

the South Sydney Herald

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The power of authenticity and diversity



'Free to Be' - 2025 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade. Photo: Michelle Haywood



Photo: Michelle Haywood

FESTIVALS

SSH

THE 47th annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade on March 1 centred around the theme "Free to Be", celebrating the power of authenticity and diversity. This theme underscores the ongoing pursuit of true LGBTQIA+ equality and serves as a reminder that the fight is far from over.

Several key issues were highlighted during this year's Mardi Gras:

1. Inclusion of LGBTQIA+ Data in National Statistics:

The recent decision by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to include voluntary questions about sexual orientation and gender in the 2026 census marks a significant milestone for the community. This inclusion aims to provide better representation and understanding of LGBTQIA+ populations, addressing previous concerns about invisibility in national data.

2. Implementation of the National Action Plan for LGBTQIA+ Health and Wellbeing:

The Australian government's release of a comprehensive plan for 2025-2035 outlines strategies to improve health outcomes

for LGBTQIA+ individuals. The parade spotlighted the importance of this plan and advocated for its effective implementation to address unique health challenges faced by the community.

3. Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Supporting First Nations Communities:

Recent reports have highlighted the overrepresentation of First Nations women and children among missing persons and murder victims. The parade amplified calls for systemic reforms to protect these vulnerable groups and ensure justice and equity.

4. Debate Over Police Participation in Pride Events:

A national survey indicates that a majority of the queer community (63.9 per cent) support the inclusion of police in pride parades. This topic remains contentious, and discussions around it featured prominently, reflecting diverse perspectives within the community.

The 2025 Mardi Gras was a vibrant celebration and also a platform to advocate for critical issues, fostering dialogue and promoting progress toward genuine equality and inclusion for all.

SSH



Photo: Michelle Haywood

Summer on the Green despite the rain

FESTIVALS

LUCY GLEESON

WATERLOO: Stormy weather couldn't stop the community from turning out for Summer on the Green, enjoying rock climbing, twirly apples, a sausage sizzle, information stalls and hot cuppas from the Vinnies Van.

Organised by Counterpoint Community Services (CCS), the event on Friday February 21

brought together residents, community groups and service providers to celebrate and showcase connections within the Waterloo area.

"It's for social inclusion, bringing everyone together and just having a nice day out for everyone," said Elle Brind, coordinator of The Factory, which is part of CCS.

Enjoying snacks and live music between activities, attendees embraced the opportunity to chat with neighbours, learn about local services and unwind in a

welcoming, inclusive space.

"I have been working in Waterloo now for nearly 13 years, and it's just such a lovely space, such a lovely community," Ms Brind said.

"I mean the turnout here today, even though it was raining, there are so many community members and familiar faces that have just come up and said thank you and the fact that they still came out is amazing.

"It's just really lovely to be part of it."

SSH



Very popular - hot cuppas from the Vinnies Van, Waterloo Green, February 21. Photo: Lucy Gleeson

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NEWS

news@ssh.com.au
Phone Lyn 0400 008 338

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adverts@ssh.com.au

MAILING ADDRESS:

PO Box 3288
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URBAN DESIGN

Geoff Turnbull

SUB EDITORS

Melinda Kearns

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Photo: Getty Images

Food and other support services in your area

HUMAN AFFAIRS

ANDREW COLLIS

RECENT data reveals that over one-third of Australian households experienced moderate to severe food insecurity in 2023 (360info.org). This alarming statistic underscores the critical role of local food support initiatives in urban communities.

In response to this growing need, the City of Sydney has

established a comprehensive food support directory, connecting residents with services across various suburbs. This resource ensures that individuals and families can access nutritious food and essential items, mitigating the impact of financial hardships.

Community organisations and volunteers are the backbone of support systems. For instance, the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre offers meals and food services, providing fresh produce and pantry staples

to those in need. Similarly, the Glebe Assistance Partnership Program extends aid with food, utility bills and advocacy, fostering a supportive network for vulnerable people and families.

The significance of these services has intensified as food banks report unprecedented demand. Factors such as falling donations and rising operational costs have strained resources, making community support and awareness more crucial than ever.

To bolster these efforts, the City of Sydney has allocated grants to organisations dedicated to improving access to affordable and healthy food. Grants empower local groups to expand their reach and enhance service delivery.



Scan the QR Code to view the list of services available.

Waterloo South relocation update

URBAN DESIGN

GEOFF TURNBULL

TENANTS in 150 homes in Waterloo South's first stage have been given six months' notice to relocate for the redevelopment. The area covers two street blocks bounded by John, Cope, McEvoy and Mead streets on the southern edge of the estate.

Others within Waterloo South will know when they might relocate within the next two years. Those in the high-rise have been told they will not need to move for at least 10 years. All tenants were advised before material was made public online at www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/land-and-housing-corporation/greater-sydney/waterloo.

Each tenant was delivered a notice, by hand if they were home, and assigned a relocations officer. Tenants can ask to be relocated into housing in

the local area or elsewhere in the state. Seventy social housing homes above Waterloo Metro will become available within six months.

A 2023 Waterloo Estate tenant survey showed 43 per cent would move out of the neighbourhood if given the chance while 35 per cent disagreed. The figures may be a bit different for Waterloo South as 22 per cent of the tenants are Aboriginal and may be more inclined to stay in the area.

At January 2025, 719 (of the 749) properties in Waterloo South were tenanted with 1,013 residents. Of these 75 per cent were single persons, 60 per cent were aged households with tenants aged 55+ (or 45+ for Aboriginal tenants) and 22 per cent have lived in their homes for over 20 years.

Homes NSW is funding Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) to provide an Independent Tenant Advocate for relocations. RLC, Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation and Counterpoint receive some Council



Waterloo South Stage 1 Relocation Map (detail). Image: Homes NSW

funding for independent support.

No extra social work/case management support is being supplied. Work on improving the current human service system has stalled and Homes NSW's People and Place Plan

dealing with additional needs from the relocations and redevelopment has not responded to community criticism.

Geoff Turnbull is the Spokesperson for REDWatch.

TANYA PLIBERSEK MP

Federal Member for Sydney



Dear SSH readers

Early education is great for kids learning to share and take turns; getting excited about stories and art; and looking forward to starting big school.

And in this electorate we have some great centres doing fantastic work which we believe every child should be able to attend.

The Albanese Labor Government now has legislation to guarantee every child has access to three days of subsidised early education every week.

From January 2026, all families will be eligible. It abolishes the Coalition's failed activity test for parents and carers.

Families earning between \$50,000 to \$100,000 will save on average \$1,460 per year.

This provides cost-of-living relief to families and helps ensure that children can access the benefits of high-quality early education and care.

This is good for families, good for children and good for the Australian economy.

Helping Australia's most vulnerable

The Albanese Labor Government is strengthening the financial futures of Australia's most vulnerable people.

We're investing \$51.5 million to ensure the successful Saver Plus program continues to support Australians experiencing disadvantage to improve their financial literacy and better navigate financial crises.

It will ensure that the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, in partnership with ANZ and supported by The Smith Family and Berry Street, will continue to deliver Saver Plus until 2030.

Saver Plus will match savings of up to \$500 for lower-income families who set aside funds for their children's education.

More choice, lower costs and better health care for women.

The Albanese Labor Government has announced a \$573.3 million investment in women's health to deliver:

- The first PBS listing for new oral contraceptive pills in more than 30 years. Around 50,000 women who pay about \$380 each year will now pay \$126.40 a year, or just \$30.80 a year with a concession card.
- The first PBS listing for new menopausal hormone therapies in over 20 years. Around 150,000 women pay between \$400 and \$670 a year will soon pay a maximum of \$369.60 a year or just \$7.70 a month with a concession card.

- More bulk billing for IUDs and birth control implants saving around 300,000 women up to \$400 in out-of-pocket costs a year.
- Contraceptives and treatment for uncomplicated UTIs directly from pharmacies.

These are in addition to the other ways that the Albanese Labor Government is helping ease cost-of-living pressures including:

- Higher wages
- Lower taxes
- One million new jobs
- Cheaper medicines
- Cheaper childcare and abolition of the activity test
- Building 1.2 million more homes - the biggest build in Australian history
- Cutting uni debts by 20%
- Helping students with paid prac
- Making free TAFE permanent

We've done all this while also building the nation's first corruption watchdog. The National Anti-Corruption Commission now has 31 corruption investigations underway and has five cases in the courts.

More than any other Government we have acted to protect the environment and to transition Australia to a net-zero economy.

Among our many achievements, we have:

- Legislated to bring the Climate Change Authority back to play a real and meaningful role in providing independent, science-based climate change advice.
- Established the Net Zero Economy Authority to coordinate and facilitate the economic opportunities of energy transformation for the regions.
- Invested \$550 million to protect our threatened species including LHI's Phasmid and Little Mountain Palm.
- Protected 95 million hectares of land and sea - an area bigger than Germany and Italy combined.
- Hosted the world's first Global Nature Positive Summit to drive collective action and private investment in nature protection and repair.

As always, please contact my electorate office should you need assistance with any federal issues.

Tanya

TANYA PLIBERSEK MP
Federal Member for Sydney

1A Great Buckingham St, Redfern NSW 2016 T: 9379 0700 E: Tanya.Plibersek.MP@aph.gov.au



JENNY LEONG MP

MEMBER FOR NEWTOWN



Protests might be a problem for the Government – but they are not the cause of harm in our community

During the first Parliament sitting period for the year, myself and my NSW Greens colleagues opposed the *Crimes Amendment (Places of Worship) Bill 2025*. This bill – which amends part of the Crimes Act to create a new offence of intentionally blocking, impeding, or hindering a person seeking to access or leave a place of worship – is characterised by ambiguity.

The Greens agree that everyone should have the right to attend places of worship without fear of harassment or impediment. Regardless of who or how they worship, people should be able to freely access the places they hold sacred.

To be clear, that is not what this bill actually protects. I am beyond disappointed at where the Government has landed: giving police the most broad discretionary powers to undermine basic human rights. The bill actually criminalises protest activity not just “in or at” but also “near” a place of worship.

In effect, it seeks to criminalise any exercise of fundamental freedoms of speech, assembly and expression in the vicinity of any place of worship, which is a deeply alarming proposition that could have catastrophic effects. The lack of specific definitions for crucial terms like “impede”, “hinder”, “intimidate” or “near” in the context of the bill leave broad scope for interpretation and, with it, broad scope for discretion.

Who is left to interpret those terms? Who gets that discretion? It is none other than NSW Police. Individual police officers are given the power to make a call on what the words mean – on the spot and in the heat of the moment – when even the NSW Attorney General's office and the legal experts responsible for drafting the laws were unable to put clear definitions in the bill.

What is perhaps more staggering is the non-existent link that has been manufactured between peaceful protests and the attacks and vandalism over past months. The arson attack and hate symbols on the Newtown Synagogue in Newtown were unacceptable. However, they had nothing to do with a protest, nor did the attacks on the childcare centre or the graffiti on and attempted arson in Dover Heights.

This bill is not about protecting the community; it is about silencing dissent.

Scan the QR code below to watch my full speech in Parliament.



Authorised by Jenny Leong MP. Funded using parliamentary entitlements.



A new cohort of first-year medical students has joined the School of Rural Health. Photo: Supplied

School of Rural Health welcomes new medical students

SPONSORED

MARK SCOTT

THE School of Rural Health is excited to welcome the 2025 cohort of first-year medical students, who will undertake the University of Sydney's entire four-year Doctor of Medicine program in Dubbo.

Nearly half of the 2025 first-year cohort come from the Western and Far West regions of NSW, representing communities such as Orange, Dubbo, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Coonamble, Parkes and Forbes.

They join a total of 93 medical students currently studying in the Dubbo Stream.

Among the first-year students are Central West locals Jonathon Toll, Savana Purss and Grace McRae.

Jonathon grew up in Dubbo and has been working locally. Witnessing the impact of limited healthcare services in rural areas, he was inspired to become a doctor to make a lasting difference in rural communities.

The Dubbo program offers a unique combination of a world-class medical education and the benefits of studying in a rural community.

“The immersive learning experience and smaller cohort offer a great opportunity to

train and develop into a medical professional in the bush.

The overwhelmingly positive reviews from current and past students, and the community in general, also motivated me to want to study in Dubbo,” said Jonathon.

Orange local Grace McRae echoes similar motivations.

“I had heard really good things about the Dubbo program and the University of Sydney. Being from the area I was really excited to be able to access a great program, without the need to go to the major cities. It's great that I can spend the full four years in the country and become one of the community. I also have family in the area, so being closer to home while studying was really enticing,” said Grace.

Savana Purss has been a dietitian at Dubbo Hospital for the past three years. While she has always been interested in becoming a doctor, she was uncertain about her chances given the competitive entry process.

“I am most excited to be studying in a town that I already know and love. It's been an extremely smooth and encouraging process to even apply to study medicine in Dubbo. I found the Dubbo School of Rural Health staff to be extremely encouraging towards local people, and this has made me feel very welcomed,” said Savana.

Professor Catherine Hawke,

Head of Clinical School said:

“It's wonderful to see so many students from our region pursuing their dreams to become doctors and we can't wait to see the impact they will have – both as medical students and future doctors.”

The Dubbo Stream is delivered in new purpose-built facilities, opened in 2022 at the School of Rural Health.

They feature two dedicated learning studios for team based collaborative work, an anatomy teaching lab and a six-suite simulation training centre.

Students use the latest in medical education technology including 3D modelling and virtual and augmented reality while also receiving clinical exposure in the newly redeveloped Dubbo Hospital.

The Dubbo program forms part of the Australian government's Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network and builds on the University's long history of over 20 years delivering medical education in the Central West and Western NSW.



Authorised by Vice-Chancellor and President Prof. Mark Scott.
Enquiries: 9351 2000
info.centre@sydney.edu.au



Gary Williams and the late Charles Perkins were the first-ever Aboriginal students at the University of Sydney, both starting in 1963 and taking part in the Freedom Ride in February 1965, which highlighted discrimination, segregation, inequality and injustice. Freedom Riders Gary Williams (right) and Jim Spiegelman (left) at the University of Sydney on February 26.

Photo: Michelle Haywood

'I'm a minister of religion – here's why I oppose restrictions on protest around places of worship'

COMMENT

JOSEPHINE INKPIN

THE NSW government recently passed legislation restricting rights to protest around places of worship. This follows abhorrent violent and threatening antisemitic acts. Jewish and all religious communities deserve to be respected and to live freely without fear. However, destructive acts relating to religious institutions were already covered by existing legislation prohibiting violence, intimidation and inciting hatred based on religion. Violence and terrorism are not protests but crimes.

The congregation where I ministered for the last four years, Pitt Street Uniting Church, has received intimidation and acts of violence, yet opposes such laws. For it has not only been attacked but also prominent in protest movements for queer rights, climate action and justice for refugees. It has erected banners, held protest gatherings outside the church and organised marches along Pitt Street.

I myself, over decades, have protested outside church spaces on several human rights grounds.

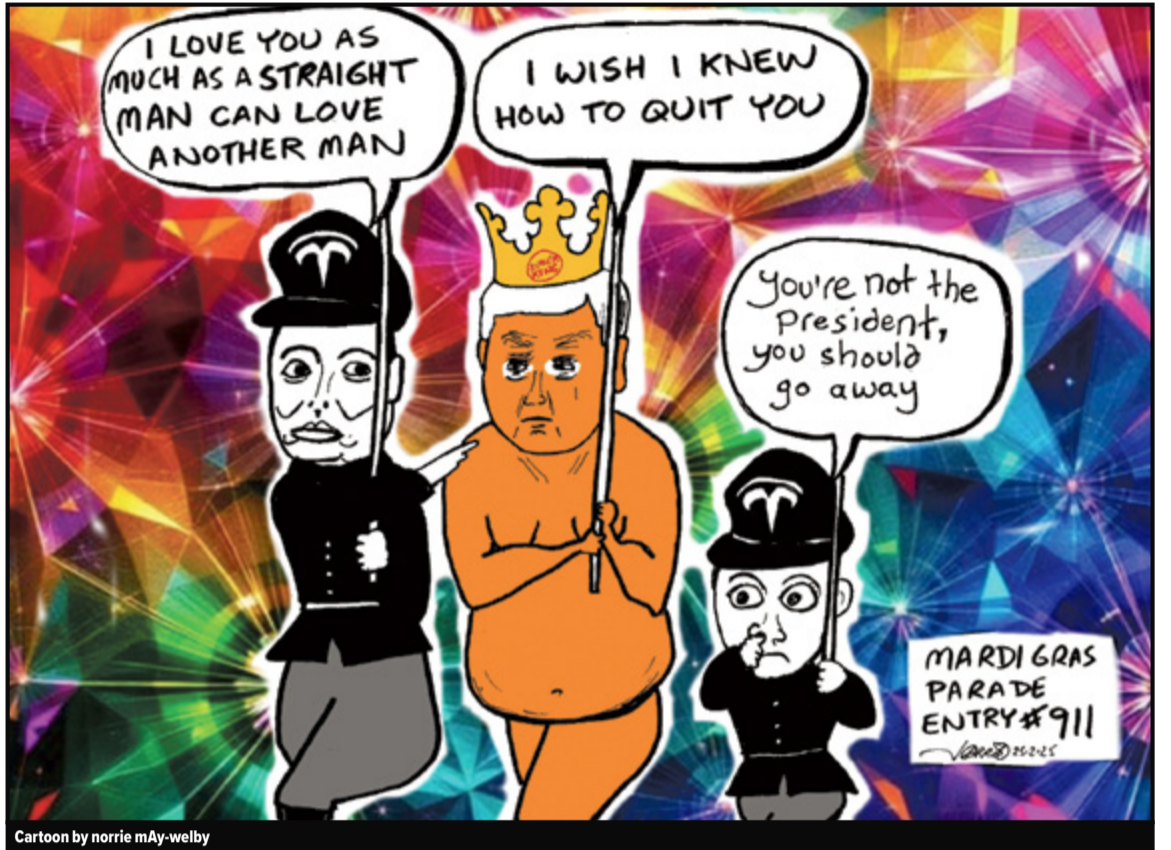
I also worry that such legislation reinforces "religious exceptionalism" – where faith bodies are overprotected – and can thereby restrict reasonable as well as unacceptable dissent from within and beyond their midst. Among others, victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse have thus spoken out against such laws. Furthermore, many Sydney protest march routes pass

by places of worship, including Pitt St UC. Protest can cause inconvenience but that is not the same as violence. Unfortunately, many politicians appear to conflate them.

Our community's capacity to engage in protest is foundational to healthy democracy and to faith witness for justice. Peaceful protest has enabled social progress such as the eight-hour working day, civil rights and independence from colonialism. Yet, sadly, over the last decade the NSW government has introduced more and more restrictive laws against protest, and upped penalties, with \$22,000 fines for protests impacting railways rushed through last year. A government review recently backed laws that made obstructing a road punishable by two years' imprisonment despite 20 civil society organisations and over 1,400 individuals calling for the laws to be scrapped.

We must address racist, and religious-linked, violence with targeted reform, rather than restricting democratic rights. Instead of the current top-down approach, I therefore encourage the government to rethink. Resourcing understanding, cross-community cooperation and cross-faith solidarity, as well as targeted reforms addressing far-right extremism, is a much better proactive way of creating the community bonds necessary to protect everyone from violence. **SSH**

The Rev. Dr Josephine Inkpin is an Anglican priest. A former General Secretary of the NSW Ecumenical Council, she is co-chair of Equal Voices and a leader in inter-faith dialogue



Cartoon by norrie may-welby

The importance of local news in a changing media landscape

EDITORIAL

SSH

WITH the rise of media monopolies and the spread of right-wing propaganda, independent local journalism – reviews, analysis and storytelling – has never been more crucial.

The collapse of local newspapers stems from corporate conglomerates gutting regional newsrooms, replacing investigative journalism with syndicated content that prioritises profit over public interest. This has created "news deserts", leaving urban and rural communities without fact-based reporting on local government, development and social issues.

One major consequence is unchecked gentrification in inner-city suburbs. Without local journalists to hold developers accountable, communities are reshaped by profit-driven forces, displacing long-term residents and erasing cultural history.

Local news is vital in exposing exploitative real estate practices, environmental concerns and the struggles of marginalised groups often ignored by mainstream media.

Meanwhile, right-wing propaganda – both print and digital – thrives in the absence of independent journalism. Misinformation spreads unchecked, polarising communities and eroding trust in democratic institutions. Reliable local news serves as a counterbalance, offering factual reporting that directly impacts people's lives.

Despite these challenges, local journalism survives thanks to the dedication of volunteer writers, photographers and distributors who work tirelessly to keep communities informed. They document council meetings, cover protests and highlight grassroots movements and issues overlooked by corporate media. Their work is an act of resistance – keeping democracy alive at the neighbourhood level.

Now in its 24th year, the SSH seeks to build community connections, listen closely to people's vulnerabilities and strengths – especially those facing insecurity, isolation, ill health or discrimination – and advocate for social and environmental justice. By amplifying local voices, SSH plays a vital role in protecting our shared spaces and histories.

To sustain independent local news, communities must support and engage with it. Subscribing to local publications, donating to independent media and contributing stories or photos all help. In a rapidly shifting media landscape, the fight for local news is ultimately a fight for democracy itself. **SSH**

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Uncle Vic Simms at La Perouse, Invasion/Survival Day 2025. Photo: Michelle Haywood

The Loner - powerful protest in song

FIRST PEOPLES

ANDREW COLLIS

A funeral for Dr William Victor "Bunno" Simms (January 29, 1946 – February 8, 2025) was held at St Andrew's Catholic Church, Malabar, on February 19.

The service was led by Pastor Ray Minniecon, with a eulogy by son William, and tributes from brother Henry as well as granddaughter Kyara. There was music, too, of course.

The SSH acclaims a much-loved Bidjigal Elder whose life and

music touched so many. Uncle Vic was a child and television star, a rock-and-roller, jailed songwriter, community leader, and advocate for land rights and freedom. Condolences to Auntie Joan and to all the family.

Vic Simms' *The Loner* (1973) stands as one of Australia's most significant protest albums, a raw and deeply personal reflection on the struggles of First Nations people. *The Loner* was recorded live in an hour at the Bathurst Correctional Facility for Ron Wills at RCA by Bruce Brown from ATA studios in Sydney. The brass was added later in the studio.

Each song delivers a potent critique of systemic oppression and the personal toll of colonisation.

The title track sets the tone with melancholic vocals lamenting isolation and displacement. The lyric – "I see misery, I see the pain / On unfamiliar ground" – captures the alienation felt by many Indigenous Australians, particularly those affected by the prison system. Simms' voice, rich with emotion, turns this simple performance into a haunting statement on the cycles of incarceration.

"Stranger in My Country" is perhaps the album's most striking protest anthem. With lines like "This land is like a store-bought pie / And lots of people come / All to get themselves a slice /

And I can't get a crumb", Simms gives voice to the generational pain of dispossession.

Other tracks, like "Poor Folks Happiness" and "Get Back into the Shadows", reflect on poverty and discrimination, reinforcing themes of resilience and resistance. Despite the heaviness of his subject matter, Simms never loses sight of hope. "Going Back Home" is an uplifting closer, envisioning a future where First Nations people reclaim their rightful place.

After his release from jail in 1977, Simms formed a group to tour prisons (throughout Australia and Canada), and over a period of 12 years "travelled from jail to jail, letting the fellas – black and white – know that someone was thinking about them".

The album was lost for decades (discontinued by RCA) before being reissued in 2013 (remastered by Sandman Records), allowing new generations to engage with its powerful storytelling.

Today, *The Loner* remains an essential listen – a vital piece of Australian protest music. Vic Simms' voice, filled with defiance and dignity, still resonates.

Luke Peacock, a Brisbane-based musician of Torres Strait Islander heritage, led the Painted Ladies project. Their 2014 album, *The Painted Ladies Play The Loner*, featured collaborations with artists such as Paul Kelly and the Medics, bringing new life to Simms' songs while preserving their emotional core. **SSH**

The Review

Arts & Culture in
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Storytelling workshops designed and led by young people

BOOKS

ELIZABETH ARRIGO

AS a creative writing organisation, developing literacy-based workshops for young people is Story Factory's bread and butter. But it's not often that those workshops end up being designed and delivered by young people themselves – a challenge that 15 young people from Chifley College Shalvey Campus in Mount Druitt took on with gusto in the second half of 2024.

Driven by the desire to act as leaders and mentors in their community, these young people rose to the challenge of becoming storytelling experts. Their task: to lead the creation of two unique creative writing workshops for a group of young students from two local primary schools, Noumea Public and Shalvey Public, to help both with their literacy skills and their upcoming transition to high school.

Over the course of a school term, the students worked together under the guidance of a Story Factory educator to create workshops that reflected their own interests and experiences. From exploring superheroes and villains to creating contraptions to catch



Workshop participants at Chifley College Shalvey Campus in Mount Druitt. Photo: Edwina Pickles

and filter their dreams, the young people put thought and passion into workshops they thought younger students would enjoy.

They then delivered these workshops themselves, teaching and mentoring local primary school students to develop their own pieces of creative writing.

"I really enjoyed working with younger students. It was easy to talk to them. I feel like they really paid attention to us, and it was nice to see how motivated they were to take part in the workshops.

It was great to be able to give them those experiences and those memories," said one participant.

The opportunity to act as mentors working with younger people also made the high school students feel respected and capable of making change in their communities.

"The students selected as mentors really came into their own in those last two sessions when it came to running the workshops. I was blown away by what great mentors they were, how friendly, warm and encouraging they were

with the younger students, and the creativity with which they ran those workshops. I am very, very proud of each and every one of them," said storyteller manager Nita van den Boogaard.

All of the writing completed throughout the course of this project is due to be published at the beginning of Term 2 this year in a new book, entitled *Be Someone*.

The young people involved in this project not only developed their writing knowledge and skills, but also built their leadership,

confidence and sense of belonging, both in their classroom and their wider local community.

One young person said: "This program was a great learning experience for everyone, as well as a bonding experience. It brought everyone together. I think each lesson that we spent with Story Factory, it not only taught us how to write and why that's important, but it brought us all together and let us explore our ideas and talents. The biggest thing I got out of this program was a changed mindset. At the start of the program, I didn't really like it, but I kept coming, and my mindset changed – I started getting excited to come to the workshops and that's the thing I'm most grateful to Story Factory for."

This project was proudly funded by the NSW Government through their Youth Opportunities Funding initiative.

"I Am" by Lyrics, an excerpt from forthcoming publication *Be Someone*:

I am the scarf I wear in the early mornings to keep me warm / I am a sweet, sugary donut with a warm hot chocolate // I am my mother's fragrance that fills me with love / I am the sounds of music that blesses my ears with the lyrics of loving // I am the warm breeze welcoming me with a smile / I am the dark of night revealing the bright stars above.

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Billie Eilish – meaning, energy, emotional connection

MUSIC

ELYZA VANDENBOVENKAMP

BILLIE Eilish's third album, *Hit Me Hard and Soft* (2024) shows her unique style and talent. At 23, she keeps changing pop music, mixing deep lyrics with creative sounds.

Her concert at Qudos Bank Arena on February 25 has a simple but powerful setup – screens, towers, a mysterious cube. Sometimes she's inside, sometimes she's out ...

Eilish's soft voice makes her music feel personal and emotional. In *When the Party's Over*, she asks for silence to highlight the song's delicate beauty. One of many stunning moments.

Her songs explore deep topics like body image, fame and relationships. In *Hit Me Hard and Soft*, she shares her thoughts openly. Songs like "Lunch" and "Chihiro" mix different sounds to reflect shifting emotions.

"Your Power" stands out: "Try not to abuse your power" ... a line to think about.

She also experiments – "L'Amour de Ma Vie" starts soft, then shifts to energetic synth-pop.

On stage, she guides us – lights up, lights down. The visuals and lasers are breathtaking.

Eilish stays true to herself with her unique style (her merch is cool) and honest lyrics. She pushes creative boundaries while appreciating her team.

The box could symbolise limits, fears or



Billie Eilish at Qudos Bank Arena, Olympic Park, February 25. Photo: Andrew Collis



Eilish's authenticity and individuality extend to her personal brand – a distinct fashion sense and candid lyrics. Photo: Elyza Vandenvovenkamp

dark emotions. She moves in and out, shaping her performance her way – talented, kind and grateful.

She gives a shout-out to her brother Finneas (not here tonight) and her mum (who is). Then, to the crowd: "I've got your back, and I know you've got mine."

The Halfway Line surveys the expansive and incisive career of Dunghutti artist, Blak Douglas. Spanning painting, photography, drawing and sculpture, *The Halfway Line* charts Douglas' career, beginning in the industrial estates of Penrith, through to winning the 2022 Archibald Prize. Featuring works from major public and private collections, *The Halfway Line* is the largest presentation of Douglas' work, presented in the heart of Western Sydney.

Theatre Review by Catherine Skipper



Nucleus

Writer: Alana Valentine

Director: Andrea James

Seymour Centre

February 19 – March 15, 2025

Award-winning playwright Alana Valentine, sharp as a tack, courageous and compassionate, once again takes up the challenge of placing the patriarchal and colonial Australian psyche under her microscope. With typical Valentine insight, *Nucleus* fuses the feudal tragedy of love-struck enemies with the destructive contemporary pursuit of divisiveness as a means of gaining power.

Valentine situates her exploration of the danger and ultimate futility of divisiveness in the currently revived debate over nuclear power, a fitting subject. Apart from the figurative connection to the process of producing nuclear power – nuclear fission – the debate – or rather conflict – provides a range of pros and cons, some of which are equally valid.

Valentine skilfully mines the material she had meticulously researched for several years to create her two knowledgeable characters who support opposing views with admirable although sometimes blind passion. The two seasoned actors, Paula Arundell as Dr Cassie Logart, a paediatrician, as the anti-nuclear campaigner and Peter Kowitz as Dr Gabriel Hulst, a nuclear engineer, bring Valentine's astute and lyrical script to thrilling and convincing life.

Arundell is enchanting as the mercurial Cassie. She is not afraid to make use of her youthful sex appeal to entrap the older Gabriel with a view to blackmail and her reflections over sleeping with the enemy are hilariously brash. Undoubtedly, she holds the trump card but she doesn't play it as over breakfast Gabriel's spontaneous ode to a shampoo bottle surprisingly reveals a man she might love. Touched by his sincerity she asks the play's pivotal question: is it possible to love someone with whom you disagree utterly? Should feeling or ideology guide our choices?

While Gabriel is a less immediately appealing character, Kowitz convincingly portrays his enraged denials of Cassie's arguments as a deeply personal rather than intellectual response. In his opening monologue Gabriel says it is difficult for him to express how much he dislikes Cassie Logart's "opinion"; he nevertheless manages to disparage her person with infantile petulance. The predictable chemical outcome of his "engineered" meeting with Cassie in the Orchid Bar leaves Gabriel humiliated, and when they re-encounter each other he is accusatory and hurtful. Self-righteously, he proclaims that shared values are the basis for a shared life. Impasse.

Structurally, the play is very engaging as we move revelation by revelation not to an answer but to the possibility of looking elsewhere than at who is winning or losing. Cassie won the short game but as the British Gabriel, so colonial in manner and costume (design, Isabel

Hudson), reminds her, there is still the long game as he has now been asked to do a new risk assessment of Cassie's home country. It would be a tragic end if not for "the quiet and gentle wind named hope" implicit in Gabriel's request to be taught how to look at things in a different way and the reassurance in the promise of a joint title and in a joint inheritance.

We are reminded, as we look up at a spectacular giant DNA molecule, of a much longer game. Occasionally it flickers or changes colour responding perhaps to the world the actors are creating for themselves and for the future from the choices they make.

A very beautifully crafted play, *Nucleus* is sensitively directed by Andrea James who handles its many layers and nuances with skill and power. The creative crew, who are so important to a satisfying theatrical experience, excelled themselves. The set is stunning, the costumes perfectly attuned to character and circumstance, and the subtle use of cello evocative. Especially effective is the mournful call of the yellow-tailed black cockatoo summoning Cassie to a different journey.

Theatre Review by Yvonne Hocothee



Song of First Desire

Writer: Andrew Bovell

Director: Neil Armfield

Belvoir Street Theatre

February 13 – March 23, 2025

This latest work by esteemed writer Andrew Bovell (*Things I Know to Be True*, *The Secret River*) is passionate, political and deeply affecting. Set in contemporary Madrid but interspersed with flashbacks to 1968 when Spain was still under Franco's regime, it examines the lingering trauma which has filtered down to current generations decades after the Spanish Civil War ended – the title is from a poem by the Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca, himself a victim of the war.

A neglected house in modern day Madrid is the home of almost middle-aged twins, Julia and Luis. They employ a Columbian immigrant, Alejandro, to take care of their mother who is ailing mentally. The handsome newcomer is a novelty to the siblings who appear to lead unusually reclusive lives, the reason for which is revealed as their stories unfold.

A sign flashed up on the wall informs the audience whether it's "Now" or "1968" – very necessary as the actors play different characters in each era. The scenes from the past, seemingly played by the elders of the contemporary family are both revelatory and harrowing in the starkness of the unrelenting cruelty. It was a time when the regime set about "cleansing" the population of any they considered dissident, or aberrant in any way, using the most extreme methods – murder, summary execution, torture, sexual abuse. It is dark and confronting, but does establish how families, two generations later, still carry the scars.

The four actors, each handling past and present characters, perform superbly.

Sarah Peirse is a stand-out, first as

modern-day Camelia, the mentally fading mother, then as the tragic Margarita of the past, who loses her family to the regime. Jorge Muriel (from the original Spanish production) creates two of the most contrasted characters: Luis, the gay, ineffective brother and Carlos, the heinous, immoral overlord. Equally, Kerry Fox handles her characters with aplomb: Julia, the feisty but damaged daughter, who sees no hope in her future, and secondly, as Carmen, the obedient, middle-class wife of Carlos. Last, but not least, is Borja Maestre (also from the original Spanish production), who represents the younger generation: first as Alejandro, forced to immigrate from Columbia, and then as Juan, in 1968 a dissident student who is forced by his mother, who knows the score, to flee for his life.

The creative crew adds immensely to the quality of the play. Music (Clemence Williams) is a subtle soundscape, augmented intermittently by a tolling bell which has a strongly dramatic effect. The set (Mel Page) is a garden area consisting mainly of soil and dying plants, in keeping with the parlous spiritual state of the inhabitants. Likewise, the lighting (Morgan Moroney) subtly moderates throughout, reflecting the emotional levels. Particularly effective is a strip of strong side lighting showing the actor on a dark stage.

Director Neil Armfield's and Andrew Bovell's efforts in bringing this stark yet intriguing work to the stage can be chalked up as another triumph in their already impressive careers.

Film Reviews by Lindsay Cohen



Conclave

Director: Edward Berger

Starring: Ralph Fiennes, Stanley Tucci, John Lithgow

Genre: Pope culture

The perfect film has great relevance to current affairs, and *Conclave* is the perfect example. Not only is the current Pope's future in doubt (at the time of writing) but the battles between the bishops to become the next Pope in the film are very political – left vs right, woke vs conservative, racism, sexism and discrimination. So, Donald Trump may not like the film, but the now more politically correct Academy members (a controversial issue about a decade ago that has been resolved to some extent) will.

The only complex factor from a viewer's perspective is the large number of great accomplishments of the actors distracting from their excellent *Conclave* performances. Ralph Fiennes has starred in lots of famous films and been nominated for many awards: *Schindler's List* (1993), *The English Patient* (1996), *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), and much more.

John Lithgow is best known for all the TV series he's starred in such as *3rd Rock from the Sun* (1996–2001), *Dexter* (2009, 2021), *The Crown* (2016–2019) and *Perry Mason* (2020). At least Stanley Tucci is a natural Italian speaker with Italian origins who plays Stanley Tucci, so

Conclave suits his role very well.

Conclave is the best film I've seen that's been nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards this year. It may not be as stylish as *The Brutalist*, as extreme as *The Substance*, as epic as *Dune: Part Two* or as nostalgic as *A Complete Unknown*, but it is the most enthralling and insightful, not that that means it will win any Academy awards (or maybe did by the time this edition is published)!

Rating: Five sinless sins.



The Brutalist

Director: Brady Corbet

Starring: Adrien Brody,

Felicity Jones, Guy Pearce

Genre: Intelligent Architecture

As you probably know, Brutalism is a form of architecture. Whether it's good or bad is debatable, but it is distinct. That's true of the film *The Brutalist* too, but ironically, that's not because it's mostly about the architecture but more about Laszlo Toth, the Hungarian architect portrayed by actor Adrien Brody.

Where this gets tricky and complex is that the story is fictional, but Toth is to a large extent based on two Jewish Hungarian architects of the same period. So, should the film claim to be "based on" or "inspired by" a true story? Does it matter?

It certainly doesn't seem to matter to the Academy Awards which seems more obsessed with the fact that the film used AI to Hungarianise actor accents. Why CGI seems acceptable but not AI accents seems inconsistent and not relevant to future actor and screenwriter employment opportunities – a focus of last year's Hollywood strikes.

Anyway, irrespective of the AI "controversy", Brody was excellent, is likely to win an Academy Award, and the film was very good. Though from my scientific, nerdy perspective a greater analysis of Brutalism architecture would have added value to the film.

It also has a unique style which is fascinating but also distracting from the storylines, some of which are more interesting and relevant than others. Indeed, the three-and-half hour film with a 15-minute intermission (the first in years) could have been edited and tightened up, but that probably would have removed the intermission marketing focus – and maybe earned it the Best Picture award (assuming it didn't win!).

Rating: Four storeys.



The Monkey

Director: Osgood Perkins

Starring: Theo James, Tatiana

Maslany, Christian Convery

Genre: Kingdumb

The film *The Monkey* is based on a short story of the same name by Stephen King. So that should already indicate to a large extent if you'll like the film or not. If you're still unsure, you can take into account

that, curiously, the drum-playing monkey is supposedly the same monkey that played cymbals in *Toy Story 3* (2010), which was a much better and funnier film.

Now if that's already confusing then what the film is supposed to be is confusing too. Marketed as a horror film, it sometimes tries to be a comedy, but the monkey goes from killing individuals and family members to being a gross shock horror character where, for no reason, it kills lots of people and communities are destroyed. How it does that and manages to survive its own destruction is also a mystery.

I make no apology for this film spoiler as there are so many other parts of the storyline too that make no sense. Indeed, while some scenes are well acted and amusing, from the beginning to the end and the flashbacks, they often don't work and can be hard to connect.

The Monkey is R rated

because it's rubbish.

Rating: One off.

Book Review by Melinda Kearns



A Language of Limbs

Dylín Hardcastle

Pan Macmillan, 2024

A Language of Limbs is split into two halves – Limb One and Limb Two, who go through life in a parallel manner. Starting in the early 1970s and covering the course of nearly 30 years, the novel begins with two teenage girls in love, neighbours in their Newcastle suburb. They are discovered having sex in the back shed by Limb One's parents on a fateful summer evening, whereupon Limb One is beaten, thrown out of home and disowned, never to return. She is taken to Sydney by a sympathetic gay truck driver and finds a home at Uranian House, made up of a range of different queer people who love her and embrace all those who come their way. Through the household's experiences, the burgeoning queer culture of Sydney is outlined, as they live through the nascent Mardi Gras and the AIDS crisis, having a range of relationships and developing equality until the dissolution of the household.

Limb Two takes a more conventional path, finishing her schooling and eventually travelling south to Sydney University where she studies English Literature. She meets and falls in love with a man, but her feelings for Limb One never truly vanish, often reasserting themselves in her dreams. They are often in close proximity, retelling the same event from different perspectives. Eventually, after separate experiences of tragic loss, bereavement, and grief, they are brought back together by their shared love of self-expression, literature and the written word.

Their future is unknown – it is not the story that Dylín Hardcastle has written here – rather, how the choice of being true to yourself or taking a more conventional path shaped the experiences of queer people in the past and present. Hopefully, in the future, living the life that you want will not require such painful sacrifices. A very enjoyable and compelling read.

'Living with Dementia' book launched in support of carers and their loved ones

HUMAN AFFAIRS

MIRIAM PEPPER

ON February 20, approximately 50 people from across Sydney gathered at Paddington Uniting Church to launch the book *Living with Dementia: A Carer's Journey*, authored by Alicia Dong and with artworks by Gloria Liang.

The book draws together a series of 11 articles and paintings first published in the SSH in 2024, chronicling Alicia's six-year journey of caring for her husband, Stuart Gardner, with an additional artwork painted by Gloria for the cover.

Alicia expressed her thanks to Miriam Pepper, the editor of the book; Gloria; Andrew Collis, SSH managing editor and minister at South Sydney Uniting Church; graphic designer Rob Young; Pastor Michael Hercock and Georgina Hare from Paddington Uniting Church; and all attending the launch for their support.

"I am blessed and grateful for a dedicated and committed team who brought the publication of the book to fruition and made this event possible," said Alicia.

"We have donated 10 copies to the Dementia Australia library, which is a national service, and they are placing a copy in

the library in each capital city across Australia. We want to reach more carers and their loved ones sharing similar journeys, including those young carers in their 20s and 30s.

"I believe that my husband, Stuart, is smiling now, knowing that all his sufferings and mine would not be in vain, and he would be proud of me that I am doing my very best to support more carers."

Gloria also expressed her thanks to all involved in the project and shared her experiences of illustrating Alicia and Stuart's stories. "Capturing the changing emotions and steps in their journey was both a challenge and a joy," she said.

In the foreword to the book, geriatrician Professor Peter Smerdely wrote: "This book gives a clear and honest look at what it's like to care for someone with dementia and offers useful advice for anyone in a similar situation ... it's also a reminder of how much love, patience, and effort carers give every day. By sharing her experiences, Alicia helps us understand the challenges carers face and how we can better support them and the people they care for."

He also commended Gloria's beautiful paintings, commenting that they "help show some of



Pastor Michael Hercock (Paddington Uniting Church), Dr Miriam Pepper, Gloria Liang, Alicia Dong and the Rev. Andrew Collis at the launch. Photo: Georgina Hare

the feelings and experiences of Alicia and Stuart in a way that words can't always express. They make the book even more meaningful and engaging."

Speaking at the launch, the Rev. Andrew Collis said: "It's an honour to stand here and celebrate this book. The whole thing is deeply

loving and emotional, humane, wise, practical, devastating, uplifting, real ... I'd like to acknowledge the precious and costly nature of this love, and the love it invites in response.

"May the book bring comfort, insight and strength to all who walk the journey."

The book is published by South Sydney Uniting Church and may be ordered for \$39.95 (plus postage) by contacting admin@southsydneyuniting.org.au

Gloria's paintings are on exhibition on Saturdays March 1 and 8 at Paddington Uniting Church, 395 Oxford Street Paddington, and are available for purchase.



Indigenous star Jaime Chapman going over with local player Nakia Davies-Welsh celebrating the try, Indigenous v Māori – Women's All Stars, February 15. A penalty goal after full-time by teen Titan Lailani Montgomery enabled the Indigenous women to overcome the loss of star playmaker Kirra Dibb and snatch a 20-18 victory over the Māori Ferns. Photo: Paul Bramble

Sporting spectacles – looking ahead

SPORT

STEVE TURNER

2024 provided plenty of sporting spectacles. We feel it was the best of the decade so far. Throwing a few Q's your way, devoted readers. The A's are for your ponderance.

1. Will Sam Kerr and her partner's baby be born happy and healthy? Will the child be a future sports star?
We say highly likely to both.

2. Should breakdancing be reintroduced to the Olympic Games?
We say no. Breakdancing

was a fad dance style of the early 1980s. It was never a recognised sport though it a very good way to keep fit and put some funk into your workout. We say fine to the activity, just not at Olympic level.

3. Should the Rabbitohs return to Redfern Oval?

Yes indeed. The hallowed ground at Redfern is deeply loved by supporters and locals. Training sessions, even occasional, would draw people to the park and cafe – and inspire the team too.

4. Will the Rabbitohs be included in next year's NRLW?

We say yes. South Sydney is a foundation club. It's a disgrace they're not already involved.

5. Will Hong Kong superstar Romantic Warrior become the best horse in the world since mighty Aussie mare Winx?

We say he is getting very close.

6. Will Paul "Fatty" Vautin get the send-off he deserves from television?

We say a big yes. Paul and Peter Sterling really were the initiators of drag on the Footy Show in the 90s. Nearly as much as Benny Hill, though he was totally international. A one off.

Volunteers' News

PAT CLARKE

Important news for volunteers – changes to distribution process

Our volunteer distributors do an amazing job every month. At least 4,000 copies of SSH are delivered to letterboxes with priority to public housing tenants. Four thousand more go to various community centres, libraries, pubs and cafes. Our printer, SpotNews, now based in Chullora, has offered to deliver the bundles to South Sydney, starting in April. We're thinking four secure but accessible locations – in Redfern, Waterloo, Newtown and Darlinghurst. From there we hope some volunteers will be able to pick up their bundles and make their deliveries. Andrew will phone volunteers this month to talk about the new process.

NSW Seniors Festival – March 3-16

There are any number of events celebrating Seniors Week in NSW, including, of course the Premier's Gala Concerts March 12 and 13 with two sessions each day at 11am and 2.45pm at the ICC Sydney Theatre. Some tickets may still be available, or you can livestream the 2.45pm concert on Wednesday March 12. www.events.humantix.com/2024-premier-s-gala-concerts-live-stream Local organisations also have various events to celebrate Seniors Week, such as the Ron Williams Community Centre on March 12, where there will be Qigong and Tai Chi taster classes, followed by a light morning tea. This is event is free and you can book through MZang@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Beauty Rich and Rare – Museum of Sydney until March 30

This is a 20-minute digital work of art using maps and other documents from



Harmony Week March 17-23. Photo: Getty Images

the Endeavour voyage to create works by Sir Joseph Banks and other botanists and scientists capturing the beautiful and rare flora and fauna from Botany Bay to the Far North. Open every day from 10am-5pm.

International Women's Day – March 8

IWD has been celebrated for 50 years in many countries, and in Australia this year's theme is MARCH FORWARD. Perry Park Recreation Centre at 1B Maddox Street, Alexandria is holding an IWD Sports Day on Sunday March 9 from 10am-3pm. This is a perfect chance to try out various sports like netball, volleyball, rollerskating and basketball, with tips from female athletes. This is a free event, and food will be provided for participants. Contact: 92659182 or pprcadmin@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Harmony Week 2025 – March 17-23,

Harmony Day is on Friday March 21, which is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The theme for this year is EVERYONE BELONGS.

Other Dates for March 2025:

Ramadan – until March 29
St Patrick's Day – March 17
Purim – March 13 and 14
Holi (Hindu Festival of Colours) – March 14

Pat Clarke

volunteers@ssh.com.au