



FROM GAMELAN TO SAPE : FIVE TRADITIONS OPEN KL FESTIVAL 2026

*Irama Pusaka unites five Malaysian musical traditions to open KL Festival 2026's
26-day cultural programme across Downtown Kuala Lumpur*

KUALA LUMPUR, 7 MAY 2026 – Kuala Lumpur Festival 2026 (KL Fest), powered by Maxis, and organised by Think City and Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), supported by the Ministry of Finance and Federal Territories Department, officially opened tonight with its gala performance, *Irama Pusaka – Akar Tradisi, Nadi Baharu* marking the start of a 26-day cultural celebration across Downtown Kuala Lumpur.

Held at the Auditorium Bandaraya, DBKL, the evening brought together five distinct Malaysian musical traditions in a single performance – a powerful reflection of the country’s diversity and shared cultural identity.

The event was officiated by Yang Berhormat Hannah Yeoh, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department (Federal Territories), alongside Yang Berhormat Loke Siew Fook, Minister of Transport, and Yang Berhormat Datuk Fahmi Fadzil, Minister of Communications. Also in attendance were senior representatives from government, city leadership, diplomatic missions and Malaysia’s arts, business and civic communities.

“KL Fest reflects our ongoing commitment to shaping Kuala Lumpur as a culturally rich and creative destination, where culture plays a central role in urban transformation, economic vitality and social cohesion. This festival is made possible through a whole-of-society approach, and I would like to thank all our partners who have come on board to realise this shared vision. As we build on this momentum, I am pleased to announce that KL Fest will return in May 2027 and welcome even broader partnerships to come forward early, so that together we can continue strengthening Kuala Lumpur as a creative capital rooted in its identity and connected to the region and the world,” said Yang Berhormat Hannah Yeoh.

The evening featured Orkestra Kuala Lumpur alongside leading ensembles including Gangsapura (gamelan), Lee Rubber Chinese Orchestra, EKAM Ensemble, and sape virtuoso Leslie Eli. Together, these five traditions created a shared musical language – rooted in heritage, yet forward-looking in line with the festival’s theme, *Memory and Tomorrow*.

While these traditions are deeply rooted and widely practised across the country, KL Fest reframes them within the city’s shared spaces – placing them in dialogue and sparking renewed appreciation among both locals and visitors.



“KL Fest is part of a long-term effort to strengthen Downtown Kuala Lumpur as a place people actively choose to spend time in – where culture, community and commerce come together to bring the city to life. It demonstrates how heritage and public spaces can be activated through curated programming, storytelling and partnerships, creating experiences that are meaningful and sustained over time. This is something we are building deliberately and systematically – working across the public, private and creative sectors to shape a more vibrant, liveable and culturally confident Kuala Lumpur,” said YBhg Dato’ Hamdan Abdul Majeed, Managing Director, Think City.

Running from 6 to 31 May 2026, KL Fest presents over 80 programmes across 26 venues, transforming heritage buildings, streets, and public spaces in Downtown Kuala Lumpur into a network of cultural experiences. Spanning reimagined wayang kulit, contemporary dance, immersive installations, outdoor cinema, and theatre, the festival also features Malaysian, Asian and international premieres - positioning Kuala Lumpur as a regional hub for contemporary artistic dialogue.

As part of the broader Warisan KL national initiative, KL Fest advances culture-led urban rejuvenation by reimagining both the tangible and intangible dimensions of the city’s heritage. By encouraging people to rediscover urban spaces, it catalyses local economic activity, strengthens cultural appreciation, and fosters a deeper sense of belonging, collective pride, and national identity. Through heritage-driven renewal, the festival supports long-term urban and economic growth while reinforcing our national unity.

“KL Fest is about how we experience the city through arts and culture – not just in traditional venues, but in the spaces we move and live in, every day. The programme brings together different practices, traditions and communities, to reflect Kuala Lumpur’s continual renewal and evolution, shaped by its memories and steered by new ways of seeing and experiencing the city,” said June Tan, Artistic Director of KL Fest.

As one of the festival’s key sponsor and exclusive telecommunications partner, Maxis enhances KL Fest 2026 through improved connectivity and seamless digital experiences across festival locations. Through strengthened coverage and curated on-ground activations, Maxis helps bring people closer to the city and to one another, enabling a more connected and enjoyable festival experience.

The festival is brought to life through the collective efforts of artists, communities and partners across the city, including Media Prima, Yayasan Hasanah, TSLaw Group, Epson, KLCC (Holdings), PNB Merdeka Ventures, Serai Group, AirAsia MOVE, Grab and many others.



Held in conjunction with Visit Malaysia 2026, Warisan KL, and Kuala Lumpur's designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Design, KL Fest reflects a whole-of-society approach to city-making – with a shared vision of shaping a city that is vibrant, safe and meaningful for all.

The full programme is available at www.klfestival.com.my.

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About Kuala Lumpur Festival (KL Fest):

KL Fest is Kuala Lumpur's flagship city celebration, inspired by its designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Design and aligned with the Warisan KL aspiration. The festival brings Downtown Kuala Lumpur to life through creativity, cultures and communities, presenting curated local and international performances, installations and public programmes accessible to all. Held across heritage buildings and public spaces, KL Fest transforms historic areas into vibrant cultural destinations. For more information, visit www.klfestival.com.my

About Think City

Think City is an impact organisation established in 2009 to create more sustainable and equitable places for the benefit of all. Our knowledge, skills and strategies focus on urban solutions, the environment, social communities, and the cultural economy. Think City is a wholly owned subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Berhad (the sovereign wealth fund of the Government of Malaysia). For more information, log on to thinkcity.com.my.

About Warisan Kuala Lumpur

Warisan KL is a national heritage and culture-led urban rejuvenation initiative to revive Kuala Lumpur's soul by restoring and reimagining Kuala Lumpur's built heritage. Its mission is to create a more liveable city while driving growth in tourism, community enterprise and commerce. Launched by YAB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia, Warisan KL unites government agencies, GLCs, GLICs, private partners, and communities to position Kuala Lumpur as a vibrant hub of heritage, culture, and creativity. By breathing life into the city, Warisan KL celebrates the past while shaping an inclusive, exciting future for Malaysia.

For more information on Warisan KL: www.warisankl.my

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