



CONGRESS



wyndhamcity

Presented Saturday 7 September 2019
Wyndham City Council Chambers



We begin by paying respect to the Land and its First Peoples.

We acknowledge the custodians of the Kulin Nations on which this work was created, the Boonwurrung, Wathaurong and Woiwurrung 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 voices often unheard.

Personal visions for our collective future.

All The Queens Men

All The Queens Men is an independent arts company based in Melbourne, Australia. Established by Australian artists Tristan Meecham and Bec Reid, the Company collaborates with communities of all shapes, sizes, and identities to produce transformative creative experiences that champion equity, social health and human connection.

All The Queens Men's vision is for all communities to fearlessly embrace social justice, joy and its own creativity. The Company values pride, respect, activism, generosity and joy!

With over 30 years of combined experience in community committed arts practice All The Queens Men has presented leading large-scale community projects locally, nationally and internationally including at Ansan Arts Festival (South Korea), ANTI Contemporary Arts Festival (Finland), Arts Centre Melbourne, Art House (Melbourne), Bleach Festival (Gold Coast), City of Melbourne, Darwin Festival, Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture, National Theatre of Scotland/ Eden Court Theatre / Luminare Festival (UK), Next Wave Festival (Melbourne), Sydney Festival, Taipei Arts Festival (Taiwan) and West Kowloon Cultural Arts District (Hong Kong) amongst many others.

Tristan and Bec met on the dance floor.

allthequeensmen.net

[#allthequeensmen](https://www.instagram.com/allthequeensmen)

Wyndham City

Wyndham is a place brimming with creative activity. In the deep west our history runs deep, the river runs deep and our connections are deep. Built on the lands of the Kulin Nations, Wyndham is home to a multiplicity of cultures that interface and interact to bring about unique perspectives and experiences.

Our community is young, emerging, evolving, growing and diversifying. But it is also established, connected, proud of its history and looking to its future, unsure of what that might be.

At Wyndham City we make space for all these viewpoints through the public programs we produce, the artworks we commission, the exhibitions we present at Wyndham Art Gallery and the work we do to support artists and creatives who gather together.

It's a privilege to work with this community.

wyndham.vic.gov.au/arts

[#deepwest](https://www.instagram.com/deepwest)

Welcome

TRISTAN MEECHAM

Speech Text —

Ok.

Welcome.

To begin and on behalf of all the speakers tonight, I start by acknowledging the First Peoples of the land on which we gather, the traditional owners and custodians of this very special place.

South west past and along Werribee river the Wathaurong people.

North from here the Woiwurrung people

South east the Boonwurrung people.

All people of the Kulin Nations.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present.

We pay respect to all First Nation Peoples here with us tonight.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

This area is significant for First Nation Peoples, as a site of gathering, of ceremony, of governance, of politics, of negotiation.

It was a meeting point, in which many tribes would travel to debate, to decide, to commune and to transform.

The history of this site is not lost upon us, as we all gather here tonight;

a room full of people with different backgrounds, contexts, identity and experience.

Together we gather on this site to participate in a citizens' assembly.

A Congress.

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.

We live in a world of cacophony. The loud, the harsh, the violent, dominate our airwaves.

They drown out the stories of the people and communities all around us – that are profound, tender, courageous.

Take this last week alone –

Around the world, political and social systems are in crisis. From Hong Kong, China, America, the UK and here in Australia. There is division as people become disenfranchised by systems of control, power and inequity.

Systems that are not representative of the people that they claim to serve.

So, we here, buoyed by the belief that we can do better, want to connect with the people. To build from the ground up.

Today, we are coming together to listen.

To listen to voices that are not always heard.

Whose lives are marked by action, transformation and change.

Each will be delivering their first speech, speeches that are political, social, cultural, a text they have created in collaboration with skilled wordsmiths.

We acknowledge these speeches have required time, negotiation, ongoing communication and empathy.

An exchange between two different people.

Hashtag – What the world needs now.

They have come together and have created eight urgent visions for our future. Personal visions for collective change.

Our job, as an audience and as a community, is to listen.

Listening is an action.

It is bearing witness.

An opportunity to learn.

It requires of us attention and reflection all at once.

Listening is political.

It is an opportunity to reflect on what we resist and what challenges us.

Tonight we ask that you respect each individual's freedom of speech.

Voices that may not always be heard. But voices that should be listened to.

Congress is a beacon of hope during these trying times. And these eight speakers are leaders that fill me with pride.

People of Wyndham, Victoria, Australia, the world.

Welcome to CONGRESS.

Speaker

**AIMEE
M^CCARTNEY**

Wordsmith

**PAOLA
BALLA**

Dancer

**BRENT
WATKINS**



Speech Text —

I would like to acknowledge the Woiwurrung, Boonwurrung and Wathaurong peoples of the Kulin Nations who are the traditional owners here of the lands on which we meet. I acknowledge all Victorian First Nations people and their ongoing strength and resilience in practising and maintaining the world's oldest living culture. I pay my respects to all Elders past, present and emerging.

In my culture, the meaning of Country extends past ownership and is much more than just a place on the map. It is a deep connection to the land. When referring to our ancestral homelands, we use the word to outline the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area. First Nations people are deeply connected to the Country of our ancestors. We are custodians and caretakers.

My name is Aimee McCartney. I am a proud Taungurung and Wotjobaluk woman from Victoria. I honour and respect my culture by always acknowledging the Country I am on.

Take Wyndham, where we gather tonight. Many of us have great personal connection to this place. There is pride in our diverse cultures and expanding community, celebrated through arts and culture and profound natural resources. This place is alive and growing.

But what was here before me, you, the trains, the buildings and the growth? How and where do the spirits of my ancestors lie in Wyndham's footprint?

Sadly, as I flick through the Werribee Official Visitor Guide, I don't see reference to what came before. I don't see an acknowledgement of the traditional owners and this omission happens often throughout Australia. We should be proud to acknowledge and celebrate the oldest living culture in the world.



Histories in Australia are often told from one perspective. I would like to share my own personal history. A history that is not often shared but should be honoured.

For First Nations people, the concept of protecting Country did not stop with the arrival of European settlement. However it shifted due to complex issues of colonisation. Our people have a long tradition of service and many First Nations people have chosen a career in the Australian Defence Force, which recognises that we have much to offer. But it is a history often omitted. Tonight, I would like to speak to that.

Did you know that First Nations people have served in every conflict and commitment involving the Australian Defence Force?

As a proud Aboriginal woman, I now serve and protect my country as a commissioned officer in the Royal Australian Air Force. But I am not the only person in my family to have served. My great, great, great grandfather, Private Alfred Jackson Coombs, known

as Jack, served in WW1 at the age of 29. His brother Willie Coombs, aged 18, signed up two weeks later.

In 1917, Jack fought on the Western Front. During this time Jack was gassed. He did not return to the field, instead returned to Australia. He married Mary Kirby. They had three boys and a girl. Little more is known about the rest of Jack's life and the long-term effects of his war service. He died at 61.

Jack's younger brother Willie was wounded in action in 1917, with gunshot wounds to his face and hands. After returning from the Western Front, Willie applied for a pension that was 20% of the full pension, a small fee for the sacrifice he made. He became reclusive, as did many suffering from post-traumatic stress. He married Bridgett Johnson. In 1953, Willie died aged 55.

Other family members who served include:

- Walter Franklin, aged 25
- Albert Franklin, aged 18
- Leslie Franklin, aged 18

In the Second World War my family continued to serve. My great aunt, Jean Williamson, enlisted in the Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force. My great uncle, Norman Franklin, served in Papua New Guinea. And my mother Terrie and my Uncle Kenny served in the Australian Army and my cousin Melissa in the Royal Australian Navy.

For many, this service failed to translate into full citizenship and recognition. Remember that First Nations people's right to vote in federal elections was not secured until 1962, and only by 1967 were Indigenous people legally considered citizens.

You might be asking why do I serve in the military? And my answer is this... In the military you are judged by your merits, your behaviour and how you represent your organisation.

Not your background. I wish that many in Australia would consider and apply this. I am tired of the lack of respect and discrimination that many of my people face on a day to day basis. I hope that we consider military ethics – that we are all equal, we should all look after each other, we all share and we never leave anyone behind.

For all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who did, and still do, defend this country, including those no longer with us. We remember them.



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 and Gunditjmara artist, curator, writer and lecturer. She is a Lisa Belleair Indigenous PhD Research Scholar at Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Centre, Victoria University.

Brent Watkins

is a Gunai Kurni man from south eastern Victoria, with Noongar Yamatji ancestry from Western Australia. 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.



Speaker

ERUM ALI

Wordsmith

GRACE VANILAU

Dancer

ANOSHA ALI



Speech Text —

As a little girl growing up without a mother, I would often use the power of my imagination and meditation to guide me throughout my childhood. My aunties taught me how to pray at seven years old, setting a foundation of faith and purpose. I would offer prayers five times a day. Even at such a young age I understood the comfort and strength it gave me. This practice would be the key to me learning the values of discipline and determination, building on a framework of belief systems that would help me to navigate my way through many difficult situations.

As a teenager my imaginings led me to work hard, to pay for my own university education, without any support. As women we were not encouraged to seek a higher education in my family, it was outside of the norm to imagine independence.

I dreamt of getting a degree. While working, studying and supporting my family. Getting by on very little sleep.

I often think back on those times and wonder how I did it all. Eventually, I completed my degree in Commerce and a Diploma in Computer Science. I learnt computer design and coding and then, began teaching.

Mapping pathways from imagination to reality... unfolding this journey, all of my experiences and dreamings have led me to this point in my life, to this event.

Standing before you as a testament of how manifesting worlds centered in faith, resilience and hope can elevate one's ideas into living, breathing, purpose filled realities.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity... to share a story.

In search of a safe and free place where I could live and nurture my life, on my own principles, my five-year-old daughter and I immigrated to Australia from Pakistan in 2013. We had no family nor friends here. But I was so excited about the numerous possibilities that Australia had to offer us. We were ready to build a new life for ourselves.

I found Australia to be a land of endless opportunities. But, even with all the opportunities presenting themselves to me, I was alone with my daughter in a new country and I yearned for companionship and interaction with others. This led me to attend an open table community lunch. Let's just say that the food needed some love... a little bit of spice. I asked the organisers whether they made Pakistani dishes and they responded that they didn't. So, I offered to bring some to the next gathering.

My passion of introducing my cultural foods to those attending the open table community lunch also brought new faces. I had the opportunity to bring Muslims and non-Muslims together to share a meal and respectful cultural exchange. I found that many people were curious about my culture and religion. And it brought me so much joy in sharing my food and stories with everyone.

Many community members were inspired to reach out and volunteer their time and skills, as they saw change – the way people were engaging with each other. The warmth and vibrancy of different languages, knowledge and exchange of food and nourishment.

Within a year I was organising and catering for more than 80 people every month, along with a team of volunteers in Moreland. Chicken biryani was a regular meal in the menu as well as other vegetarian, non-vegetarian, vegan dishes and desserts.

I moved to Wyndham. I continued cooking for the open table in Fawkner, catching public transport each month. I had made so many strong relationships

with the community who were attending. They had become my God-gifted family.

I had come to care deeply for the people, especially the elderly who had welcomed me into their hearts. I felt a responsibility to continue providing this service at the standard of excellence I know can be achieved if we work respectfully on building one on one relationships, of truly caring for all the people in the village.

A mother's heart unifies nations. To dream of change, to manifest that change for myself and my daughter and to witness a community of people coming together over a warm nourishing meal, laughter and endless curiosity of each other's ways of moving in the world.

I received an invite from the welcome dinner project in Wyndham and I had the opportunity to celebrate my daughter's birthday with local community members. It inspired me to imagine... again, and to remember, through my own recent experience, that we all need a warm welcome when we leave our homelands and move to a new country. To provide support and the tools to be able to navigate a way through new terrain and to find a sense of belonging.

I have now started my own project, Welcome Place, to honour new arrivals to Australia. With a group of friends of diverse cultural backgrounds. And I urge you to consider how you can also be generous and open to those finding their way as they land in this country to start their new lives. With love, they will adapt, build and grow with us together, harmoniously.

I have been blessed with so many lessons and unplanned achievements. I am a member of the District Advisory Committee of Wyndham Council and the Interfaith Network. I have completed my certification in Building Blocks Community Leadership Program. I am an AFL Community Ambassador and I recently won the Wyndham Volunteer Award in the category of community engagement.

For me, Australia has been a land of opportunities and my faith has made me believe that I can achieve what I want to achieve, exactly the way I imagine it to be done (if my intentions are loyal and harmless). My faith has been buoyed by those who welcomed me here.

It has been seven years since my daughter and I arrived in Australia. We are now settled in Wyndham and she

is blossoming. My dreams for her have been granted and every day we give gratitude for the path that has led us to this place, to this moment.

I am Erum Ali, a proud Australian, Pakistani, Muslim, mother, nurturer and ambassador.

Thanking you for lending your heart.

Shukriya



Erum Ali

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

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 of mobilising, challenging and uplifting communities through creativity.

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 first ever performance.



Speaker

HANNAH BRADSWORTH

Wordsmith

WANI LE FRÈRE

Dancers

L2R DANCE



Speech Text —

My name is Hannah Bradsworth.

I'm a performing artist, actor, daughter, a friend and one day soon, I will also become a dance teacher.

Dancing to me is much more than just dancing.

It's how I've learnt the skills I've needed to be able to get through real life moments that have often been difficult.

I love dancing because the rhythm that I hear through the music makes me so happy.

Each time I listen to music it makes me feel like I'm living in a dream, as if I'm flying.

I am a Queen of 90s music.

I hope to become a dance teacher one day because I really believe that through dancing, or at least through understanding the principles of dance, we can change the world.

Dancing has taught me many things, including being able to overcome things that I've often found challenging.

It has been the space in which I've felt most heard.

I can always use dance to express myself no matter where I am in life.

Dancing is like a language of its own. I'm able to forget everything that's going on and connect to those around me better, even without words sometimes.

It's a way of life that can't be said in one sentence, one poem or one speech.

It's absolute freedom.

I dance in my bedroom.

I dance in public places.

I dance on main stages.

I dance at parties.

First and last on the floor.

I dance on my own.

I dance with hundreds of people.

When I'm dancing, I'm just living out my dreams in real life. I feel dance has given me the tools I need to be prepared for life.

These sets of skills are what I hope to one day pass on to others when I become a dance teacher.



Skills like communicating without always needing to talk, quick thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, but most especially how to work as part of a team.

All of these life skills are important and help us better understand how to move through the world.

Dancing has given me confidence to move through any situation.

I've been dancing for over 25 years.

In that time I've learnt so many skills and experiences that I believe would make me an incredible dance teacher.

For all my future students, I believe I can help them find the tools they need to also move through life in a way that lets them fully be who they are.

As a teacher I would focus on how they learn instead of just the outcome. I believe it's through these moments that you're able to learn amazing skills like responsibility, accountability, time management and focus.

I want my students to be able to find purpose for themselves and live out their dreams as I have found mine within dancing.

I wrote a short poem to better express this concept:

When I dance I feel at ease

When I dance I am my most free

When I dance everything stops

Everything is still

Everything is quiet

There is just peace.

When I dance there are no boundaries

No limits

No judgement

There is just music

There is just rhythm

There is just joy

When I dance, I feel free

When I dance, I feel seen

Because when I dance

I am finally me.

We live in a world with many boundaries, most of which we can't always change. But I believe that if you give people the right tools to allow them to see the power within themselves, they are able to develop courage, sacrifice, love, dedication and friendships, in a way that lets them feel more deeply for everyone else in the world, and in this way, we can change.

Because we need a world full of courage, understanding and love.

I've found my passion in dancing, and I hope to be able to share that with the world one day.

Because as the Backstreet Boys say:
That makes you larger than life!
My name is Hannah Bradsworth.
I am a daughter
A creator
A teacher
A friend
But most of all I am a dancer.



Hannah Bradsworth

is a performer, dancer and actor with critically acclaimed theatre company, Rawcus, for people with and without disabilities. Hannah has a strong passion for dance, which 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.

wāni Le Frère

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

L2R Dance (Monday, Vicky, Shirley, Maryanne, Way Paw Wah, Radha, Parth & Gopal) believes 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. Leadership believes in one language... DANCE!

L2R.org.au



Speaker

DAMON PARAHA

Wordsmith

FATIMA MEASHAM

Dancers

NGA URO WHAIORANGA



Speech Text —

My name is Damon Paraha. I am a second-generation immigrant Polynesian twice over – Mum is from Samoa and Dad is Maōri. I am the second oldest of six children, a father of two – one-year-old Anaya and Zion who is one month young. I am a youth worker and a hip-hop artist. I am 21 years old. I am here and I have questions.

My head is in the sky and my feet are on the ground, so tell me – is it enough to stand or do I have to make a stand? What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a Polynesian man? What does it mean to be a young Polynesian dad?

I have a feeling that these questions are best asked of women. What the women in my life show me is that being a man is not about having to prove it. That I can be vulnerable and strong at the same time. That not being in front does not mean I am left behind.

My mother is raising six kids as she ascends in her career. My two

grandmothers cared for their children and one got two degrees. My great-grandmother had a faith that let me figure things out on my own. I have two sisters, a partner and a daughter of my own.

I am not any less of a man for having strong women in my life. My strength is bound up with theirs. I carry their line. On both sides of my heritage, women historically held together families, community and culture.

In Samoan tradition, women had equal rights to land and leadership. The sacred brother-sister covenant feagaiga, calls on men to honour, protect and serve their sisters. Ritual words refer to women as sacred, as peacemakers and liberators.

It is similar in Maōri culture, where the sacredness of women as te whare tangata – the house of humanity, the link between the earth and coming generations – secured their status. Women had a say in the affairs of their iwi or hapu and could inherit land.

They are the first to formally welcome visitors to the marae with karanga. They were often sent as ambassadors to mediate; the peace they made was known as rongo ā whare and it was an unforgiveable offence to break it.

This was the character of equality until the white Christian man arrived. The nature of colonisation is patriarchal. When you undermine the status of women – the force that holds things together – you undermine society itself. That is convenient for conquest.

When the British arrived in New Zealand, they automatically assumed that Maōri women had no power and dealt only with the men. They brought laws based on gender difference.

This is how culture is erased. This is how history is buried. This is how men lose sight of who they are and what they can be. This is a condition for violence.

We don't talk about that in our Polynesian community. Because if no one talks, we don't have to listen. And listening means having to do something – to protect and defend, to apologise and make amends, to change for the better.

In our current culture, it is considered taboo to confront the shame and alcohol mixed up with domestic violence. We don't pull ourselves back from cutting women down, even though they're the strongest part of us. We avoid words like mental health, counselling and intergenerational abuse.

In 2017, the multicultural City of Wyndham had the fifth highest number of family violence incidents of all Victorian municipalities – even though recorded incidents fell by 2.4 per cent

from the previous year.

This is a national crisis. Two in every five women in Australia have experienced violence at least once from the age of 15 years. Violence by a male intimate partner contributes more to disease in women aged 18 to 44 years than risk factors like smoking, high cholesterol or illicit drugs.

Domestic violence is not just physical, it is psychological terror: it is men exclusively controlling all the money, limiting contact with people outside of the family and children witnessing abuse.

I remember a time when I was scared of Dad, afraid of even speaking to him. This is traumatising in itself for children. I should have been feeling safe and I wasn't.

When our people can't bring themselves to communicate, it is the women and children in silence who suffocate. Until the silence is broken for them by a police siren.

The cops turned up at our house. I was 13 or 14 years old. They arrived to see furniture broken. But there was more damage than that, that they could not see.

Not just trust and certainty and a version of childhood that might have been. But a sense of honour that is bound up with fundamental values around family and the place of women in it.

It was a wake-up call, sending Dad off to work on himself. He took counselling. He entered self-improvement programs, including anger management. It takes grit to do that. It takes time. And Dad needed plenty of both.

None of it would have been possible if Mum had not had the strength to give him the chance to do that. But this is not for everybody. Ultimately it is not on women to have to be brave.

My Dad broke the cycle, and I am keeping it broken. I am reclaiming something that is truer for Polynesians than the postcolonial status of women as objects and rivals. I am inviting us all to consider ways of being together that make us proud and free.

I know it starts from inside each of us. I know it starts from talking. Break the silence and we can begin breaking the cycle.

My name is Damon Paraha. I am 21 years old. I am a second-generation Polynesian Australian. I am a son, brother, partner, father, youth worker and musician.

My head is in the sky and my feet are on the ground. I make a stand just by standing where I am.



Damon Paraha

(A.K.A. Nomad) is an APRA award-winning, rapper/poet of Maōri and 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.

Fatima Measham

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

Nga Uro Whaioranga (Nina Katene & Katarina Riini)

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





Speaker

JUMESS DINANGA

Wordsmith

EUGENIA FLYNN

Dancer

GEORGETTE MOLAFESI, AFRO FEVER



Speech Text —

I was born in Africa, the richest land for others

The hell for our mothers

But, I am proud to be African

I am proud to come from a land of beauty and strength

I am born to release the beauty of my culture. Yes! I am African

I am fearfully and wonderfully made, I am strong and very brave

Urgh! I cannot believe that our modern generation tried stealing away my pride and joy for my country. Modernity has enforced our people to disown who they are. I am ashamed that I was part of those people

Africa my beloved, I am sorry that I have tried to detach myself from you

I miss the days I used to carry a bucket on my head to go to the stream to fetch water and listen to the birds sing. I miss the days I wasn't ashamed to speak in my native language

The truth is... I miss the days I used to eat with my bare hands in one big bowl with all my siblings

Damn! Have I lost a sense of who I am?

Africa I dream, I dream of your light, compassion and warmth, Is it still there? Hidden behind the greed and the evil

I dream of justice and fairness and good that prevails

I dream of a better tomorrow and a future for all

I am confused and afraid, I wonder what path you will take

But I will always stand with you and forever be proud to be African

Dear Africa I just pray that you will be great again

My name is Jumess and what you just heard was a poem I wrote about my love for my culture and for myself.

The truth is, though, I haven't always loved my culture or myself.

I came to Australia when I was 12 years old and my relationship with this country has had its ups and downs in terms of understanding and acceptance. Australia has so much diversity, but it also has big problems with racism.

Racism is something I have experienced firsthand. I have dealt with the media portraying young African people as thugs and as criminals. There was a time where I couldn't get a job because of what the media was saying. The media portrayed me as negative and I stopped loving myself, I stopped loving my culture. I felt embarrassed, belittled, and I didn't want to be African anymore.

But I realised that I was letting their words define me. I was thinking: everyone thinks I'm a thug, everyone thinks I'm a criminal, so I'm going to let it be like that. I realised that if I didn't love myself, no one else would. People would just keep stepping on me and my culture. I realised that I needed to start loving myself. That young African people needed to start loving their heritage and culture.

I knew if I felt that way, that other young African people must be feeling that way too. I felt like they were really in pain. And I felt like they just needed a space of refuge, a space to express themselves. So that's why, in 2018, with my friends Agnes and Pascaline, we created Afro Fever. Afro Fever is a space to dance, to be free, to embrace culture. To feel at home. Afro Fever is a space for young African people to express culture.

Since starting Afro Fever there have been big changes. Now, I love my culture. I love talking about it, I love dressing culturally. I have grown, I have

accepted my culture more. I have accepted myself more. I have seen the young people who come to Afro Fever become more confident.

I am really passionate about creating change. I am passionate about removing racism from the world and about young people here in the west.

When the media was overloading us with negative portrayals, talking about Sudanese gangs and African gangs, I became frustrated and angry. It made me want to work harder and get the attention of those around me. To get people to listen and understand. Now, I refuse to stop talking about this issue until I see change.

I want the young African people to love themselves, even when the world is against them. Or against their culture, or religion, or whatever the media may portray them as. I want to see people infected with Afro Fever. To feel confident. As we say in our program: "Everybody has Afro Fever in them. You are Afro Fever. We all are Afro Fever."

We are all responsible for each other. All of us allow racism. So it's up to all of us to call it out. Like one of my personal heroes, Rosa Parkes said:

"Each person must live their life as a model for others."

I would like to be known as a person who is concerned about freedom and equality and justice and prosperity for all people."

I would like to finish with a simple action that we can all take in our daily lives. Instead of asking "where are you from?" when you see some different to you, try offering your hand in friendship. Introduce yourself and tell a bit of your

story first. Ask the other person's name and expect nothing else in return. Leave space for the other person to define themselves, rather than try to quickly categorise them.

Hi, I'm Jumess. I run Afro Fever and I live in Wyndham. What's your name?



Jumess Dinanga

is an 18-year-old Criminology student, born in Congo (DRC) and raised in France, who was able to see the best/worst of both worlds. Due to her experiences Jumess developed a passion for helping people and the community. Which is why with the help of her co-partner she was able to create a program called Afro Fever to bring African youths together and to 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.

Georgette Mofalesi, Afro Fever

is an inspiring tennis player and fashion student. In the hope of becoming a professional tennis player and a successful fashion designer, Georgette also aspires to 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 talent and African heritage.

#afro_fever_au



Speaker

LES SANDERSON

Wordsmith

DAVID WELLS

Dancers

TAMA TATAU



Speech Text —

Hello.

I am Les Sanderson. I am the 10th child in a family of 11 kids from Little River. Yes, that means two or three in a bed. I have two sons who make me proud. Wish I could spend more time with them.

When I was a boy our house in Little River was surrounded by farms. My Dad was employed at the Board of Works and would ride his bicycle to work every day because our family didn't have a car. It took him an hour and half each way. He was committed, which certainly has inspired me! Nowadays, I sit on nine committees and have been involved in many others.

I miss my Dad. He was such a great man and was an important role model for me and my family. There is a song by a guy called Dan Fogelberg that I get emotional listening to. The chorus really gets me:

The leader of the band is tired and his eyes are growing old

But his blood runs through my instrument and his song is in my soul

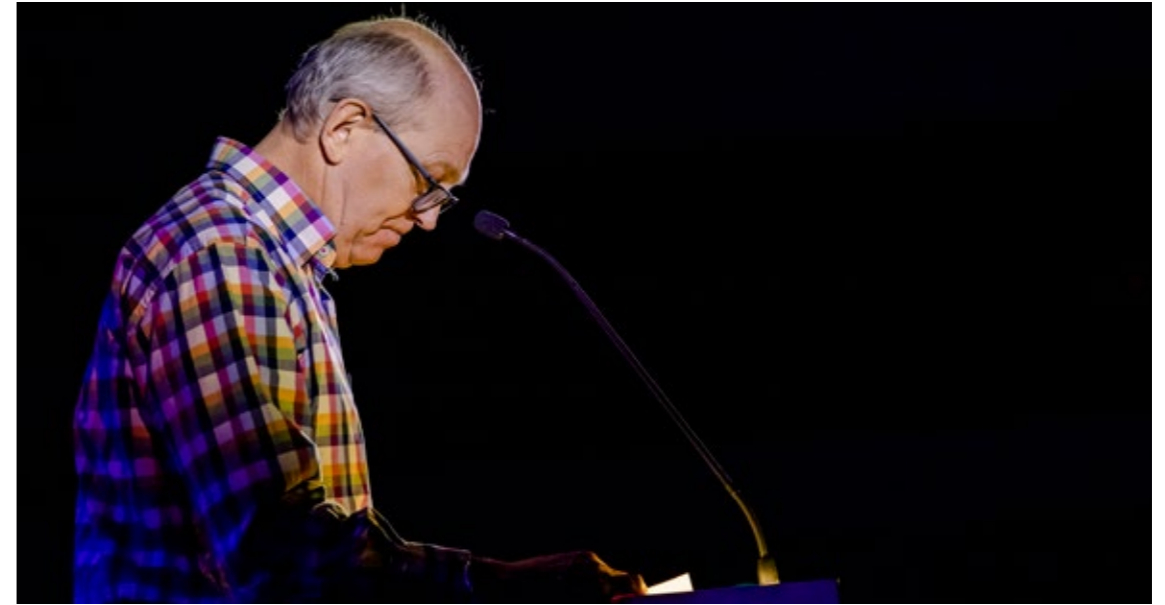
My life has been a poor attempt to imitate the man

I'm just an instrument for the leader of the band.

My Dad was the bandleader. He worked hard for everyone around him. He was a great example for me, but he isn't around anymore. He died in his 60s. I'm in my 60s now and I have lost my bandleader.

When I was growing up, Little River was like a village. Everyone was connected and I knew everyone and everyone knew me. I think everyone needs to feel like they belong. I loved my childhood and maybe I am trying to replicate that.

I think a lot of men my age living alone with grown up families have a tendency to be sentimental and nostalgic for the past. Just like the way I talk about Little River and my Dad. It takes me back to a time that was a lot simpler and more comfortable. When I didn't have to try and work out how to be.



If I am honest, I feel I must now take a good look at myself. Right now I need to be true about who I am. I am uneasy about my own wellbeing. I am uneasy about my future. I work myself to exhaustion and then I get stressed. I am unsure about where I am going. I feel my ability to think reasonably is almost non-existent. I lack clarity and I am also not good at reassuring myself. I am a self-doubter of Olympic proportions. I would also be a candidate for "The Socially Apprehensive Man of the Year Award"! Is there a committee in Wyndham that would like to bestow this award? If so, I would like to self-nominate.

I do think that I am not the only one who is lonely and unhappy and alienated. In fact, I know I am not. Mental health issues for men are high and many men in rural areas don't feel comfortable talking about their mental health. I know firsthand – it has directly impacted the Little River community!

There is a quote I heard recently by a French guy called David Thoreau. It goes like this: "Most men lead lives of

quiet desperation and die with their song still inside of them." I don't want this. I really do not want this. This is a difficult thing to express but I honestly never thought I would make it to 40 because I have always struggled with my place in the world.

Suffering is part of life, but we don't always have to suffer alone. Keep an eye out for anyone who may be doing it tough and show a little kindness and compassion any way you can.

Ask RUOK? let's go for a cuppa. It can make a difference. It has made a big difference to me.

I would also like to say to anyone else out there who is struggling the way I have struggled – talk to someone... seek help. Everyone needs a team, a template, a bandleader. Find ways to support yourself and each other. Everyone needs hope. Everyone.

I have been isolated and vulnerable and to some extent I still am. There is lots of stigma around mental health. But there are organisations out there which are

set up to be of assistance. Everyone needs help at one time or another. You can't do everything yourself.

Organisations like Lifeline, Mind Australia, Black Dog Institute, Beyond Blue, Q Life, Mindhealth are all only a phone call away!

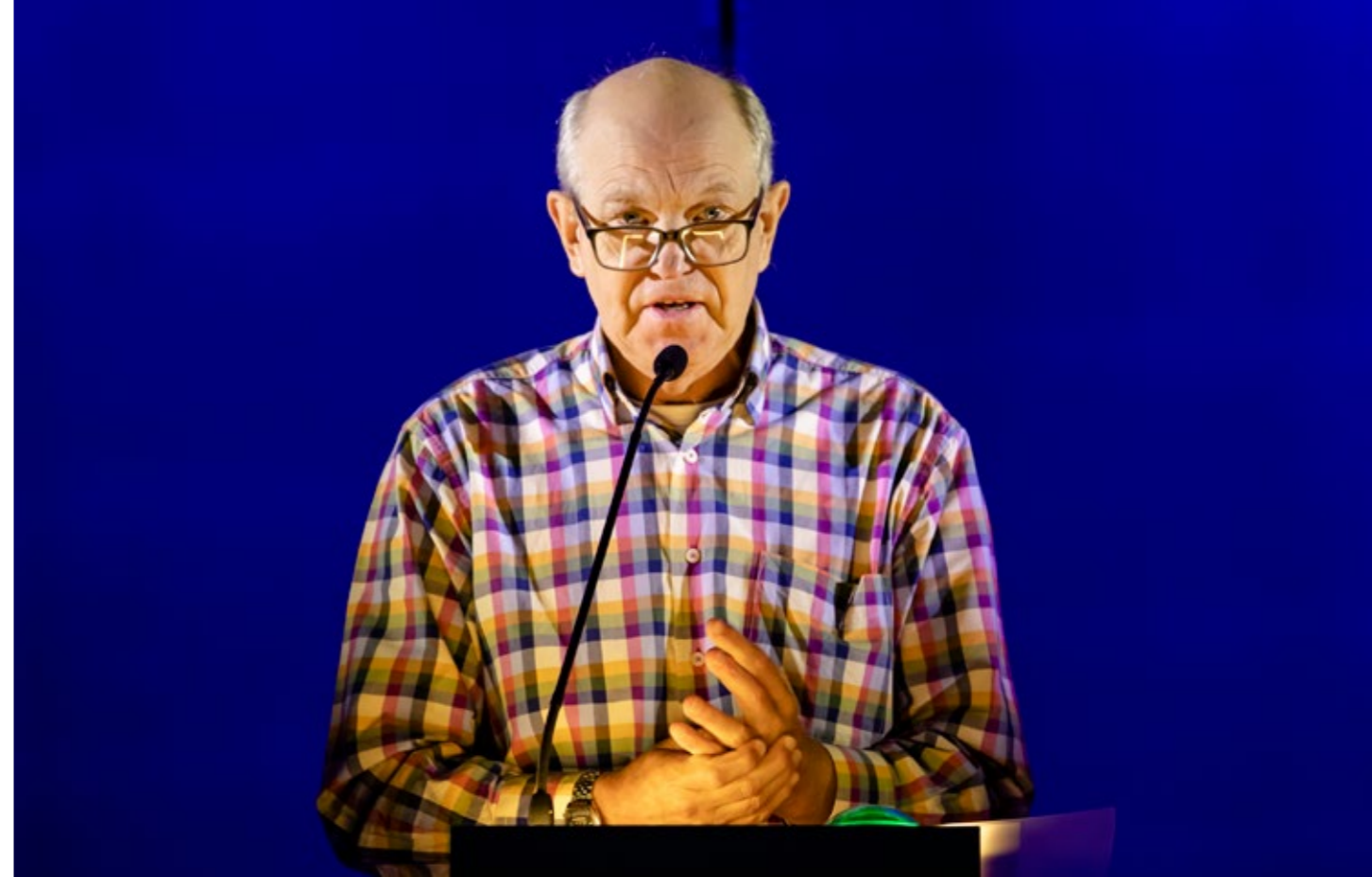
Tonight, I certainly left my comfort zone behind! I am immensely grateful at having this opportunity to share, to acknowledge and hopefully connect meaningfully. While this has been terrifying, I would like to say publicly standing here in front of you...

This is my starting position. I feel it is important to have a starting position. I have been on a journey and I am about to embark on another. I am here now. Me. Les Sanderson.

Starting out again. Trying to invest in my community again but also trying to invest in myself.

Hoping for love and peace... Always.

Thankyou...



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.

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.

Tama Tatau (Eddie Vaiotualemoso & Otto Mateo)

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



Speaker

PAMELA KENNEDY

Wordsmith

ROGER MONK

Dancer

BEC REID



Speech Text —

I don't know if anyone here tonight knows of, or remembers, the slogan, 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'. For those of you who don't know, Don't Ask, Don't Tell was a policy applied under Bill Clinton's administration in 1993 to 'appease' political opposition to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse and intersex (or LGBTI) personnel serving in the US military.

At its core, Don't Ask, Don't Tell forced enlisted LGBTI personnel to closet themselves while serving. It wasn't until 2011 that this policy was reviewed allowing LGBTI people to serve out and proud.

You're probably wondering what on earth Don't Ask, Don't Tell has to do with me, standing before you today. Well, I think one of the most important things I have learned as a health professional and an ally of the rainbow community, is that enforced secrecy about who you are and not feeling safe to live your truth has devastating impacts.

My name is Pam Kennedy. I am a mother and grandma. I trained as a physiotherapist and married my husband Derek some 40 years ago. Yes, that deserves a round of applause...

Derek served in the Australian military. Together we embraced army life, which is also my context for referencing Don't Ask, Don't Tell and gives us all an idea of how widespread the issue of 'closeting identity' is. It affects people all over the world, including here in Wyndham.

I understand that we all live in our own different bubbles. A couple of decades ago, I didn't know many gay men or lesbians. I certainly didn't know any trans and gender diverse or intersex people – at least I didn't think I did. But I did. In fact, I know we all do! What I didn't know then, is that many members of the LGBTI community, especially those not living in the inner-city metropolis, become experts at hiding themselves. Consciously flying under the radar for fear of rejection, fear of violence or abuse, exhausted by continual discrimination. Some

become isolated and so their health suffers. Many experience depression and anxiety, which can lead to immense stress, and even suicide. So, in understanding that, I came to realise that I needed to pop my own bubble and that we all needed to change.

In 2008, a Victorian Ministerial Task Force report entitled 'Well Proud' was published. That document created guidelines to assist health professionals understand difference from an LGBTI perspective. It was an eye opener for me, released around the time I started working in the accreditation of health services. Now remember, I knew very little about the LGBTI community, apart from seeing *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. And let me say, *Priscilla* isn't exactly a 'How To' guide when dealing with the everyday health needs of the rainbow community!

The report was only the beginning. We wrote our first set of standards based on the report, but it was limited. It became clear there were two main areas of concern for LGBTI people in health care and in particular for trans, gender diverse and intersex people; that is, concern about disclosing their authentic selves for fear of prejudice and discrimination, and that practitioners generally, have little to no understanding of LGBTI people's individual health needs and their life experiences.

We realised that we needed to contextualise a broader lived experience. A new document was published called 'The Rainbow Tick' which is now much stronger and more inclusive. The Rainbow Tick truly is a unique set of standards, and world class. This accreditation is now

recognised by LGBTI communities as an indicator of a safe and welcoming service for them, a service that's capable of providing high quality of care.

But standards aren't of use unless applied in practise, and measuring if practitioners meet them is a challenge and the mission of my work.

How do we get staff in hospitals and clinics, aged care and local government services working with the rainbow community to apply The Rainbow Tick? It is massive. It is a profound cultural change.

At each training session, I face people with strong personal beliefs that don't align with the values that The Rainbow Tick espouses. It is my job to lead by example, to be inclusive, to try to get across the idea of walking in someone else's shoes, to understand and empathise a different lived experience. This means knowing and understanding your own subconscious bias and making personal change. From this work, I know that embracing difference is transformational.

Not just the LGBTI community but across all our communities – our First Nations, older people, refugees, those with ethnic and religious differences, mixed abilities, social and economic difference or young people.

So back to the army. The last couple of years have seen that deeply conservative institution change, albeit incrementally. Derek and I have watched with interest, as they have implemented policy change to address LGBTI discrimination, misogyny, sexual misconduct. It's a stark contrast to Don't Ask, Don't Tell. LGBTI people are now affirmed members of the military.

In Derek's time in the army he didn't ask, but now, he is deeply interested in the telling, and joins me in being a strong ally to LGBTI people in our community.

If the military has begun to change, at least in leadership levels, then perhaps everyone can. Time will tell how the army sustains this change, but wouldn't it be great if the army completed The Rainbow Tick? In fact, I would like to see The Rainbow Tick become common place, contributing towards societal change everywhere. With lawyers, brickies' labourers and Uber drivers, not just health professionals. In football clubs, youth centres, local councils and churches, not just hospitals and community services. In whole communities. Can our community, our

City of Wyndham, become a fabulous example of inclusion at its best, celebrating our myriad of differences for all they bring to our community?

As a long-term resident, I hope that we here in Wyndham build a community where no one has to hide who they are. I hope for a future where we celebrate with an open heart and mind all the colours of the rainbow and that we put this into action every day.



Pam Kennedy

is concerned with improving the health and wellbeing of communities whom society marginalises. 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 and 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.



Speaker

JACK MEASHAM

Wordsmith

DEMET DIVAROREN



Speech Text —

My name is Jack but people call me a dynamo. Mum describes me as a “total ham”. I describe myself as passionate. I am passionate about a lot of things. Like making a difference. I’m a part of the student representative council at school and am also the Vice-Captain. It was my first grasp of responsibility and after that I just went “Nah! No politics for me!”

I am passionate about sushi. If I could eat sushi every day I would. Definitely. When I was a kid I was asked if I wanted pancakes or sushi. Most people would choose pancakes. I chose sushi. What can I say? I’m a visionary. Sometimes my mum gets me a box of sushi to take to school and at lunch there’s a thousand eyes watching the sushi box. Everybody loves sushi.

Not everybody loves the planet.

There are people out there who think that there aren’t any problems in the world. And they have power. There are politicians who don’t believe in

global warming or climate change. That worries me. On Friday, around 1,000 kids from each state or large city had a protest rally. It all started with Greta Thunberg. She is an inspiration. Greta started the school climate strike movement outside Swedish parliament, which then inspired thousands of kids across the world to raise their voices about the ‘climate crisis’. She got the conversation going. And now you’ve got thousands of kids everywhere following in her footsteps.

I’m one of those kids.

And my voice isn’t heard.

To all of you adults who were once kids dreaming of a better future, where the earth was still whole and glaciers were not splintering across the globe.

Listen up.

We need to stop climate change. The sun is getting hotter and closer, drying out trees, making them vulnerable to disease. Trees breathe out the oxygen we need to stay alive.

For every tree that dies, we lose a breath.

Eventually there will be no more air to breathe and humans will have to move to Mars, which is the closest thing to Earth. But instead of saying “let’s think about what we’re going to do for Doomsday”, shouldn’t we start thinking about how to fix the Earth? The question should be how do we stop Doomsday?

There are so many things that need to change in our society. Firstly, Aboriginals need to be declared the true owners of this land. The climbing ban on Uluru is a step in noting that this is their country, but the acknowledgement to country needs to feel more genuine. It can sometimes feel like “right, done, let’s get on with the event”, but it needs to be more than that.

We need to do more.

We need to listen.

We need to hear each other’s stories.

That’s what anime does best. It sets up arcs for every single character. Some writers stay focused on the main hero’s adventures but in anime, writers set up journeys for every single one and incorporate them into the main character’s story. Every character is seen. Every character is heard.

Imagine what might happen if each one of us had a voice.

Imagine what might change if our voices united.

We could rewrite the future.

Currently, that future is in the hands of adults. And they’re not listening. We can’t let these people ignore the issues that are happening. It’s going to be up to us kids to create a new story. One that makes a difference. One that tackles big arguments and makes a stand. I’m going



to keep doing that until I can have the future people dreamed about it in the past. A future with a happy life where I know I’m safe.

A future where problems are resolved and don’t go on forever.

A future with a thriving planet.

A future where we are still here.

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.





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 is being open at all to possibilities of encounter. Damon and I would likely have never met, much less have dived 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 and 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

Wyndham

Speakers & Wordsmiths



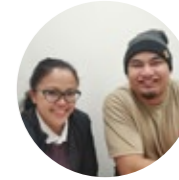
Aimee McCartney
& Paola Balla



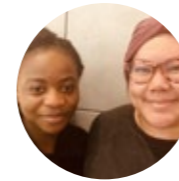
Grace Vanilau
& Erum Ali



Hannah Bradsworth
& wāni Le Frère



Fatima Measham
& Damon Paraha



Jumess Dinanga
& Eugenia Flynn



David Wells
& Les Sanderson



Roger Monk
& Pam Kennedy



Demet Divaroren
& Jack Measham

Dancers

Brent Watkins
Anosha Ali
L2R Dance
Monday, Vicky, Shirley,
Maryanne, Way Paw Wah,
Radha, Parth & Gopal
Nga Uri Whaioranga
Nina Katene
& Katarina Riini
Tama Tatau
Eddie Vaiotualemoso
& Otto Mateo
Afro Fever
Georgette Molafesi
Bec Reid

Creative Team

Created and Directed by
Tristan Meecham and
Bec Reid
Composer, Lighting
and Sound Designer
Nick Roux
Production Manager,
Lighting Designer and
Set Consultant
Ben (Bosco) Shaw
Stage Manager
Leo Gester
Audio Description
Will McRostie,
Description Victoria
Auslan Interpreters
Benji Hoopmann and
Glenda Judd, Auslan
Stage Left
Wyndham City Council
Trish Carlon

Documentation

Photography
Bryony Jackson
Filming
Singing Bowl Media
Publication
Forde+Nicol
Proofreader
Andi Lawson-Moore

Thank You

Donna Aston
Bec Cole
Wyndham Learning
Festival
Kate Sulan
Alex Walker
Pauline Crameri
Erin Milne
Willoh S Wieland
and the Backstreet Boys



wyndhamcity



wyndham.vic.gov.au/arts
#deepwest

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#allthequeensmen