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NATIONAL PLAYWRITING COMMISSION AWARDED FOR PLAY THAT REBELS AGAINST THE DREADED BEEP TEST

The winner of Canberra Youth Theatre's 2023 Emerging Playwright Commission is Sydney-based playwright **Sonia Dodd**, for her play, *How to Destroy the Beep Test in Five Days*. The play follows a group of students coming up to the final term of primary school, who firmly believe that the beep test is an unethical method of measuring success – prompting them to conjure up a grand plan to destroy it, once and for all. Speaking about her play, Sonia said:

“In terms of inspiration for this play, whenever I mentioned the beep test it evokes a visceral reaction from anyone who has experienced it, because it actually sucks. You’re being assessed on physical endurance and made to feel unsuccessful against your peers. While the idea of wanting to destroy the beep test kind of seems frivolous, it draws a lot of parallels to the real world in terms of establishing your morals, campaigning for change, and working as a team. The play is going to be silly and chaotic but will ask big real world questions such as, how do you create change, how far do you go, and who do you need to challenge?”

Sonia's play was selected from over 50 submissions from every state and territory in Australia. The commission, which is generously supported by national law firm Holding Redlich, offers an emerging playwright \$16,800 to create a new full-length work that brings the voices and stories of youth to the stage. The other finalists, Gabriel Fallen (VIC), and Madelaine Nunn (NSW) will also receive \$1,500 each to support their writing practice.

Luke Rogers, Artistic Director & CEO of Canberra Youth Theatre, says:

“We established this commissioning program three years ago as part of our commitment to investing in the creation and development of new Australian plays for young people. It’s a privilege to witness the incredible talent rising up in Australian theatre, and to play a part in nurturing the voices that will shape our culture for generations to come.

Through the Emerging Playwright Commission, we make a commitment to the long journey of creating new work, working with the winning playwrights to develop their

play over a number of years with the young artists in our company. This atmosphere of collaboration and creativity yields enriching experiences for everyone involved, and year-on-year, is producing incredible new works for the stage. With Holding Redlich's support, this long-term commitment to supporting talented writers, building professional pathways, and making great theatre for our audiences makes a bold statement for the transformative impact of youth arts on the cultural landscape."

Sonia Dodd (she/her) is a Malaysian-Australian creative, originally from Newcastle. She holds a Bachelor of Communication (Theatre/Media) from Charles Sturt University and is currently finishing a Graduate Certificate in Psychological Science online. Sonia works as a freelance independent producer, actor and writer. She was awarded the Blair Milan Touring Prize for her play, *Good Mourning*, which debuted at Bathurst's Sprung Festival in 2019 before a Sydney season at the Old 505 Theatre in 2020, and a 2023 season in her home town of Newcastle at the Civic Theatre with Tantrum Youth Arts. She was one of four NSW participants in Australian Theatre For Young People's Fresh Ink playwriting program in 2022, with one of her works selected for Slanted Theatre's new work showcase. In Sonia's playwriting practice, she is passionate about "exploring form, authentic representation and having a case of the sillies."

Holding Redlich's partnership with Canberra Youth Theatre is part of its long-standing support of the arts which currently also includes sponsorship of Salon des Refusés in New South Wales, the Flying Arts Alliance in Brisbane and regional Queensland, and the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF).

"We are pleased to continue supporting Canberra Youth Theatre and talented young playwrights through our ongoing sponsorship, and congratulate Sonia for winning this year's commission", says Holding Redlich's National Managing Partner **Troy Lewis**.

Canberra Youth Theatre's Emerging Playwright Commission is granted through an open application process, and is specifically designed to springboard writers at a crucial point in their career. The commission is for emerging Australian playwrights aged under 35 who have created a modest body of work, but have not yet been professionally produced by a major theatre company. The commissioned playwright receives ongoing dramaturgical support, collaborates with an ensemble of young emerging artists, participates in a series of creative development workshops in Canberra, and sees their script come to life in a full production of their work.

Last year's Emerging Playwright Commission winner, Honor Webster-Mannison, has worked with young artists from Canberra Youth Theatre over the past year to develop their script, *Work, But This Time Like You Mean It*. A "crazy, deep-fryer-dive into the surreal world of young people's first experiences in the workplace," the world premiere production will be staged at Canberra Theatre Centre in September 2024.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE OPPORTUNITY FOR MEDIA TO DISCUSS:

- Canberra Youth Theatre's proud and extensive history of commissioning, developing, producing and promoting new Australian writing.
- The pathways for emerging writers from youth theatre to a professional career as they go on to create new works for companies all over the country, taking their place at the centre of our theatre culture.
- The dedicated time and investment that goes into a new work to realise its artistic potential, as each commissioned play is nurtured from conception, through to production and publication over a three-year program.
- The scope and ambition of Canberra Youth Theatre's Emerging Artist programs, bridging the gap between youth arts and professional practice in Canberra, and creating pathways that connect emerging Canberran artists to the national arts industry.

Available for interview:

- Sonia Dodd — 2023 Emerging Playwright Commission Winner
- Luke Rogers — Artistic Director & CEO, Canberra Youth Theatre
- Troy Lewis – National Managing Partner, Holding Redlich

Further information: canberrayouththeatre.com.au/commissions

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