

Peoples and traditions

Artistic and cultural activity in Britain ranges from the highest professional standards to a wide variety of amateur involvement. London is one of the leading world centers for drama, music, opera and dance. Other cities are serve as centers of artistic excellence in their regions. Some 650 professional arts festivals take place each year. The Edinburgh International Festival is the largest of its kind in the world.

Britain has about 300 theatres intended for professional use, of which about 100 are in London, including the Royal National Theatre. The Royal Shakespeare Company performs in Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace, and in London. Sixty-four companies receive subsidies from the Arts Councils. Contemporary British playwrights who have received international recognition include Harold Pinter, Alan Ayckbourn, Caryl Churchill and David Hare. The musicals of Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, including "Evita", "Cats" and "Phantom of the Opera", have been highly successful in Britain, New York and around the world.

There is music for every taste in Britain including opera, choral and classical orchestra's pieces, rock and pop, folk and jazz, military and brass bands, acoustic and newly emerging musical collaborations such as music theatre, music video, and music with live arts. In musical composition, experimentation is in vogue, with composers mixing their sources: medieval modes and minimalism, quotations from Wagner and from Debussy, Indian melodies and African rhythms. Since the early 60s with the emergence of the Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and the Who, through the 70s with Genesis, Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd and the 80s with Dire Straits and The Police and punk pioneers like.

Britain's leading symphony orchestras include the London Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony, and the Ulster and the Royal Scottish Orchestras. There are also chamber orchestras such as the English Chamber Orchestra and the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

Opera is enjoying unprecedented audiences and attention in the 90s due to performances on television as those directed by Jonathan Miller and well publicised commercial recordings of the classics. Royal Opera, Covent Gardens, and the English National Opera are the main London opera companies. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own opera companies. Scottish Opera has regular seasons at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow and tours mainly in Scotland and northern England. Welsh National Opera presents seasons in Cardiff and other cities in England.

Audiences have a wide choice of dance in Britain including classical ballet, African people Dance, physical theatre, jazz, new dance and contemporary dance. The lion's share of Arts Council funding for dance, about 90 per cent goes to support the Royal Ballet (housed with the Royal Opera in Covent Garden), the Birmingham Royal Ballet, which tours widely in Britain and overseas; English National Ballet, which performs in London and regionally; Northern Ballet Theatre, based in Halifax which tours mostly in the north of England; and Scottish Ballet based in Glasgow. Britain's leading contemporary dance company, the Ballet Rambert is also subsidised by the Arts Council, as is the London Contemporary Dance Theatre, which has regular seasons in London and tours. Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble is also supported and the KOSH, which combines, dance, theatre and acrobatics.

Recently, South Asian dance and African People's dance have increased in popularity. Since the 70s and the introduction of 'animators' (usually a professionally trained dance artist who provides a range of dance activity within a specific locality) a greater public awareness of dance is evident. As a result, six new national dance agencies were established in Birmingham, Leeds, Leicester, London, Newcastle and Swindon to offer training, management support and creative opportunities for artists. These agencies either program and produce dance productions themselves or work closely in partnerships with promoters.

British films, actors and the creative and technical services, which support them, are acclaimed at international film festivals. The industry also produces films for television. There are many well known British performers, three of the best known being Sean Connery, Michael Caine and Kenneth Branagh.

There are about 2,500 museums and art galleries in Britain. The major national museums, many of which are in London, have world-famous artistic, archaeological, scientific and historical collections. They include the British Museum, The Natural History Museum, the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery. Many of Britain's great private houses (some open to the public) are of prime architectural interest and also contain art treasures.