



**PLAY IT ●  
STRANGE**

# IMPACT REPORT 2025

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COVER PHOTO CREDIT  
Steve Bone Photography



PHOTO CREDIT  
Danielle Hao-Aickin

## CEO MESSAGE



### KIA ORA KOUTOU

2025 has been a year of milestones.

We received a record number of songs entered into our competitions, we awarded over 200 of these songs as finalists and a day in a recording studio to professionally record their song. We launched the Play It Strange podcast, and have partnered with festivals and radio stations to continue providing more opportunities to the talented rangatahi who enter our Play It Strange world.

876 original songs and waiata have been entered into our competitions this year from secondary school students nationwide – the most in our 22-year history. Behind each of those songs are young people finding their voice, building confidence, and feeling empowered to share their creativity with the world.

This year we launched our first-ever podcast series, On The Record. Season 1 hosted by Play It Strange alumni Rei debuted in July, followed by Season 2 hosted by another alumni Chaii in November. Across both seasons, our hosts sit down with some of Aotearoa's leading artists and industry legends – acting as a toolkit for emerging artists to navigate the music industry in Aotearoa. If you haven't watched or listened yet – please check it out on Spotify, YouTube, or Rova!

We have also strengthened our alumni pathways through more live performance opportunities than ever before – through partnerships with Moana Auckland, Press Play with BIG FAN, and bFM, and by taking alumni to industry events such as the Aotearoa Music Awards, Taite Music Prize, Pacific Music Awards, Synthony in the Domain, and the APRA Silver Scrolls.

Our 2025 mentors and judges, including Bic Runga, Louis Baker, Rebel Reid, Dame Hinewehi Mohi, Kings, Chaii, our founder Mike Chunn and more continue to give their time and wisdom generously. Their support, alongside the dedication of our partners and funders, reminds us that Play It Strange is a true community, and only exists because of those who believe in and support us.

Finally, I want to acknowledge our small but mighty team – Evie, Paige, Emily, and Brad – whose creativity, passion, and relentless mahi make everything you read in this report possible. Thank you also to our founder, Mike Chunn, for his ongoing passion and wisdom, and to our Board of Trustees for their support in everything we do.

Ngā mihi nui,

**Stephanie Brown**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
Play It Strange Trust

### HIGHLIGHTS



#### A RECORD

# 876

ORIGINAL SONGS  
AND WAIATA ENTERED

#### AWARDED

# 200+

SONGS AS FINALISTS,  
FUNDED BY OUR  
WONDERFUL SUPPORTERS  
AND PATRONS

#### LAUNCHED

## ON THE RECORD PODCAST

SEASON 1 AND SEASON 2  
– WATCH / LISTEN NOW!

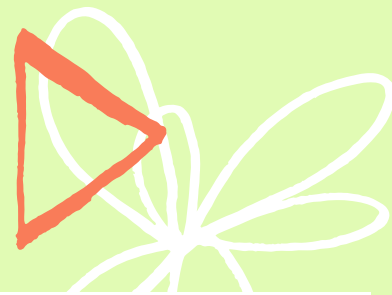
#### STRENGTHENED

## ALUMNI PATHWAYS

LIVE PERFORMANCES  
AND PARTNERSHIPS



# SONGWRITING COMPETITION WINNERS 2025



We had a record-breaking year with 876 original songs entered and over 200 songs and waiata awarded as finalists from our 2025 songwriting competitions. 'School of the Year' for the highest number of finalists in 2025 went to Papatoetoe High School with 10 songs. Our first place winners in 2025 are...

**PLAY IT STRANGE**

**NATIONAL SONGWRITING COMPETITION 2025 YEAR 9-13**

PRINCIPAL PARTNER  
**THE LION FOUNDATION**

474 SONGS ENTERED

74 SONGS AWARDED

161 SCHOOLS REPRESENTED

**1ST PLACE**  
**A GIRL NAMED ABIGAIL**  
**SALEM MĀHIA**  
**(SALEM MĀHIA RANDALL)**  
GISBORNE BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL

Salem is a five-time Play It Strange finalist (in 2023, 2024 and 2025), in 2023 won Rockquest Solo-Duo and in 2022 won Whakaata Māori TV's singing series '5 Minutes of Fame'.

*"[A girl named Abigail] is a metaphorical song that I wrote after watching a movie called We Live in Time [a romantic drama starring Andrew Garfield and Florence Pugh]. It's about a woman with cancer and [the song] is based on my auntie Keri, who passed away from cancer when I was 4."*

– Salem Māhia

Salem received a \$10,000 music promotion package thanks to NZ On Air. He recorded his song at BIG FAN in Auckland with Noema Te Hau, and enjoyed redeeming part of his prize pack – a \$1,500 Rockshop gift card – for a new guitar! Salem has been able to share his story and celebrate the winning track in the media including, The TAHI Podcast, bFM, NZ Herald, and Waatea News.

He has also recorded two additional songs this year with Play It Strange, as Salem is a finalist in both our Waiata Māori Competition and Peace Song Competition.

**PLAY IT STRANGE**

**PEACE SONG COMPETITION 2025**

PRINCIPAL PARTNER  
**Wright Family FOUNDATION**

194 SONGS ENTERED

65 SONGS AWARDED

93 SCHOOLS REPRESENTED

**1ST PLACE**  
**AT LEAST, I'LL TRY**  
**BETTY SHEN**  
LONG BAY COLLEGE

Betty was a Play It Strange finalist twice last year with her songs 'Willow's Song' and 'Sweet Potato'. Betty also had the winning album artwork on the 2024 Peace Song Competition album.

Betty's music has been influenced by Radiohead, Elliott Smith, Linda Perhacs, and competition judge Bic Runga.

*"At least, I'll try" is a weaving masterpiece whereby Betty takes her musical adventure with a lyrical engagement and we, the listeners, find ourselves in a riveting environment. There is magic in this song. And I congratulate Betty in the highest fashion. It's a triumphant song and is a winner that walks with true pride."*

– Mike Chunn  
PLAY IT STRANGE JUDGE AND FOUNDER

Following a mentoring session with competition judge Bic Runga, Betty recorded her winning track at Roundhead Studios, Auckland.

As part of her prize, Betty received the opportunity to work with composer, James Cullen to create a backing arrangement for a quartet of orchestral instruments – cello, French horn, clarinet and flute – thanks to Auckland Philharmonia and their Learn & Participate programme, who joined Betty in the recording studio.

Betty celebrated her success winning this competition during interviews with ZM, bFM, LifeFM amongst others.

## PLAY IT STRANGE

## JUNIOR SONGWRITING COMPETITION 2025 YEAR 9-11

THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS AND OUR GENEROUS PATRONS

182 SONGS ENTERED | 65 SONGS AWARDED | 72 SCHOOLS REPRESENTED

**1ST PLACE**  
**SWEETNESS**  
**SIENNA FITZGERALD**  
NORTHCOTE COLLEGE



Sienna was a two-time finalist in last year's Play It Strange songwriting competitions and continues to demonstrate remarkable songwriting ability with this moving track.

*"The winning song Sweetness is an exceptional song and performance. I'm blown away by the songwriting talent of all the rangatahi this year – the future looks bright for the next generation of artists and songwriters coming out of Aotearoa."*

– Louis Baker  
COMPETITION JUDGE

Sienna recorded her winning entry at BIG FAN in Tāmaki Makaurau, with producer and songwriter Aubrie Mitchell. Sienna was so excited to work with a producer of such a high calibre to bring more production into the song. The special day was a true family affair, with Sienna supported by her musical whānau; her father joined her to add electric guitar and bass, while her mother, an experienced voice teacher, popped in to workshop harmonies and coach Sienna as she tracked her vocals!

Sienna was also a finalist in our National Songwriting Competition with her song, 'Let It Drive' which she recorded at Boh Runga and Troy McKubre's Old North Studios.

## PLAY IT STRANGE

## WAIATA MĀORI COMPETITION 2025

PRINCIPAL PARTNER

**grassroots**  
trust

26 WAIATA ENTERED | 5 WAIATA AWARDED | 20 SCHOOLS REPRESENTED

**1ST PLACE**  
**TAI Ō MATE**  
**IHAKA**  
**WHANARERE-TAURI**  
MANUKURA SCHOOL



*"Ko te waiata nei, he whai whakaaro ki ngā mate kua hāoa nei e te kupenga o Taramainuku. Rātou kua riro i ngā rangi, i ngā wiki, i ngā marama tata nei. Tera ia ko te kuia o te Awa o Whanganui, te kahurangi o te motu, a Tariana Turia. Tera ia ko te uri o Rangitāhuhua whare, a Pakaitore Turia. Te raukura o Ngati Hine o Te Rā, o Ngā Paerangi, a Te Terenga Whanarere. Rātou katoa kua tiwha ki tua o hawaiki hou, tēnei te tangi atu nei ki a rātou."*

*"This song is paying homage to those who've gone before us. Those whom we've lost in the past few days, weeks, and months. Tariana Turia, Pakaitore Turia, Te Terenga Whanarere, and everyone else who has passed away."*

*This is a form of crying out to them and remembering all the memories and things they've done for us who are still here on earth."*

– Ihaka Whanarere-Tauri

*"Continuing the rich legacy of waiata reo Māori, making us proud Ihaka, and Manukura. Kei runga noa atu!"*

– Dame Hinewehi Mohi  
COMPETITION JUDGE

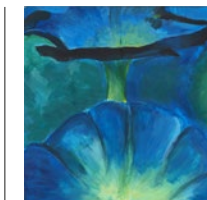
Ihaka grew up immersed in kapa haka from a young age, gaining recognition for his incredible poi skills from viral social media clips at just 11 years old. Ihaka recorded his winning waiata at Parachute Studios in Tāmaki Makaurau.

## PLAY IT STRANGE

### STRANGE ALBUM ART COMPETITION

A creative album art competition open to year 9-13 students.

108 ENTRIES  
4 WINNERS



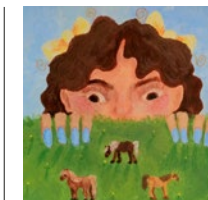
● NATIONAL  
**SEEDS OF HOPE**

Hazel Jeffreys  
QUEEN MARGARET COLLEGE



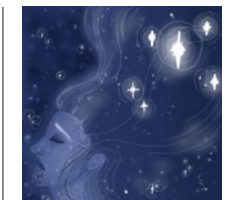
● PEACE SONG  
**PEACE**

Hanah Hammond  
KAIAPOI HIGH SCHOOL



● JUNIOR  
**LITTLE BIG GIRL**

Stella Dixon  
MOUNT MAUNGANUI COLLEGE



● WAIATA MĀORI  
**MATARIKI'S CHILDREN**

Grace Fox  
MOTUEKA HIGH SCHOOL



# COMPETITION JUDGES 2025



This year, 17 of New Zealand's most acclaimed artists, musicians, producers, and industry leaders made up the 2025 judging panel for our competitions.



**Mike Chunn CNZM**

Founder of Play It Strange and legendary musician and former Splitz Enz member. For the past 21 years, Mike has listened to every single Play It Strange submission – more than 6500 songs.



**Dave Johnston**

Three-time Aotearoa Music Award winner, Dave is a producer, engineer, composer, musician, lecturer and songwriter. Not only is he a founding member and drummer of iconic alternative rock band Villainy, he's also one half of DJ duo Delivery Boys.



**Louis Baker**

An APRA Silver Scrolls nominee, Louis was a Play It Strange finalist in 2009 and has now toured New Zealand, Australia, the UK and Europe multiple times.



**Dianne Swann**

Dianne first gained recognition in the Aotearoa industry with When the Cat's Away, the iconic Kiwi supergroup of the late 1980s. Dianne has been nominated for the Taite Music Prize and was inducted into the NZ Music Hall of Fame in 2021.



**CHAI**

CHAI, Play It Strange alumni from 2009, stood beside Stan Walker in the highest number of nominations for the 2025 Aotearoa Music Awards.



**Josh Fountain**

Josh's band LEISURE recently completed a sell-out USA tour and have over 400 million streams on Spotify. He is Bennee's producer and main writing collaborator, winning the APRA Silver Scrolls in 2020 with 'Glitter' and being added to the 1,000,000,000 List for surpassing 1 BILLION streams of 'Supalonely'.



**Georgia Lines**

Recently nominated as a finalist for the 2025 Taite Music Prize and Aotearoa Music Award for 'Album of the Year', Georgia released her first album in lockdown and she's been capturing hearts with her soulful vocals ever since.



**Rebel Reid**

A 2005 Play It Strange finalist, Rebel is a producer, songwriter, and guitarist. As a member of the band Valkyrie, she has ventured into the Nevada desert to film epic music videos and played at Aotearoa's top festivals such as Splore.



**Bic Runga**

One of Aotearoa's most iconic singer-songwriters, Bic has won multiple music awards, including the prestigious APRA Silver Scroll award. Her large discography has resonated with listeners all around the world for over two decades.



**Matt Kidd**

In his role as co-Managing Director at Universal Music NZ, Matt is responsible for working with some of Aotearoa's most prestigious artists such as Six60, Lorde, Muroki, and Shapeshifter.



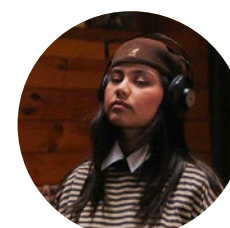
**Dame Hinewehi Mohi**

Dame Hinewehi (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tūhoe) has been a pivotal force in the widespread revitalisation of te reo Māori in contemporary music. Her performance of the National Anthem in te reo at the 1999 Rugby World Cup is a defining reason as to why we sing it in both Māori and English today; and her double-platinum, debut album released in the same year was the first contemporary Māori language album to be released internationally.



**Kings**

Producer and hip-hop artist Kings has won multiple Aotearoa Music Awards including Breakthrough Artist of the Year, Best Pacific Male Artist, Best Urban Artist and Best Producer.



**Paige**

Paige is an award-winning singer-songwriter from Tāmaki Makaurau. Her 2023 debut album saw her nominated for 'Album of the Year' and 'Best Pop Act' at the 2024 AMAs. Paige's 2020 EP, ALWAYS GROWING, has been certified platinum in South Korea and earned her two nominations at the 2020 Aotearoa Music Awards for 'Pop Artist of the Year' and 'Breakthrough Artist'. It also saw Paige awarded 'Best Māori Female Solo Artist' at the 2021 Waiata Māori Music Awards. Paige also works with us at Play It Strange as our Operations & Marketing Manager.



**Eliette Roslin**

Play It Strange alumni Eliette launched Eliettes Music Academy in 2016 which has since grown to three locations and 700+ students enrolled in their music and songwriting classes. In 2018, Eliette launched The Green Room Charitable Trust, a music programme supporting young people struggling with mental health. She was named a KiwiBank Local Hero in 2019 and a semi-finalist for Young New Zealander of the Year in 2020!



**Laughton Kora**

Laughton has been at the forefront of New Zealand music for over the past decade. At 17 years old he won Smokefree Rockquest and went on to see great success as a founding member of Aunty Beatrice, Soul Charge and KORA. Laughton has toured extensively around the world.



**Troy Kelly**

Troy is the founder and engineer of The Armoury, a world-class recording studio in Wellington. As well as being a 2025 judge, Troy has been supporting our finalists in their recordings for many years.



**Lily Paris West**

Lily has won 'Best Album Artwork' at the Aotearoa Music Awards twice and is the singer, songwriter, and bass player of Mermaids. She creates epic merch for artists such as The Beths and Nadia Reid, and is also the textile designer for twenty-seven names. Lily judged our 2025 Strange Album Art Competition!



**SIENNA FITZGERALD AND LOUIS BAKER**

**All our first-place competition winners received 1:1 mentoring sessions.** Louis Baker mentored Sienna at The Armoury in Te Whanganui a Tara; Bic Runga came to Long Bay College for Betty's session; Rebel Reid mentored Salem at the University of Auckland, and Ihaka's mentoring session will be taking place shortly.



## PLAY IT STRANGE PERFORMANCES

### Moana Auckland

Moana Auckland, New Zealand's Ocean Festival, was the first of its kind in Tāmaki Makaurau. Seven Play It Strange alumni performed at pop-up music sessions around the waterfront, creating a lively atmosphere that had people stopping to enjoy the music and talent on offer!

### Press Play

To celebrate Youth Week, we combined forces with fellow youth music organisation, BIG FAN, to bring 'Press Play' for the second year running, a panel and showcase designed to shine a spotlight on emerging artists.

The evening opened with a panel discussion about breaking into the Aotearoa music industry, featuring artist and Play It Strange alumni Emerson, Casey Yeoh (NZ On Air Music), and Zac Arnold (Creative Director at Naked PR).

Seven up-and-coming performers, all alumni of our organisations, got on stage for a free-to-attend concert. Emerson kicked us off, followed by singer songwriter Alex Sulusulu, alternative pop singer Laine, rapper Ngatoro Wilson, hiphop duo Levol Y featuring Josh Engu and En Passant, indie band Tangerino, and electronic producer duo Could Be closing out the night. All the team working behind the scenes were youth too – lighting, sound, stage management and social media to name a few.

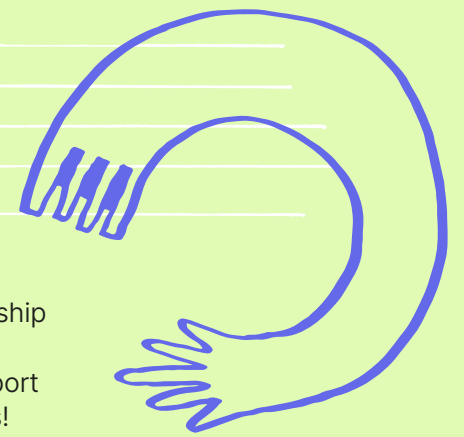
### bFM's Fancy New Band

Every Friday, bFM showcases new music on their Morning Glory show with the Fancy New Band segment. This year, they have welcomed five of our rangatahi, including Salem, winner of our National Songwriting Competition and other incredible artists such as Cameron Beattie, Lily Stiven, Alofau and Greer Castle. We're thrilled to work with bFM for this important opportunity to share our up and coming artists to an engaged audience.



## BEYOND THE STUDIO 2025

Beyond our competitions, we strive to provide performance and mentorship opportunities, and unique experiences within the music sector. Here are some highlights of 2025. We'd also like to acknowledge the special support of BurgerFuel who feed our rangatahi at many of our events and outings!



### APRA Silver Scrolls

Our students had an inspiring time at the APRA AMCOS Silver Scrolls soundcheck in Ōtautahi Christchurch, getting a glimpse of what goes on behind the scenes at one of the industry's most prestigious events. Students were also very lucky to receive tickets to the ceremony itself! Thank you so much for such a special night APRA!

### Taite Music Prize Soundcheck

Rangatahi attended the 2025 Independent Music New Zealand (IMNZ) Taite Music Prize soundcheck at Auckland's Q Theatre. They had the privilege of watching the incredible Vera Ellen soundcheck, asking the band questions, and chatting with IMNZ General Manager Dylan Pellett about all of the amazing mahi Independent Music NZ does to support artists across Aotearoa. Thank you Dylan and for all the incredible mahi IMNZ does supporting independent artists!

### Aotearoa Music Awards Rehearsal

Our students and alumni had an epic evening witnessing some of the very best musical talent in Aotearoa as they rehearsed for the Aotearoa Music Awards. Watching the soundchecks of Chaii, LAB, Stan Walker, Fazerdaze and more made for the most memorable night. Huge thank you to the team at the AMA's for this amazing experience!

### Pacific Music Awards Soundcheck

Students had an incredible time watching the soundcheck for the 2025 Pacific Music Awards. Mālō 'aupito to the incredible crew, who gave us a tour of the entire building, showed us backstage, and chatted through everything that goes into putting an award show on – from production to artist nominations. We even got a sneak peak of performances by Myshaan, A.R.T and Sam V. Thank you to the Pacific Music Awards team!

### SYNTHONY in the Domain

Students went backstage at SYNTHONY in the Domain, an immersive electronic dance music experience, performed by a full 60-piece orchestra. They got to meet the artists, go backstage, and watch the soundcheck – seeing the show before 40,000 attendees did! Thank you Duco Events!



1. APRA Silver Scrolls
2. Pacific Music Awards
3. SYNTHONY in the Domain





OUT AND ABOUT  
IN SCHOOLS



It's been a busy year visiting music classes and connecting with Play It Strange finalists, entrants, and other talented rangatahi – sharing conversations about songwriting, breaking into the music industry, and getting your music out there.

From Manurewa High School and Massey High School in Auckland, to Hagley College and Cashmere High School in Christchurch, and all the way down to Mt Aspiring College and Wakatipu High School in Queenstown and Wānaka – we've travelled across the motu to reach as many young people as possible!

Not only did we visit 33 schools this year, our team mentored and ran workshops at youth-music focused conferences including YAMI in Wānaka, Commotion in Nelson, and AURA in Tauranga.



PLAY IT STRANGE PERFORMANCE TRACKER

COMPETITIONS, SONGS & RECORDINGS		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
NATIONAL COMP. YEAR 9-13	SONGS ENTERED	220	270	284	320	317	376	356	352	374	383	474
	SONGS AWARDED	45	50	64	45	60	54	91	75	60	63	74
PEACE SONG COMPETITION	SONGS ENTERED	36	43	44	66	76	162	120	125	132	160	194
	SONGS AWARDED	2	2	2	2	5	5	8	11	44	45	65
JUNIOR COMP. YEAR 9-11	SONGS ENTERED	-	-	-	-	-	63	144	142	146	161	182
	SONGS AWARDED	-	-	-	-	-	20	49	65	44	45	65
PREVIOUS COMPETITIONS	SONGS ENTERED	19	29	39	32	36	53	-	-	-	-	-
	SONGS AWARDED	1	1	1	1	1	5	4	-	-	-	-
WAIATA MĀORI COMPETITION	WAIATA ENTERED					29	-	-	-	-	18	26
	WAIATA AWARDED					3	-	-	-	-	6	5
TOTAL SONGS WRITTEN AND ENTERED		275	342	367	418	429	654	620	619	652	722	876
TOTAL SONGS AWARDED		48	53	67	48	69	81	155	151	148	159	209
STRANGE ART COMPETITION	TOTAL ENTERED								22	41	66	108
	TOTAL WINNERS								1	1	4	4

OUR SUPPORTERS

PRINCIPAL PARTNERS



SUPPORTING PARTNERS



SUPPORTERS IN KIND



PATRONS

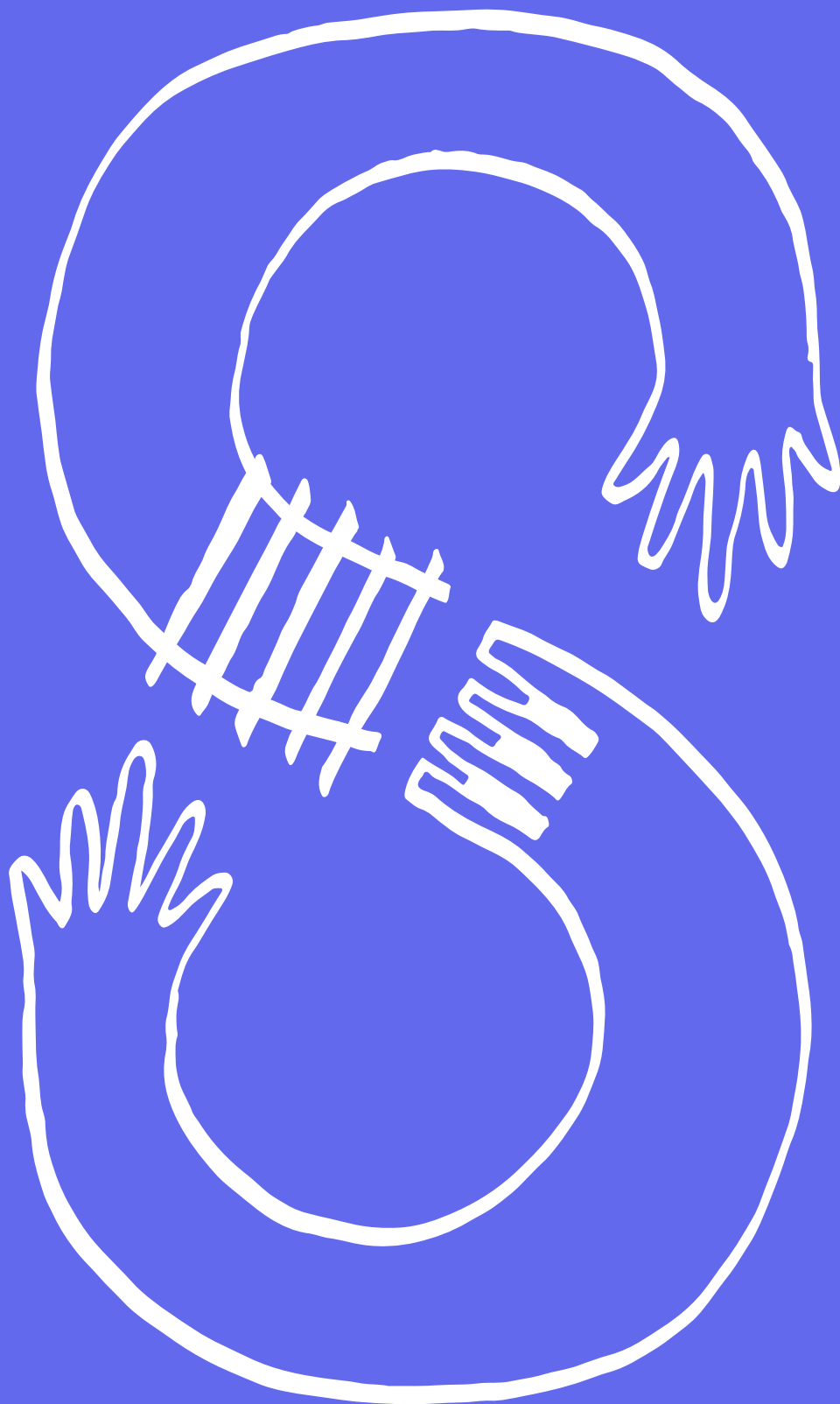
David Richwhite  
David & Angie Ferrier  
Jonty & Amber Edgar  
Greg Hinton  
Fran Wyborn  
Gaye Gardner

Nancie Plested  
Paul & Liz Blackwell  
Terry & Jo Gould  
Will & Michelle Rouse  
Neil & Sharon Finn

Andrew Ferrier  
& Danielle Guitard  
Anthony Quirk  
Bill Moran  
Grant & Sandra Biggar  
Jane Haines

Roger & Jo Wall  
Matt & Leigh Williams  
Sonja & Glenn Hawkins





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**STRANGE**

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