



MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 29 April

Local luminaries lead The Wheeler Centre's winter program: Cheng Lei, Jana Wendt, Ngarra Murray to appear

Following news of bestselling romantasy author Lauren Roberts' visit to Melbourne this June, The Wheeler Centre has added a slate of new events to its winter calendar. Political analysts, cultural gamechangers and trailblazing thinkers join the centre's calendar of events, offering audiences bold conversations, powerful storytelling and fresh perspectives on the issues shaping our world today.

Looking ahead to the next few months of programming, **The Wheeler Centre's CEO, Erin Vincent** said: 'This winter, The Wheeler Centre's program presents a range of respected voices on politics, world events and personal lived experiences. Across June and July, audiences of all ages can experience everything from thought-provoking discussions on current affairs and culture to joyful, hands-on workshops for kids. There's something for everyone as we continue to champion dynamic public discussion and foster important literary conversations.'

Journalist and recipient of the 2024 Press Freedom Award, **Cheng Lei**, will share the harrowing story of her wrongful imprisonment in China in 2020 – from the harsh conditions and prolonged periods of solitary confinement to the toll of restricted access to her family – and how she survived it. Now, back in Australia and free to write and speak her mind, Lei recounts her story in *A Memoir of Freedom*, an extraordinary memoir of her arrest, trial, imprisonment and eventual release. In conversation with **James Scullin**, Lei offers a complex, deeply personal account of resilience and resistance.

After decades away from the spotlight, legendary journalist and Gold Logie-winner **Jana Wendt** comes to The Wheeler Centre to discuss her debut short story collection *The Far Side of the Moon*. Wendt reflects on her trailblazing media career and literary turn, sharing poignant stories of friendship, love and loss, both real and on the page. This rare appearance promises rich insight from one of Australia's most respected voices.

For the **Books and Ideas at Montalto** series, broadcaster and author **Jacinta Parsons** will share in an uplifting and thought-provoking conversation on ageing with **Hilary Harper**. Drawing from her new book *A Wisdom of Age*, Parsons reflects on her personal journey of growing older and the stories of women across the country who are redefining this next phase for themselves and generations to come. Accompanied by a delicious menu from Montalto, the event will offer an empowering perspective on embracing life's second half with courage, clarity and a spirit of rebellion.

After five weeks of relentless campaigning, *Back to Back Barriers* podcast hosts **Barrie Cassidy** and **Tony Barry** provide a postelection reprieve with a special live podcast examination of this year's federal election results. With sharp scrutiny and insider experience, the pair will look at the key moments that shaped the campaigns, unpack the role of Independents and minor parties and discuss what has been revealed about the political, cultural and social issues shaping Australia.

In the latest iteration of **The Fifth Estate** event series, ambassador of Ukraine to Australia, **Vasyl Myroshnychenko**, will discuss Putin's war, Trump's foreign agenda and Australia's role in supporting the ongoing struggle for Ukraine's sovereignty amidst a shifting global order. In the wake of Trump



and Zelensky's fiery encounter in the Oval Office in February, Myroshnychenko and host **Sally Warhaft** probe the current state of play between Ukraine and the US, recent developments in the conflict and the very real risk of further attacks on Europe by Russia.

Following the defeat of the Voice to Parliament referendum, as well as the loss of bipartisan support for the Treaty process in the state, co-chair and Member for the Metropolitan Region of the Victorian First Peoples' Assembly, **Ngarra Murray**, examines why *Victoria's Path to Treaty* has stalled. Highlighting the ongoing strength and resistance of First Peoples, Murray will shed light on the Victorian Treaty process and share her frank assessment of the work still to be done.

Top Scribe 2025 celebrates works by 2024 VCE Literature students from across Victoria, showcasing creative writing produced by some of the state's most outstanding young writers. Organised by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority in partnership with The Wheeler Centre, the launch of the Top Scribe anthology will feature readings from selected writers, a special guest and the opportunity to take home a hard-copy edition of the collection.

Bestselling children's author and illustrator **Yuval Zommer** hosts a lively, hands-on workshop celebrating nature and creativity. Kids will hear stories from Zommer's popular *Big Book* series and *Our Islands*, then create their own nature-inspired artwork to take home. Perfect for curious young minds who love animals, art and the environment.

Introduce young listeners to the magic of live music with a special **Musical Storytime** performance of *Bila's Big Dance*. Follow Bila the Spoonbill as he rallies the waterbird mob for a rain dance to help their drought-stricken river in a tale of empathy, community and perseverance as brought to life through the sounds of wind and string percussion instruments. Composed by **Tim Gray** and featuring musicians from **Orchestra Victoria** and **Ensemble Offspring**, these relaxed, interactive sessions invite children to join the storytelling, discover new instruments and dance along.

Fresh voices, unique perspectives and underrepresented stories come to the fore in the latest edition of **The Next Big Thing**. Brought together around a theme of *Roads Less Travelled*, the June crop of NBT talent will feature **Samantha Byres, Thomas Vowles, Emma Pei Yin, Sinead Stubbins** and **Chloe Elisabeth Wilson** as they present new works with an intimate audience at The Moat.

Budding playwrights can take a deep dive into the craft, process and industry of theatre-making in this one-day masterclass presented in partnership with Emerging Writers' Festival. A selection of Australia's most acclaimed playwrights, dramaturgs, directors and producers – including **Chenturan Aran, Laura Lethlean, Kamarra Bell-Wyke, Isabella Vadiveloo** and **DS Magid** – will convene to share invaluable insights into bringing stories to life on stage, both locally and internationally.

Craft beer meets the art of storytelling in a special event with the **Tough Guy Book Club** celebrating books, brews and the good conversations that flow from both. In ***Cheers to That: A Night of Books and Beers***, all are welcome for a friendly, inclusive social event aimed at encouraging reading and building camaraderie.

Nothing is off limits as journalist **Alyx Gorman** and sex and relationship expert **Georgia Grace** get deep about women's pleasures in a special **Up Late** event at The Wheeler Centre. In a candid and sex-positive conversation the pair will tackle everything from libido and arousal to kink, consent and the orgasm gap while sharing practical advice and specialist knowledge about sex, bodies and relationships.



In *Creating the Universe*, renowned astrophysicist **Dr Katie Mack** and poet **Alicia Sometimes** take a mind-bending tour of the cosmos through science and art. From the origins of the universe to its possible end, this thought-provoking event blends astrophysics with poetry, sound and visual art to probe some big questions about life itself. A dazzling collision of creativity and curiosity, this is a night for lovers of science, storytelling and the stars.

– 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

Jacinta Parsons at Montalto

Jacinta Parsons, Hilary Harper
6.30pm, Friday 6 June
Montalto

Top Scribe 2025: Anthology Launch

10.30am, Friday 13 June
The Wheeler Centre

The Fifth Estate: Ukraine at the Crossroads

Vasyl Myroshnychenko, Sally Warhaft
6.30pm, Tuesday 17 June
The Wheeler Centre

Cheng Lei: A Memoir of Freedom

Cheng Lei, James Scullin
6.30pm, Wednesday 18 June
The Wheeler Centre

Lauren Roberts: Fearless

Lauren Roberts
7.00pm, Wednesday 25 June
Melbourne Town Hall

The Next Big Thing: Roads Less Travelled

Samantha Byres, Thomas Vowles, Emma Pei Yin, Sinead Stubbins, Chloe Elisabeth Wilson
6.30pm, Monday 30 June
The Moat



The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas

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15 Years

Up Late: Pursuits of Pleasure

Alyx Gorman, Georgia Grace, Jess McGuire

8.30pm, Friday 4 July

The Wheeler Centre

Masterclass: Playwriting

Chenturan Aran, Laura Lethlean, Kamarra Bell-Wyke, Isabella Vadiveloo, DS Magid

11.00am, Saturday 5 July

The Wheeler Centre

Jana Wendt in Conversation

Jana Wendt

7.00pm, 9 July

The Capitol

Musical Storytime: Bila's Big Dance

Orchestra Victoria, Ensemble Offspring, Tim Gray, Rebecca Chapman

Thursday 10 July-Saturday 12 July

The Wheeler Centre

Crafty Kids' Lab with Yuval Zommer

Yuval Zommer

11.00am, Tuesday 15 July

The Wheeler Centre

Creating the Universe

Dr Katie Mack, Alicia Sometimes

6.30pm, Wednesday 16 July

The Wheeler Centre

Victoria's Path to Treaty

Ngarra Murray

6.30pm, Thursday 17 July

The Wheeler Centre

Cheers to That: A Night of Books and Beers

Tough Guy Book Club

5.00pm, Saturday 26 July

The Wheeler Centre

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.