



DESIFEST Celebrates 20 Years with a Record-Breaking Weekend — and the Launch of the UMA Centre

Toronto's longest-running South Asian music festival marks two decades at Sankofa Square with 23 bands, nearly 100 performers, and a bold new home for artists.

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA, June 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [DESIFEST](#), Toronto's longest-running celebration of South Asian music and culture, marked its 20th anniversary this past weekend with a record-setting two-day festival at Sankofa Square — and the announcement of an ambitious next chapter: the launch of the [UMA](#) Centre.

A Record-Setting Weekend

Across two days, June 19th and 20th, DESIFEST 2026 drew a record-setting turnout for one of its most jam-packed programs yet — 23 bands and close to 100 performers, including singers, musicians, dancers, and DJs. Presented by TD and free to attend, the festival transformed the heart of downtown Toronto into a non-stop celebration of South Asian sound and movement. Flavour, Play, and Discovery

Beyond the stage, crowds enjoyed a vibrant array of South Asian food vendors alongside immersive activations from the festival's partners, including Jameson, Trojan, Schoolio's Kids Zone, and TD's Musicology Bar — bringing flavour, play, and discovery to every corner of the Square.

In the Words of the Crowd

The weekend's energy was perhaps best captured by the festival-goers themselves, who were overheard across the Square:

"This was one of the best nights of my life."

"It felt like home again."

"I haven't danced this much in a long time."

A New Home for the Culture

The festival used its milestone year to unveil the UMA Centre, a permanent home for DESIFEST's mission to support independent artists with space, funding, and mentorship. Envisioned as a gathering place to bring communities together, spark new ideas, and celebrate the richness and fullness of South Asian arts, music, and dance in Toronto, the UMA Centre represents the next chapter in the festival's two-decade commitment to the culture — and to the artists who carry it

forward.

“Twenty years ago, we set out to give our culture a stage it could call its own,” said [Sathish Bala](#), Founder of DESIFEST. “This weekend, watching a packed Sankofa Square sing and dance as one, it hit me that we didn’t just build a festival — we built a family. The UMA Centre is our promise to the next twenty years: a permanent home where independent artists find space, support, and the belief that their story matters. We built this together, and together we’ll keep shining the brightest light on South Asian arts in this city.”

The Work Continues Year-Round

The festival weekend is only part of the story. Through the UMA Centre, DESIFEST sustains its mission year-round — beginning with its monthly open mic series, which continues to give emerging artists a recurring stage to test new material and grow an audience. The coming year also brings the launch of DESIFEST’s first annual Hip-Hop Incubator, a 4-weekend pilot program developing the next generation of South Asian hip-hop talent through mentorship, industry connections, content development, and more. To connect that talent with opportunity, the festival has also introduced a new booking platform that makes it easier for venues, promoters, and audiences to discover and hire artists from the community. More is on the way, with a slate of upcoming shows to be announced at [desifest.ca](#).

Partners and Sponsors

DESIFEST 2026 was presented by TD Bank, continuing a partnership that has supported the festival since its earliest years. CBC Music returned as the festival’s Exclusive Broadcast Partner, on site, across both days to capture performances for national distribution across its channels in the months and years ahead.

The festival also welcomed back returning sponsors Schoolio and Amazon Music, alongside Sony Music Canada, Trojan, Shanti Bhavan, and Mary Brown’s Chicken. On-site, partners brought the weekend to life with immersive activations, including Jameson, Trojan, Schoolio’s Kids Zone, and TD’s Musicology Bar.

About DESIFEST

DESIFEST is Toronto’s longest-running South Asian music festival, founded in 2007 by Sathish Bala, CEO. The festival’s mission is to elevate South Asian artists and create meaningful platforms for cultural expression. Over 20 years, DESIFEST has supported more than 1,000 artists, with a vision to position Canada as a global hub for South Asian creative excellence. In 2026, the festival marked its 20th anniversary and launched the UMA Centre, a permanent home dedicated to supporting independent artists through space, funding, and mentorship. DESIFEST is produced by the UMA Foundation.

About UMA Foundation

UMA Foundation is a Canadian non-profit arts and culture organization dedicated to supporting South Asian creative communities. 181 Carlaw Avenue, Suite 228, Toronto, ON M4M 2S1.

Media Contact

Sathish Bala, CEO

DESIFEST / UMA Foundation

sbala@desifest.ca

Sathish Bala

DESIFEST

+1 416-302-9321

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