

# rifco theatre company

## 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



**THEATRE THAT CELEBRATES THE BRITISH SOUTH ASIAN EXPERIENCE**



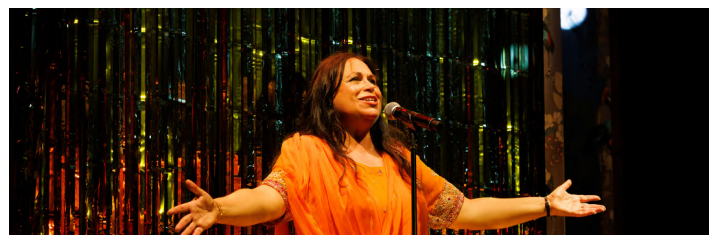
## ABOUT RIFCO

Led by Artistic Director Pravesh Kumar MBE, Rifco is one of the UK's most successful touring theatre companies. Coming out of the pandemic we have invested hugely in producing digital shows and supporting emerging and mid-career British South Asian artists in 2022.

When Pravesh founded Rifco Theatre Company 21 years ago, his vision was simple: 'If no one else is willing to represent the stories and experiences of the British South Asian community, I will.'

21 years later, the way representation looks on our stages has dramatically changed, and Rifco has been and continues to be a major part of this journey. The company has drawn from the vibrancy of the British South Asian community, who have in turn shown unwavering support for the work produced. This has provided opportunities to draw underrepresented artists and audiences together to create and enjoy relevant and accessible stories.

Our focus on artistic excellence, new writing and ambitious programming has driven every strand of activity we've delivered this year. We've embedded artist development of British South Asian voices, working with new writers and supporting young artists into every project, creating new and exciting work, involving our communities every step of the way.



## 2022 IN SUMMARY

We kicked the year off in style with our Artistic Director Pravesh Kumar recognised in the Queen's New Year's Honours list for his contribution to British theatre. We hope that this accolade will send a message to the wider British theatre industry about the importance of British South Asian theatre.

This year saw several milestones for Pravesh, with the successful premiere of his debut feature film *Little English*, and the positive reaction to his production of *Abigail's Party* at Watford Palace Theatre in March.

In January George Warren joined the team as Producer and has since been promoted to Executive Producer on the departure of Executive Director Jenny Roberts, who moved on to the next stage of her career after six years at the company. George has led the management team to produce the second series of *Leave The Plastic On*, the *Glitterball* tour and the *GenerAsians* documentaries.

Vic Shead filled the position of Marketing Manager in April after a 7 month gap without a dedicated in house marketing role. Along with Rifco regular Gurpreet Braich and new digital agency Crafted she delivered a new website on time and in budget. She also led on the marketing campaign for *Glitterball*, navigating a different offer for new and existing Rifco audiences alike.

Hari Johnson was brought in as the Audience Engagement Coordinator for the *Glitterball* tour and subsequently has accepted the role of part-time Marketing Assistant until the end of July 2023. Hari has been brilliant at welcoming audiences to Rifco performances at venues and helped us get very close to our quota of completed audience surveys for this financial year.

Sue Lloyd returned as Head of Development and Partnerships. Her focus was initially on rekindling her previous relationships, with *Glitterball* and the 21 Artists for 21 Years exhibition providing opportunities to host and entertain, establishing new Celebrity Patrons, and new potential HNW supporters. She has submitted funding bids to a number of trusts to support project and core needs, and end-of-year reports to existing funders. She has submitted sponsorship proposals to a number of companies with the aim of achieving support for the *Happy Birthday Sunita* tour.





## 2022 IN SUMMARY (ctd)

In April we opened submissions for this year's cohort of Rifco Associates, with a focus on creating short-form digital content.

Ameet and Pravesh continued to support emerging and mid-career writers, working closely with the six Associates developing writing and dramaturgical skills through workshops, 1-2-1s and masterclasses with industry experts. Ameet Chana has as always done a superb job supporting the Associates through this process, while this year also appearing in the West End show *Life of Pi*.

Throughout the year we have showcased commissions from our 21 Artists, one for each year of Rifco's history, with an exhibition curated by Hafsa Bashir at Oldham Library in May. *Eid: Past & Present* was an audio-visual exploration of the Eid Festival through the photos and stories of the local community.

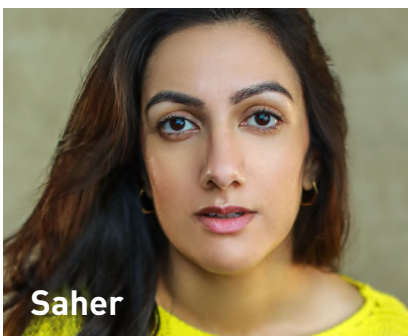
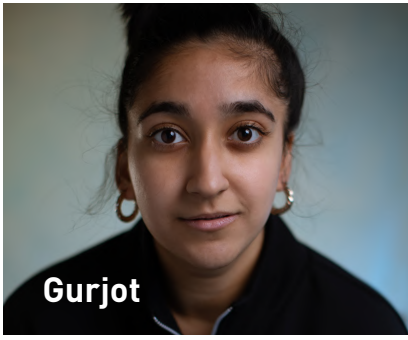
The *21 Artists for 21 Years* programme culminated in a VIP evening at Riverside Studios in September. The event was a wonderful celebration of diverse talent, from writers to filmmakers, visual artists and a magnificent costume exhibition curated by Andy Kumar. The team at Riverside Studios made the whole company feel so welcome in what felt like a Rifco venue takeover. *A Palette of Possibilities* - a hanging textile artwork crafted by one of our 21 Artists Momtaz Begum-Hossain has been hung in the foyer of Watford Palace Theatre.

May saw the launch of the second series of our online sketch show *Leave The Plastic On*. New writers, new characters and new online audiences have enjoyed the Br-Indian comic stylings of *BollyOaks* and the *Weather'd Woman* among other episodes. Views and feedback from audiences have been very encouraging, indicating that there is an appetite for this kind of digital content from Rifco.



## RIFCO HIGHLIGHTS:

# Rifco Associates Programme



Rifco Associates was launched in 2015 to address the lack of opportunity for British Asian artists in the theatre sector. Through the programme artists from a range of practices including writers, lyricists, composers, designers, aerialists and spoken word performers have been supported.

The programme is led by Rifco's Associate Director, Ameet Chana, who himself came through the Associate programme. Ameet has worked extensively with us as a trainee director, curating the British Asian Festival in 2016 and as a Director and Assistant Director. He also leads the digital arm of the company's work.

Our new cohort of Associates for 2022 all submitted pitches that had the potential to be developed into scripts for short form digital content:

**Gurjot Dhaliwal** is an actor and writer, who graduated in 2021 from The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

**Ben Grant** is an interdisciplinary artist, currently in post as the Resident Director at the Oxford Playhouse and Magdalen College School.

**Jaisal Marmion** is an early career writer, primarily interested in exploring issues around identity, multiculturalism and racism.

**Kurban Kassam** is completing his masters in screenwriting at the Royal Central Speech and Drama.

**Saher Shah** is an actor, writer and poet from London. Since leaving behind a career as a Dietitian in the NHS, she has retrained and worked in theatre, voiceover and film.

**Zishan Afsar** is an actor and writer, a Drama Studio London graduate, and was part of the Soho Theatre Writers' Lab 2019-20. He is passionate about writing South Asian centric stories.

Two out of the six Associates will have their work produced into a film in early 2023, with a sharing event planned, plus extensive online distribution via Rifco channels and a PR campaign to amplify this strand of supporting talent.



## RIFCO HIGHLIGHTS:



This project is a celebration of the enormous contribution that British South Asian creatives have made, and will continue to make, not just to the success of Rifco but to the UK theatre sector.

Rifco has commissioned one artist for every year of our journey – playwrights, craft makers, lyricists, visual and spoken word artists – to create new work that celebrates Rifco's 21st anniversary and gives voice to artists and their own British South Asian experiences.

As we look back on how far we have come, Rifco is incredibly excited to present proof that British South Asian artists are placed to lead the arts sector over the next 21 years.



# RIFCO HIGHLIGHTS:

## 21 ARTISTS FOR 21 YEARS (CTD)

### Satinder Chohan | Writer

Commission: The Koh-i-Noor Trilogy captures the spirited resistance of three feisty figures, each separately fighting a controlling and oppressive British establishment.

### Raxstar | Musician/Songwriter

Commission: 'Rifco's 21' - a spoken word celebration of 21 years of the British South Asian journey. Where we came from, how we persevered and ultimately excelled in so many fields.

### Momtaz Begum-Hossain | Artist

Commission: A Palette of Possibilities is commemorative textile artwork taking inspiration from Rifco's stories, costumes and shows.

### Amrit Bhamra | Artist

Commission: The Perfect Bride is a raw and authentic series of drawings around unrealistic standards of marriage.

### Lucky Azad | Writer

Commission: Lucky was one of the writers on the second series of *Leave The Plastic On* - a comedy sketch show released online throughout 2022.

### Vik Kainth | Artist

Commission: Vik was commissioned to work on a series of illustrations to be used in our *GenerAsians* series, commemorating the Asian Ugandan expulsion of 1973.

### Amman Kayla | Writer

Commission: Amman co-wrote the second season of *Leave the Plastic On*, giving us Lucky and Johnny, possibly the most hilariously awkward mother son team of 2022.

### Nimisha Odedra | Writer

Commission: Nimisha co-wrote the second season of *Leave the Plastic On* and is responsible for the Weather'd Woman, oversharing on every topic apart from the weather.

### Harry Syed | Writer

Commission: Harry co-wrote the second season of *Leave the Plastic On*, giving us the irrepressible and irresponsible Suri Coach Ya, the lifestyle guru behind the 5 Day Diet plan.

### Andy Kumar | Costume Designer

Commission: Andy curated the 21 Artists for 21 Years Costume Exhibition at Riverside Studios, an incredible and beautiful array of outfits and props from past Rifco shows.

# RIFCO HIGHLIGHTS: 21 ARTISTS FOR 21 YEARS (CTD)

## **Hafsah Aneela Bashir | Writer**

Commission: The Eid Past & Present Exhibition was exhibited at Oldham Library in May and at the Kushi Festival until August 2022.

## **Yasmin Wilde | Writer**

Commission: *Glitterball*, a new play exploring dual heritage, grief and the glorious hits of Shirley Bassey, which toured to Watford, London and Oldham in Autumn 2022.

## **Taqi Neezer | Writer**

Commission: *Ristha*, a satirical rom-com that is deliberately unapologetic in celebrating South Asian marriage culture.

## **Radhika Jani | 2021/2022 Associate**

Commission: *Cornershop Love*

## **Naomi Joseph | 2021/2022 Associate**

Commission: *How Are you?*

## **Sara Isaac | 2021/2022 Associate**

Commission: *The Good Shepherd*

## **Nafeesa Hamid | 2021/2022 Associate**

Commission: *Shop Uncle*

## **Guinder Maini | 2021/2022 Associate**

Commission: *Bobby*

## **Rupi Lal | 2021/2022 Associate**

Commission: *The Quiet One*

## **Apinder Sahni | 2021/2022 Associate**

Commission: *Life is 4 and Half Metres*

## **Mahesh Parkar | 2021/2022 Associate**

Commission: *Me Marathi Bolto/Duality*



## RIFCO HIGHLIGHTS:



**'Glitterball has it all... Superb comedy that leaves you in stitches'**

London Theatre Review

**'Beautiful story, lovely poignant script, fantastic acting'**

Audience Member

**Nominated for three Offies:**

Set Design - Libby Watson

Most Promising Playwright - Yasmin Wilde

Best Production

Our first live touring production post-pandemic was *Glitterball*, a debut play written by and starring Rifco Associate graduate Yasmin Wilde.

The show played Watford Palace Theatre, Riverside Studios and Oldham Coliseum from 15 September - 15 October 2022.

This was an opportunity to give a platform to an exciting new British South Asian talent, and Yasmin wrote an exceptional, distinctive piece that highlighted the contradictions of mixed heritage and the challenges of being heard as a woman over 50.



### **The Glitterball tour in numbers:**

Venues 3

Performances 37

Cast 6

Creative & Production Team 8

Audience Members 2821

Venue first time bookers:

Watford 122 bookers (295 seats)

Riverside 45 bookers (122 seats)

Oldham 82 bookers (261 seats)

## RIFCO HIGHLIGHTS:



### Audience feedback on social media:

**'This is so funny!'**

**'These little videos are just brilliant'**

**'I can't stop laughing!!! This is such a british indian serial'**

**'Lucky and Johnny are literally my fave characters'**

After the great reception that the first series of *Leave The Plastic On* received in 2020, we unleashed a bumper second series this year, introducing some new members of the LTPO family into the world alongside favourites Prema Patel and MC Maacho.

New characters included: Sabz Begum: Blustering and repeatedly failing up through numerous job interviews. Surinder Kocchar, aka Suri Coach Ya: A self-proclaimed personal trainer and nutritionist who promises to get you fit with his 'Suri Coach Ya! - 5-Day Plan'. Lucky and Johnny Kaler: Lucky is a single mother to growing son Johnny, who takes things to an extra level as she grapples with the birds and bees and trying to be a father figure.

*BollyOaks*: The new Br-indian mash-up where Indian TV serials meet UK soaps. Everyone's overdressed for a quiet pint in their local, and not at all waiting for the drama to unfold. This two-parter really struck a chord with our audiences, as we parodied TV stereotypes and editing styles that a generation grew up watching with their parents.

## Leave The Plastic On - Series 2 in numbers:

South Asian writers 4

Creatives, Cast & Crew 17

Episodes 16 (+ 16 BSL versions)

Series 2 views (original versions as of 29/11/22):

Facebook 13979

Instagram 3895

YouTube 67621

Series 2 views (BSL versions as of 29/11/22):

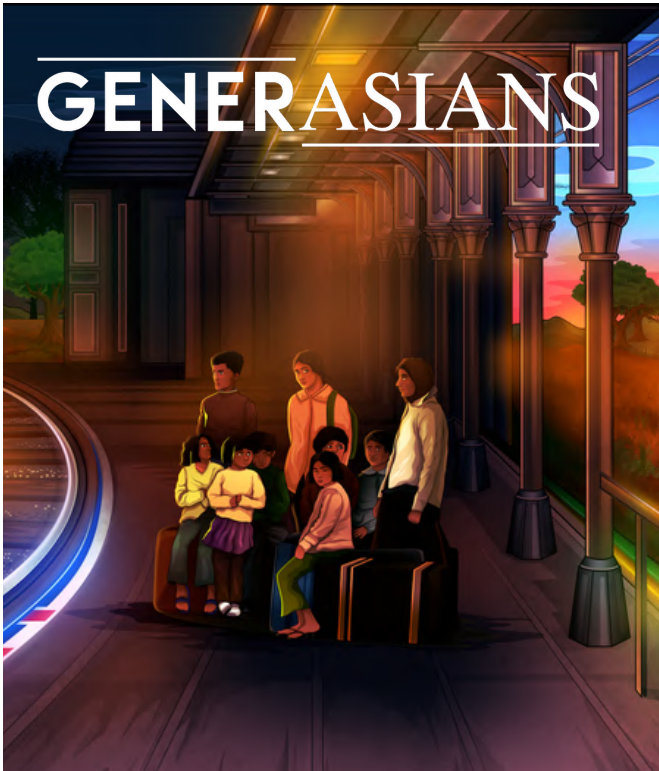
YouTube 477

Total 85495





## RIFCO HIGHLIGHTS:



### Audience feedback:

**'Heartbreaking story, but beautiful short film'**

**'Such an inspirational story - come with nothing and within 2 years had set up a business'**

**'Harrowing to watch & hear but a story that must be told. Our young must never forget what parents/ grandparents went through'**

**'this was so moving and heartfelt'**

**'thank you for sharing this testimony. this was very powerful and moving to listen to'**

4 August 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of the Ugandan Asians Exodus, as ordered by former Ugandan President Idi Amin. We've commemorated this historic decision with *GenerAsians* - a series of films about a generation who were forced to flee.

Each individual history is told through a filmed interview where individuals tell their family's story. Some stories are of families reaching UK shores and making a success of their life in Britain. Some involve the journey back to Uganda after years of living away. Some tell of a stark contrast between a previous profession and menial labour.

Through this series of short documentaries, we're shining a light on how displacement, prejudice and new beginnings shaped a generation's definition of home.

### GenerAsians in numbers:

Creative Team & Crew 6

Participants 11

Episodes 7

Views (as of 29/11/22):

Facebook 3384

Instagram 5185

YouTube 14640

Total 23209





# rifco theatre company

## TRUSTEES

Ravleen Beeston  
Georgia Gatti  
Ganan Kanagathurai  
Amardeep Kambhoz  
Vikram Menon  
Neena Shea

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Watford  
WD17 1JZ

## MANAGEMENT TEAM 2022

**Artistic Director & CEO** Pravesh Kumar MBE  
**Associate Director** Ameet Chana  
**Executive Producer** George Warren  
**Digital Producer** Sahil Sabharwal  
**Head of Development & Partnerships** Sue Lloyd  
**Marketing and Communications Manager** Vic Shead  
**Marketing Assistant** Hari Kanabar Johnson

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Charity Registration 1123986

