was at the heart of it all, where Bollywood rhythms and drama played out on the dancefloor.

“There would be balloons, fabric, incense, everything smelled and felt magical. Tables were full of grapes, mithai, and samosas, authentically Asian. People were dancing, hugging, screaming when songs came on. I realised: these were the songs I danced to in my bedroom, door locked. It was the freedom to dance how you really wanted to.” **Asifa**

“I think it was hard in those days, some people were married, I myself was married; I had an arranged marriage, and I wasn't out.” **Sanjay**

“Being South Asian in these spaces was really important, there was and still is a lot of racism in the UK, so going to a place where we could be safe and celebrate different parts of ourselves.” **Manju**

“You could go and hear Turkish pop, belly dance music, Bollywood and Bhangra, Kylie Minogue and Madonna all at the same time. And the music styles varied as well. You know, there was ragga, there was jungle, there was house music, R & B and whichever languages those were sung in. Ultimately, they were dance music styles.”

DJ Ritu

”

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All Aboard! A celebration of Difference

Diversity in motion powered by unity & devotion. This spirit was reflected in celebrations of Christmas, Diwali, Eid, Vaisakhi, World AIDS Day, and more.

“

“Celebrating diversity within diversity and so on, Club Kali provides that inclusive space that was so needed and still needed in the LGBT scene, no matter where you go.” **Ubie**

“With Club Kali I was able to take the range of music further, making it even more diverse all-inclusive because Club Kali attracted lots and lots of clubbers from other parts of the world.” **DJ Ritu**

“You’d hear all sorts of languages in the queue, English, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, whatever, you’d see everybody, turban-wearing Sikhs, Muslims with their beards or with their topis, Hindus with their tikas, Chutney Queens, the drag queens just going by, going straight to the front and straight in.” **Asifa**

“When Rita and Ritu held a [Club Kali] event, the night before we started that 150-mile [charity] walk, I was invited to the stage and talk about it. It was an opportunity for me to invite many of my friends who would never know about Club Kali or would never go to Club Kali ordinarily.” **Matt, Matt and Naz Foundation**

“My very first time in 2014, it really gave me a lot of confidence to do something about my real gender transition. I was really lacking that confidence prior to that, so, Club Kali really made a difference.” **Anqa**

Home is who you Dance with

A home away from home. Where people found friends, their chosen family, connections and supported each other, a club night which became a global community.

“

“A circle formed around us, there was an old Qawwali song, a style of traditional Indian Sufi music, and we danced, three of us were very much in sync, it was almost like we’d rehearsed this and went really well.” **Ravi**

“It felt like coming home, comfortable, although it was such a big space, from the moment you come in there are people to welcome you, to smile, to be warm towards you, like they’ve known you before, for a long time.” **Manju**

“We could take off all of those... external... cloaks that we had, not just the physical that we took off as we walked into those doors to reveal the extravagant nature of ourselves of South Asian attire. It was more than that, we were shedding the shame, leaving that at the door.” **Al Sadiq**

“People got to know how important protecting the mental health and wellbeing of our LGBTQ+ community is and was. We started to have more real conversations and people reached out to us from all over the world.” **Rita**

Partnering Up to Power Up

Club Kali built bridges to break down barriers; worked collaboratively, established, inspired other groups, and enabled access to other specialist services.

“

Through AIDS Memory UK, which I founded, the AIDS Memorial in London and Club Kali, we teamed up on a number of events, at Duckie they were completely full, sold out.” **Ash**

“Club Kali’s legacy is huge, not only has it created a community, it provided a safe space for 30 years, it has also given birth to other clubs all around the UK. It has put our charity, Naz and Matt Foundation on the map with the big launch event.” **Matt**

“We set up stalls at Club Kali promoting sexual health information, ultimate Karma, we were there to listen, to signpost to services; sexual health project in Birmingham, NAZ Project in London, and various sexual health projects across the country.” **Hardish**



And the Beat goes on

The Future is intergenerational. Where next?

“

Throughout the last three decades it’s managed to keep reinventing itself, keep going despite the racism of some of the club world, the pandemic, all the challenges over the last 30 years, it’s still going. You know, the kind of the links they’ve made with the film festival, supporting others...supporting Pride events, all these things have created that legacy. And I see no sign of it ending any day soon.” **Deni**

“Club Kali’s legacy is to spread this around the world. What is it 30 years of Club Kali? That speaks for itself.” **Dirish**

“A lot of the generation has got it on a platter, sometimes forget that there were people before them, that came and made that space available, so that we can now be celebrated the way we are.” **Andy**

Thank you for giving us home, refuge, shelter, and voice. I think the future; we need to think about what the future generations need and talk to them.” **Pravesh**

“As long as it continues to retain its... ethos and its sense of self, I know in the hands of Rita and Ritu they will always make sure that it is a place full of joy and that safe haven, that happy space for the community.” **Ricky**



Links and resources

Visit Club Kali
www.clubkali.com



More on the WEMW project
including multi-media
exhibition here.



Watch, read and
listen:
www.clubkali.co.uk

Download and listen to
our Podcast Series:



Discover the Club Kali
archive collection in
person or online:
[www.bishopsgate.org.uk/
archives](http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/archives)



Follow us @clubkali



Thank Yous and Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the great input and support of the following individuals and organisations.

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The Bishopsgate Institute that is housing the Club Kali archive collection, preserving it for future generations - and hosting our archive launch event.

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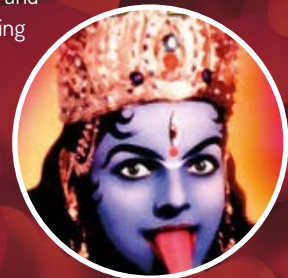
Club Kali Working Group members - to Sakib Khan for mobilising the group team and introducing our heritage to the wider project team.

All the **Kali community**, volunteers and behind the scenes people, memorabilia and image donors, and associates thank you too for supporting the stories and making this project come to life.

30+ Kali members for coming out, giving your time and sharing your memories and your memorabilia - to be treasured always.

We thank **all our project associates** for their kind support.

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A massive THANK YOU with love & gratitude.



“Club Kali is like a patchwork quilt — a beautiful blanket that protects, comforts, and connects you. It’s not just a thing, it’s the emotions and experience — there for you when you need it.”

Rita, OBE, co-founder



“From what people tell us about how much Club Kali has meant to them, I’m hopeful that we will be in people’s memories and hearts for a very long time.”

DJ Ritv, MBE, co-founder



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