# CONGRESS

## A CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

Personal visions
for our collective future

The word Congress comes from the Latin roots '*con*' meaning together and '*gradi*' meaning to walk, which then becomes '*to meet*.' A congress is an act of coming together.

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 and courageous.

Congress connects eight local citizens in collaboration with eight professional wordsmiths. Together, these partnerships have created a series of 'first speeches' - generated urgently for our times.

Here, just this once, we come together to listen to what they have to say.

All The Queens Men pay respect to the Lands and the First Peoples, the Sovereign Custodians of the Kulin Nations, the Boonwurrung, Wadawurrung and Woiwurrung people. We pay our respect to all First Nations Elders past, present and emerging. Always was, always will be Aboriginal Land.

## Wordsmith and Citizen Speaker Partnerships

### Skye Cusack and Uncle Charles Pakana

**Skye** is a Dulgubarra Yidinji and Asian writer, journalist and accidental comedian living in Naarm. Common themes in her writing include mental health, disability, fatphobia, existential Blak crises, and people generally making fools of themselves.

**Uncle Charles Pakana** (born Keir Wells) is an Aboriginal man of Tasmanian descent, yet identifies strongly as an Aboriginal Victorian. As Australia's first full-time Treaty Correspondent, Charles has consistently covered the Victorian Treaty process.

### Roger Monk and Tony and Francesco Cattafi

**Roger** is a screenwriter for film and TV. His feature film, *Walking on Water* won multiple writing awards and the Teddy at Berlinale in 2002. Other credits include *Nowhere Boys*, *Secret Life of Us*, *Dance Academy*, *Doctor Blake Mysteries*, *East of Everything* and *Itch*.

**Tony** migrated from Sicily to Melbourne in 1965, arriving with little more than a suitcase and no English. Decades later, the Cattafi family continues Tony's legacy of generous Italian hospitality in the heart of Carlton.

### CQ Quinan and Nicolette Forte

**CQ** is an Associate Professor in Gender Studies at the University of Melbourne. Their work brings together academics, practitioners, NGOs, policymakers, and other stakeholders to assess lived experiences of trans and nonbinary legal gender recognition.

**Nicolette** is an eclectic creative who makes music, theatre and brings together communities with a wealth of knowledge around growing food, homesteading practices and ecosystems all informed by her passion for permaculture.

### Fatima Measham and Anna Pidgeon

**Fatima** is a nature writer with a visual practice. Her writing has appeared in Meanjin, Liminal and other publications. Her perspective is drawn from Filipino revolutionary history and Catholic liberation theory.

**Anna** is a newly qualified midwife with a particular passion for bereavement care. She has a degree in philosophy and has worked in Radio, the Arts and the Emergency Services.

## Beau Windon and Geoffrey Lim

**Beau** is a neurodivergent author of Wiradyuri heritage based in Naarm. Beau is doing his PhD in the Aesthetic Form of Neurodivergent Literary Memoir at RMIT University.

**Geoffrey** is the Executive Director and co-founder of Cypher Culture, a street dance community organisation bridging Melbourne's grassroots dance scenes with the institutions that have long overlooked them.

## Maxine Beneba Clarke and Tina Hosseini

**Maxine** is the author of the ABIA and Indie award-winning short fiction collection Foreign Soil and the critically acclaimed bestselling memoir The Hate Race. She was the inaugural Peter Steele Poet in Residence at the University of Melbourne (2023-2025).

**Tina** is a passionate advocate for multiculturalism, human rights and social justice, with extensive experience within dispute resolution, public policy, research, governance and community leadership. She currently works in dispute resolution.

## Willoh Weiland and River Gammon

**Willoh** is an interdisciplinary artist, curator and writer. She is passionate about the social role of art and a leader and advocate for the role of experimental arts practice in Australia.

**River** is a writer, artist and proud trans Christian. His writing work has been published in Cordite Poetry Review, Going Down Swinging, and other places across cyberspace.

## Isabella Eichler-Onus and Vera Kipp-Murray

**Isabella** is a proud Gunditjmara writer living in Naarm. With published poetry with Red Room Poetry and Voiceworks, her work explores themes of identity, cultural connection and the intricate relationship between land and body.

**Vera** is ten years old and lives on a cattle farm in central Victoria. She loves listening to music, making Lego and climbing trees.

## Movers

**Fine Lines** was created to challenge stereotypes and assumptions about older dancers and provides a place where mature artists continue to grow artistically and creatively: Ruth Williams, Anna White, Swann Biguet, Jenny McLeod, Annabelle Crotty, Kerry McGrath, Gali Weiss, Shannon Parsons, Katrina Rank, Jenny Barnett, Kym King, and Rachel Morgan. finelinesdance.com.au

**Ooshcon** is a Samoan/Pakeha Theatre-maker and dancer, who specialises in free-body methodologies. The core belief 'ina ia sosolo le alofa / so love may flow' is imbued into Ooshcon's evolving practice and way of being. conjah.com

**Thara Brown** (Wala Connections) founded Wala Connections in 2019 to provide opportunities for cultural connection and expression through dance. As a professional dancer, Thara has performed and delivered workshops and programs nationally, including the Boonwurrung Ngargee Dance Program in Melbourne. walaconnections.com

**Maya Hajizadeh, Nastaran 'Nasta' Ghalhghovand and Samira Khonsari** immigrated to Australia and share their love of Iranian dance as professional Artists and Teachers.

**Yellow Wheel** was established in Naarm/Melbourne in 2012, is an Australian dance company specialising in working with young people and emerging artists. Asrinasmara Sastradipradja, Laiken Jackson, Tylah-Kate Syme, Carla Formoso, Tamsyn Sollier-Smith and Leyla Boz. yellowwheel.squarespace.com

**Karlia May and Danni Cook** are sisters and dance artists of Māori, Mā'ohi and European descent with ancestral connection to the Ngāpuhi people of Aotearoa. Karlia holds a Masters of Dance at the Victorian College of the Arts and Danni is a WAAPA graduate. Their work explores ongoing connection to the land and waters.

If you enjoyed Congress, please consider supporting All The Queens Men by joining our mailing list:

allthequeensmen.net

All The Queens Men (ATQM) is a queer, artist-led contemporary arts organisation creating distinct, multi-artform experiences that reflect communities, celebrate difference and spark collective joy. Artist-led. Community-informed. Socially driven.

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## Creative Team

**Concept and Direction**
Tristan Meecham and Bec Reid

**Composer and Sound Design**
Nick Roux

**Lighting and Set Design**
Ben 'Bosco' Shaw (Additive)

**Lighting Assistant/Operation**
Alex Nguyen

**Production Manager**
Tom Brayshaw (Additive)

**Stage Management**
Gabi Barton

**Assistant Stage Manager**
Daniel Newell

**Auslan Interpreters**
Leah Collins and Cindi Boychuk (Auslan Stage Left)

**ATQM Ushers**
Sara Strachan and Max Burgess

**Graphic Design**
Dom Forde (Forde and Nicol)

## Congress Editions

2017 Melbourne Fringe Festival
2018 Darwin Festival
2019 City of Wyndham
2022 Salisbury International Arts Festival

Presented at Argyle Square, Lygon Street for the 2026 Melbourne Fringe.

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