



The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas

176 Little Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
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THE WHEELER CENTRE ANNOUNCES NEW EVENTS WITH SARAH WILSON, GILLIAN TRIGGS AND ANDY GRIFFITHS

Tuesday 17 February

The Wheeler Centre's second edition of its latest program brings together leading thinkers, writers and performers to grapple with the defining conversations of our time – from the future of human rights and the fragility of democracy to the role of comedy in authoritarian times and the search for hope amid systemic collapse.

QUOTE FROM ERIN VINCENT, THE WHEELER CENTRE CEO: 'These newly announced events, spanning human rights, the future of democracy, comedy and the power of storytelling, strengthen an already extraordinary 2026 program and reflect The Wheeler Centre's commitment to brave and impactful debate. We're proud to be a place that brings people together to test ideas with curiosity and respect, just as these incredible events promise to.'

As Victoria marks 20 years since the passage of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act – the first law of its kind in Australia to enshrine civil, political and cultural rights at a state level – leading legal minds come together to reflect on its legacy and future. **Rob Hulls**, Director of RMIT's Centre for Innovative Justice and former Victorian Attorney-General; **Gillian Triggs**, former President of the Australian Human Rights Commission and former UN Assistant Secretary-General; and **Nerita Waight**, CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, join Human Rights Law Centre CEO **Caitlin Reiger** to examine the Charter's original intent, the controversy that surrounded its introduction, what it has achieved over two decades, and whether it remains fit for purpose in increasingly precarious times.

Presented in partnership with Melbourne International Comedy Festival, a host of leading comics will consider how comedy survives, adapts and occasionally strikes back in an age of rising authoritarianism. Hosted by **Tom Ballard**, with 2025 Victorian RAW Comedy Semi-Finalist **Bahaa Dabbagh**, lawyer-turned-comedian **Leon Filewood** and former *Saturday Night Live* writer, **Sam Jay**, this timely conversation explores what happens when punchlines carry real-world consequences, from public denunciation to legal threats, and what the policing of laughter reveals about the strength – and fragility – of power.

In *Dialogue in a Divided World*, leading academics **Daniel Heller** and **Farid Zaid** – founders of Monash University's Brave Conversations Project – explore how we can have more constructive, nuanced arguments in an increasingly polarised society. For this special edition of **The Fifth Estate** with **Sally Warhaft**, they'll examine the forces driving division in public life and offer practical strategies for how we can learn to disagree more productively.

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For a special live recording of ***Uncomfortable Conversations*** with **Josh Szepe**, *New York Times* bestselling author **Sarah Wilson** confronts the reality of systemic collapse – from climate catastrophe and democratic decline to rising inequality and unrest – and asks how we can continue to live meaningfully in precarious times. In a provocative and searching conversation, Wilson and Szepe grapple with difficult truths, explore what remains if the unthinkable happens, and consider why this turbulent moment may yet offer a powerful reason for hope.

Preeminent philosopher **A. C. Grayling** appears in Geelong to address one of the most urgent issues of our time: the global decline of democracy. In conversation with **Sophie Black**, Grayling discusses his new book *For the People: Fighting Authoritarianism, Saving Democracy*, unpacking the forces eroding democratic institutions – from corporate interference and tainted donations to gerrymandering and rising authoritarianism – and outlining bold solutions to protect civil liberties and restore faith in democratic ideals.

Newly appointed Australian Children's Laureate **Andy Griffiths** brings imagination, adventure and just the right amount of chaos to Kyneton Town Hall for a lively, interactive event celebrating his brand-new book *Let's Go*. Perfect for the young and young at heart, this high-energy session invites audiences to discover the magic of storytelling through words, pictures and big ideas – with plenty of laughs and creative fun along the way.

Celebrate the launch of *Two Tongues*, the powerful debut poetry collection from Mununjali poet, David Unaipon Award-winner and The Next Chapter fellow **Maria van Neerven**. Developed during her 2024 fellowship with The Wheeler Centre, the collection reflects on the legacy of colonisation and intergenerational harm, reclaiming ancestral stories and honouring the enduring strength of Blak culture and the Yugambeh language. Van Neerven is joined by mentor **Maxine Beneba Clarke** and **Ellen van Neerven** for an evening of readings and conversation celebrating Indigenous language, storytelling and connection to Country.

– ENDS –

Media contact

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Media centre: Images available [here](#)

The full list of events and dates are listed below. For more information, please visit wheelercentre.com/events

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Human Rights in Victoria: Past, Present, Future

Rob Hulls, Gillian Triggs, Nerita Waigh, Caitlin Reiger

6.30pm, Thursday 26 March

The Wheeler Centre

Who's Afraid of a Joke?

Tom Ballard, Bahaa Dabbagh, Leon Filewood, Sam Jay

2.00pm, Saturday 28 March

The Wheeler Centre

Presented in partnership with Melbourne International Comedy Festival

Maria van Neerven: Two Tongues

Maria van Neerven, Maxine Beneba Clarke, Ellen van Neerven

6.30pm, Monday 30 March

The Moat

Let's Go with Andy Griffiths [Kyneton]

Andy Griffiths

2.00pm, Thursday 9 April

Kyneton Town Hall

Dialogue in a Divided World

Daniel Heller, Farid Zaid, Sally Warhaft

6.30pm, Wednesday 15 April

The Wheeler Centre

A. C. Grayling: Fighting Authoritarianism, Saving Democracy [Geelong]

A. C. Grayling, Sophie Black

6.00pm, Wednesday 29 April

Geelong Library and Heritage Centre

Presented in partnership with Geelong Regional Libraries

Uncomfortable Conversations: Josh Szepe with Sarah Wilson

Sarah Wilson, Josh Szepe

7.00pm, Thursday 4 June

The Edge, Fed Square

The Wheeler Centre is Melbourne's home for smart, passionate and entertaining public talks, and exists to support writers, readers and thinkers. Through live and digital conversations, debates, readings, performances and discussions, it deepens public engagement with the most pressing topics of the day. It is dedicated to creative collaboration, community engagement, diversity, and innovation.

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