

THINGS TO DO / [LONG ISLAND EVENTS](#)

## First Long Island South Asian Film Festival coming to Stony Brook University's Charles B. Wang Center



Harbinder Singh, creator of the South Asia Film Festival, is shown at the Charles Wang Center at Stony Brook University on Wednesday, Nov. 9, 2022, where the festival will take place on Saturday, Nov. 19, 2022. Credit: Newsday/John Paraskevas

**By Natalia de Cuba Romero**

[Special to Newsday](#)

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Being the only kid wearing a turban at Ward-Melville High School back in the early '80s might seem more character-building than career-building, but for Harbinder Singh, the Sikh turban has been a pathway to a career in television and film.

This weekend, you can see just how far Singh — and the South Asian community — has come. Singh's short film, "Manpreet," — his first screenplay — will have its world premiere at the first Long Island South Asian Film Festival (LISAFF) on Nov. 19, from noon to 8 p.m. at Stony Brook University's Charles B. Wang Center.

Singh, whose family moved to the U.S. from India in the '70s, wasn't a movie buff — his day job is in IT at a hospital — but growing up in a community with few South Asians ("If you ran into one person in a week, it was a lot") made him want to build connections. He discovered he liked performing by organizing Diwali cultural programs, and at the same time noticed how Sikhs were represented on screen.

"You'll see a guy with a long beard and turban and he's always stereotyped as the gas station or bodega owner," Singh says. "That irked me." So he started doing "background work": appearing in television shows like "Law and Order," always wearing his turban. Casting agents began to request him.

In 2019, he and his wife appeared in a short Hewlett-Packard (HP) documentary about how they met. "History of Memory: At First Sight" went to the Tribeca Film Festival, where the red carpet, the big audience, the talkback, beguiled him. "It was the first time I felt like, 'I want to do this,'" he says.

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Speaking roles followed, in locally-produced feature-length films like "The Scrapper" (2019), "Long Island Gus" (2022) and the upcoming "Sunita" (2023).

Singh traveled to Texas in May for the DFW South Asian Film Festival — now in its eighth year — where he met SAFF founder, Jitin Hingorani. While Hingorani already runs a New York City SAFF, Singh convinced him to try Long Island where the community is growing fast.

Do not expect Bollywood extravaganzas here. "Bollywood already has its place," says Hingorani. "Festivals like ours create platforms for independent films."

Hingorani lived in Wyandanch when he first arrived from Mumbai in 2008. He is well-known by South Asians as an entertainment reporter for Asian Variety Show (ASV).

There are 13 short films, one short documentary and one feature film. Attendees can choose by session: South Asian shorts from places like Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives; U.S. diaspora shorts; the feature film, or get a full day pass that includes a Q&A and a VIP reception with refreshments. South Asia has many languages; all films have English subtitles to make them accessible to everyone.

As for Harbinder Singh, he hopes the festival and his film — in which he also stars and financed himself — are just the beginning. “Making the film is something not a lot of people even think about doing, so it’s already a big accomplishment. I know I want to do it again,” he says. “But I also want the film festival to be a big networking event for South Asians, and also for other people. Long Island is diverse and people need to know that. We are here! It’s an exciting time.”

## LONG ISLAND SOUTH ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL

**WHEN | WHERE** Nov. 19; Film festival runs from noon to 6 p.m.; VIP cocktail reception is 6 to 8 p.m.; 100 Circle Rd., Stony Brook. [calendar.stonybrook.edu](https://calendar.stonybrook.edu)

**COST** \$20 per block of programming and \$50 for an all-day pass; students and seniors are \$15 per block or \$40 for an all-day pass. All-day pass includes three blocks of films (1.5 hours each) and a VIP cocktail reception.

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