

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW PLAY ABOUT CYCLE OF TEEN MISOGYNY WINS EMERGING PLAYWRIGHT COMMISSION

The winner of Canberra Youth Theatre's 2024 Emerging Playwright Commission is Naarm/Melbourne-based playwright **Sarah Matthews**, for her play, *The Hit List*. Centering teenage characters, experiences, and language to explore themes of sexism and gender-based violence in Australia, the play follows an ensemble cast through the pressure cooker of the final days of school. In a world of increasing gender-based violence, *The Hit List* exposes the uncomfortable reality of people of all genders as perpetrators of misogyny, asking us to consider what is driving this malicious cycle – and, even more importantly, how can we break it?

Accepting the commission, Sarah said:

“My play, The Hit List, interrogates the aftermath of two acts of misogyny that occur during the final days of Year 12 muck-up week. It explores sexism, class, and the differences in how institutions react to incidents based upon the gender of the perpetrators. I hope to create an emotionally complex and nuanced work that challenges our understanding of misogyny in educational environments.”

“I'm over the moon to have won the Emerging Playwright Commission for 2024. It means the world to me that my first step into a career as a writer will be with Canberra Youth Theatre, as being shortlisted for the EPC in 2023 is what gave me the confidence to pursue playwriting in the first place.”

Sarah's play was selected from over 60 submissions from every state and territory in Australia. The commission, which is generously supported by national law firm Holding Redlich, offers an emerging playwright \$17,100 to create a new full-length work that brings the voices and stories of youth to the stage. The other finalists, Rebecca Duke (NSW), and Thea Jade (NSW) will also receive \$1,500 each to support their writing practice.

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

“Over the past four years our Emerging Playwright Commission, with the generous support of Holding Redlich, has become a celebrated program with both local and national impact. We take pride in our legacy of new Australian writing, supporting the journeys of emerging writers to become some of the most significant

playwrights in Australia today. The Emerging Playwright Commission has become synonymous with work that expresses the voice of young people, artistic excellence, and innovative creative practices.”

Sarah Matthews is a Naarm-based writer and primary school teacher who prioritises joy in everything she creates. She is passionate about telling stories that centre the experiences of young people through a distinctly Australian lens. This year, Sarah completed her Master of Theatre (Writing) at the Victorian College of the Arts, where she wrote her first full-length play. She also attended the Australian Theatre for Young People’s National Studio residency, along with nineteen other emerging playwrights from across the country.

Holding Redlich’s partnership with Canberra Youth Theatre is part of the firm’s long-standing support of the arts which 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.

Elizabeth Carroll, Head of Holding Redlich’s Canberra Office, says:

“Congratulations to Sarah Matthews for winning this year’s Emerging Playwright Commission. Since our partnership with Canberra Youth Theatre began in 2022, we have seen exceptional young talent emerge, bringing their creative works to life and inspiring the next generation of playwrights. We will continue to support the Commission and Canberra Youth Theatre in the years to come.”

Canberra Youth Theatre provides a platform for writers, performers, designers, directors, theatre-makers, and cultural leaders to gain invaluable professional experience, develop their craft, and find their own creative voice. The winner of the annual Emerging Playwright Commission receives ongoing dramaturgical support, collaborates with an ensemble of young artists, participates in a series of creative development workshops in Canberra, and sees their script come to life in a staged reading of their work. This year’s winning playwright, Sarah Matthews, says:

“I’d like to thank Canberra Youth Theatre for this opportunity, and congratulate the other finalists, Rebecca Duke and Thea Jade. I’d also like to thank Holding Redlich for sponsoring this commission and making this opportunity possible. For the first time, the possibility of writing professionally feels within my reach.”

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:

- Sarah Matthews – 2024 Emerging Playwright Commission Winner
- Luke Rogers – Artistic Director & CEO, Canberra Youth Theatre
- Elizabeth Carroll – Head of Holding Redlich's Canberra Office

Further information: canberrayouththeatre.com.au/writers/commissions

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