

# CONGRESS

A Written Response By Fatima Measham

As we walk down the street after his first meeting for Congress, I ask Jack how he thought it went. His face lights up.

'Remember that party where I really wanted to be part of the conversation, but the adults just kept talking and assumed I had nothing to say? It was the opposite of that.' Jack at 11 is the youngest speaker in the Wyndham production.

His experience of being noticed, heard and taken seriously captures so much of what this project is about. It points the way not just for our local community but our country.

Listening is political. Who we choose to listen to and under what circumstances – these are powerful choices that determine culture and policy at every level.

We can do either a lot of good or a lot of bad based on the voices we prefer to hear. Or refuse to hear. Such decisions can have a significant impact in a city like Wyndham, where fainter voices might get lost to the winds of change.

Change is in most of the stories you will hear in Congress. But it is also writ large for us as the local landscape shifts rapidly. From Laverton North to Eynesbury to Cocoroc, our community continues to grow and is more diverse and aspirational than ever.

There are new challenges on top of old ones. Some of these link us to broader questions in Australian life around identity, connection and the future. So what does it mean for us to be in it together?

There is no way to start approaching the answer without listening. When someone tells you their story, when they are being fully themselves – manifesting their fear, rage, hope and joy – there is humanity and power in that.

But it empowers us, too. How often have we heard someone tell their story and felt less alone and braver? How often have we found things in common this way with people who don't sound or speak like us? How often have we ended up solving something because another person made us look at the problem differently?

Perhaps a step back from listening: being open at all to possibilities of encounter. Damon and I would likely have never met, much less dive into the deep together, if it had not been for this project. Yet his courage and ambition have given me permission to also be courageous and ambitious.

This is what art makes possible. It creates spaces for encounter. It makes freedom contagious. It validates dimensions of trust, vulnerability, generosity and love. But there is life after art. What happens after the performance?

We hope that listeners will carry with them: a sense of having been gifted with the stories of eight different people in their community; an understanding of shared vulnerability that lets them give themselves and others permission to be human; glimpses of – and yearnings for – a city that is more inclusive, just and free.

We all can feel braver together in making this happen. It starts with letting ourselves be changed, even agitated, by the things we hear from those we hear the least.

# CONGRESS

## All The Queens Men



Image credit: Duane Preston

## INVITATION

Please join us in the foyer for a post-show celebration with *Tawanda & Friends* featuring: Tawanda Gadzikwa (cajon kit), Luis Poblete (djembe cajon and conventional cajon) and Dale Gorefinkel (ngoni and balafon)

## THANK YOU

Donna Aston, Bec Cole, Rahima Hayes, Daniel Reeves, Kerrie Godbold, Wyndham Learning Festival, Wyndham Cultural Centre, Tuck Shop, Kate Sulan, Alex Walker, Pauline Cramer, Erin Milne, Willoh S Wieland, Bryony Jackson and the Backstreet Boys.

A citizens' assembly.  
A series of first speeches from voices often unheard.  
Personal visions for our collective future.

wyndhamcity





We begin with paying respect to the Land and its First People. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Kulin Nations on which we met, the Boonwurrung, Wadawurrung and Woiewurrung people. We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

## CONGRESS

Created by All The Queens Men

A citizens' assembly.

A series of first speeches from those often unheard. Personal visions for our collective future.

The word Congress comes from the Latin, CON meaning together, and GRADI meaning, to walk, which when joined becomes 'to meet.' A congress is an act of coming together.

Tonight, we are coming together to listen.

We live in a world of cacophony, the loud, the harsh and the violent dominate our airwaves. They drown out the stories of the people and communities all around us - that are profound, tender, courageous.

Congress connects eight Wyndham citizens in collaboration with eight professional wordsmiths.

Together they have created a series of 'first speeches' created urgently for our times.

Tonight, we are coming together to listen to what they have to say.

## All The Queens Men

Established by Australian artists Tristan Meecham and Bec Reid, All The Queens Men celebrate and collaborate with community to create contemporary arts and performance.

All The Queens Men are passionate about social equality and justice and it's projects are presented locally, nationally and internationally.

Tristan and Bec met on the dance floor.

**allthequeensmen.net**

### Congress Creative Team

**Composer, Lighting and Sound Design:**

Nick Roux

**Production Manager/Lighting Designer/Set Consultant:**

Ben (Bosco) Shaw

**Stage Manager:**

Leo Gester

**Audio Description:**

Will McRostie, Audio Description Victoria

**Auslan Interpreters:**

Benji Hoopmann and Glenda Judd, Auslan Stage Left

**Wyndham City Council:**

Trish Carlon



**Aimee McCartney** is a proud Taungurung and Wotjobaluk woman from north-west Victoria, and is the eldest girl of nine children. Aimee currently lives in Melbourne and is passionate about being a strong role model for her community and in particular for young Indigenous people.

**Paola Balla** is a Wemba-Wemba & Gunditjmara artist, curator, writer & lecturer. She is a Lisa Bellea Indigenous PhD Research Scholar at Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Centre, VU.



**Jumess Dinanga** is an 18 year old criminology student, Born in Congo (DRC) and raised in France, was able to see the best/worst of both worlds. Due to her experiences Jumess had developed a passion in helping people and the community. Hence why with the help of her co-partner she was able to create a program called 'Afro Fever' to bring African youths together and celebrate their heritage.

**Eugenia Flynn** is a writer, arts worker and community organiser. She identifies as Aboriginal, Chinese Malaysian and Muslim, working within her multiple communities to create change through art, literature and community development.



**Pam Kennedy** is concerned with improving the health and wellbeing of communities whom society marginalizes. This has led to working with services wanting to become more inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse and intersex people. Pam is passionate about celebrating diversity in all its amazing forms.

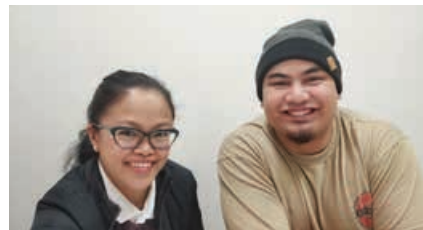
**Roger Monk** is a multi award winning film & TV screenwriter, showrunner and producer. He won the AFI, IF and Australian Critics Circle Best Script awards in 2002 for feature film Walking On Water which also won the Teddy Award at Berlin Film Festival. Roger is currently working on projects out of Singapore and Jakarta. He enjoys working with emerging and diverse writers and loves being a part of the All The Queens Men family.



**Grace Vanilau** is a Naarm based interdisciplinary artist and Community Cultural Development practitioner of NZ Samoa descent. She morphs between multiple disciplines; singing, writing, spoken word poetry, weaving, mummy duties and acting. As a Community Cultural Development practitioner she specialises in producing culture-specific programs for Oceanic communities and developing intercultural knowledge share spaces, with the key purpose to mobilise, challenge and uplift communities through creativity.

My name is **Erum Ali**, a proud Pakistani, passionate about feeding people and learning their cultures. She is keen to introduce my culture to Australia through Pakistani dresses and food. Bringing communities together and benefit others is the aim of her life. Erum love Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and wants to be the centre of hope for everyone like him (pbuh) irrespective of culture and faith.

## CITIZENS



**Fatima Measham** is a writer, mother, and (aspiring) conservationist in outer west Melbourne. She enjoys pop culture, musicals and cocktails.

**Damon Paraha** (A.K.A. Nomad) is an APRA award-winning, rapper/poet of Maori & Samoan descent. A proud father of two, and the second oldest of six talented siblings, Damon is also a part-time youth worker and participant in multiple artist mentorship programs.



**David Wells** is a performing artist with an interest in cultural identity, community engagement and individuality. David is also fascinated by the presentation of authentic story as well as tall tales and fun.

**Les Sanderson**, grew up within a large family in the history rich Little River community. Volunteering is a large part of Les' life and he's been very active and involved in that community for many years.



**wani Le Frère** is an award-winning artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo based in Naarm (Melbourne).

**Hannah Bradsworth** is a Performer, Dancer and Actor with critically Acclaimed Theatre Company, Rawcus, for people with and without disabilities. Hannah has strong passion for Dance with spans over 30 years, she is currently a member of the Hip Hop Crew, Inkrewsive, with Wild@Heart and training to be a dance assistant.



**Jack Measham** is an 11-year old student. He likes drawing, solving Rubik's Cubes, hip hop, anime, and hanging out with friends.

**Demet Divaroren** is the author of Living on Hope Street and teaches creative writing at VU Polytechnic.

## DANCERS

**Anosha Ali** gave her first speech at the age of eight to welcome newly arrived Australians because her speech was about them. She is passionate about drawing and this is her ever first ever performance.

**Brent Watkins** is a Gunai Kurni man from south eastern Victoria, with Noongar Yamatji ancestry from WA. As a dancer (traditional/ hip hop), didgeridoo player and visual artist, Brent created Culture Evolves, an indigenous group based in Narm. Drawing from his ancestral epistemology, combining it with contemporary narratives, Brent conveys the struggles that First Nations people are experiencing in Australia today.

**Georgette Mofalesi** is an inspiring tennis player and fashion student. In the hopes of becoming a professional tennis player and a successful fashion designer, Georgette hopes to work alongside or start her own human rights organisation, seeking justice for survivors of war crimes in Congo, or civilians who have been wrongfully accused or sentenced to prison unjustly. **Afro Fever** is a diverse program that empowers African youths by showcasing talents and African heritage. [#afro\\_fever\\_au](#)

**Limbs 2 Riddims** believe dance has the power to breakdown social barriers and create meaningful connections for children and young people experiencing financial or social challenges. L2R Dance is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to harnessing the power of hip-hop to strengthen our community through belonging, wellbeing and leadership in the arts. [L2R.org.au](#)

**Nga Uri Whaioranga** is a not for profit maori culture performing arts group with a member base of over 60 performers. With a passion for maori performing arts, the group formed after talks with various maori community leaders agreeing that there was a need for our community to reconnect with their culture and incorporate a traditional maori holistic lifestyle view into everyday life.

**Tama Tatau** are men linked through their Traditional tribal tattoos with their passion for Pacific and contemporary dance. They captivate audiences through their dance movements and high energy.

[www.facebook.com/tamatataumelbourne](#)