

27–29
MARCH
2026



ASPIRING CONVERSATIONS

Presented By



Festival of Ideas & Kōrero

From the team behind the Wānaka Festival of Colour
www.aspiringconversations.co.nz

We extend our gratitude to the businesses and organisations that generously support our Festivals.

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HE WĀ WHAKAARO – A TIME FOR THINKING

After bringing back Aspiring Conversations in 2024 following a six-year hiatus, we are delighted to be sharing this year's stellar line-up of speakers and artists with you. We continue to live in challenging times, so we believe it's more important than ever to gather to discuss, listen and reflect on the issues that affect us all.

We look forward to welcoming back Radio NZ's **Kathryn Ryan**, who will chair several of our sessions.

Our heartfelt thanks to our supporters, our sponsors, funders, Creative Circle, Benefactors and Patrons. Without you, this programme would not be possible!

Wānaka Festival Team

I'm sure this year's Aspiring Conversations will be an outstanding event. The programme goes from strength to strength each year, and the funds provided by Council are magnified many times over by the tireless work of volunteers supporting the Trust. Inspiring our community to think differently and listening to insights from people we would not normally have the opportunity to meet are great outcomes, and I wish you a very enjoyable 2026 festival.

John Glover, Mayor of Queenstown Lakes District



John Glover
Mayor of
Queenstown
Lakes District

Philip Tremewan
Aspiring
Conversations
Programmer

Sophie Kelly
Aspiring
Conversations
Programmer

Laura Williamson
Aspiring
Conversations
Programmer

The Festival Team

Sophie Kelly, Philip Tremewan & Laura Williamson | Aspiring Conversations programmers
Sophie Kelly | Artistic Director
Laura Williamson | Acting Executive Director
Kelcey Radford | Event Manager
Raewyn Murray | Box Office Manager
Elephant Publicity | Publicist
Ashlea Roughan | Venue Manager
Dennis Schwarz | Lighting
Entertainment Solutions | Sound & AV
Ruby Meekma | Graphic Design

Special thanks to all our crew and wonderful volunteers.

The Festival Trustees

Kirsty Hazledine - Co-Chair
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THE BURNING HOUSE

Nightsong

A theatrical play reading.

What happens when you tell the story of your life – and your life starts talking back? **Nightsong** shares excerpts from their new work-in-development, **The Burning House**, in a theatrical reading format.

Leading independent theatre company Nightsong is known for acclaimed works, including *Te Pō, Mr Red Light, I Want to Be Happy* and *The Worm*.

It's Readers and Writers Week, and 'An Evening with Christopher Busby' is the hottest ticket in town. After thirty years abroad, the celebrated novelist has returned home to launch his memoir, *The Burning House*. As he reflects on his past, the story begins to unravel.

The evening concludes with a discussion with Carl and Ben on crafting compelling stories and where this new work is heading.



TRUE STORIES TOLD LIVE

Lost & Found

Five storytellers take to the stage to share a tale based on the theme 'Lost and Found.' Expect laughter, heartbreak, beauty, and a deep dive into the strange stuff of life.

Oturehua-based writer **Jillian Sullivan** is writer, poet, former indie-rock drummer, and strawbale house owner/builder. LGBTQIA+ activist and former NZ Herald columnist **Shaneel Lal** was named 2023 Young New Zealander of the Year. Wānaka local **Paul Tamati** is a committed volunteer, *Stars in Your Eyes* regular and a funeral director with Affinity Funerals. **Peta Carey** is a writer and filmmaker whose book *The Hollows Boys* tells the story of three brothers caught up in the heyday of helicopter deer hunting and recovery in Fiordland. Actor and theatre director **Ben Crowder**'s multi-decade career saw him receive a 2023 FAME Mid-Career Award. He also teaches clowning and "has trouble hearing things are not possible".



Friday 27 March, 8pm
Lake Wānaka Centre
\$25/\$15 Students
70 minutes, no interval

Sponsored by

QUARTZ REEF
CENTRAL OTAGO

WĀNAKA FESTIVAL OF COLOUR PRESENTS



Friday 27 March, 5.30pm
Lake Wānaka Centre
\$25/\$15 Students
60 minutes, no interval
Session will be followed by a Q&A

Sponsored by

Aspiring Law

Saturday 28 March, 9am
Lake Wānaka Centre
\$25/\$15 Students
60 minutes, no interval

Sponsored by

MILFORD **ODT**
Otago Daily Times

BUILDING ON THE TREATY

Te Tiriti o Waitangi has been under fire. This session focuses not on the attacks, but on the positive benefits that honouring the agreement of 1840 brings us. What if we embraced the Treaty and all that it offers Aotearoa New Zealand?

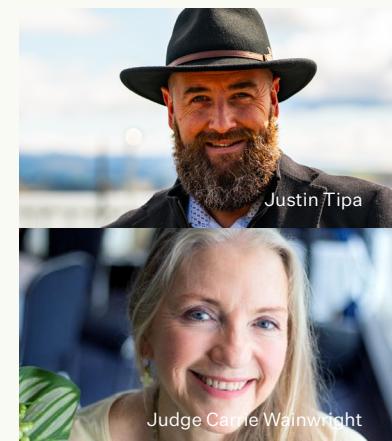
Justin Tipa (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Mamoe) is the elected Kaiwhakahaere of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu. He made an important speech on Waitangi Day last year at Ōnuku Marae alongside the Prime Minister and the Governor-General. **Judge Carrie Wainwright** is a judge of the Māori Land Court and Waitangi Tribunal.

The session will be chaired by Wānaka local **Annis Somerville** (Kāi Tahu), a retired Family Court judge and a member of the Southern Lakes Arts Festival Trust board.

Supported by

Te Rūnanga o NGĀI TAHU

Saturday 28 March, 11am
Lake Wānaka Centre
\$25/\$15 Students
60 minutes, no interval





TRICKLE-DOWN ECONOMICS? GIVE US A BREAK

New Zealand remains a staunch adherent to neoliberal beliefs about the economy – an approach sometimes characterised as “trickle-down economics” and sometimes as privatisation and plunder.

Maybe it's time to rethink our economy, what we want from it and change the thinking behind government budgets and spending.

Shamubeel Eaqub is chief economist at Simplicity and an author, media commentator and a thought-leading speaker. He has more than two decades of experience in Wellington, Melbourne and Auckland in international banks and consultancies.

Chlöe Swarbrick is the Co-Leader of the Green Party, and also the Party's spokesperson for Finance and Revenue. She was the first politician to be interviewed on the UK podcast Gary's Economics (check it out). Last year, the Greens produced their own fiscal strategy and their own draft budget to show how we can do things differently.

Saturday 28 March, 1pm

Lake Wānaka Centre
\$25/\$15 Students
60 minutes, no interval

Sponsored by

FINDEX

TAKING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

What if we took climate change seriously, rather than paying lip service? What if we actually cut out fossil fuels, intensive dairying, building on flood plains? What if we implemented those international reports and agreements? What would change in farming, in city life? How would we deal to the 1.5 degrees warming that's already baked in?

Jessica Palairet is a lawyer and Executive Director of Lawyers for Climate Action. She has a Masters of Law from New York University, where she specialised in international law and climate change. Jessica previously worked as an International Human Rights Law Fellow at the United Nations.

Jonathan Boston is Emeritus Professor of Public Policy at Victoria University. His research interests include climate change policy, both mitigation and adaptation. He was a member of the Expert Working Group on Managed Retreat for the Ministry for the Environment, and also assisted the Environmental Defence Society with their project on climate change adaptation.

Kay Harrison is an independent consultant who works internationally in the fight against climate change. She is Honorary Fellow of the International Emissions Trading Association, and until mid-2024 she was New Zealand's Climate Change Ambassador, representing us at international climate change meetings, summits and negotiations.

Saturday 28 March, 3pm

Lake Wānaka Centre
\$25/\$15 Students
60 minutes, no interval



SELENE

A young girl is watching the moon landings on repeat, entranced by the astronauts' weightlessness.

A bunch of teenagers are swimming under a lunar eclipse, lost in what might happen next.

A mis-matched couple are watching a horror film at a drive in cinema, about to step into all the next stuff.

SELENE is a radical explosion of an ancient myth.

It's about how we grow up, defined by our bodies.

And it's about all the wild stuff inside of us.

A new sibling show to the hugely acclaimed HELIOS (Aspiring Conversations 2024), SELENE is an intimate theatre experience with cinematic score and striking storytelling. Told by and made with Megan Drury (THE GODS THE GODS THE GODS, Festival of Colour 2023).

Presented by Wright&Grainger with Theatre@41 Monkgate. NZ tour produced by A Mulled Whine Productions.

A story about the goddess and the dark side of the moon.



Rob Campbell



Lucy O'Hagan



Boyd Swinburn

Saturday 28 March, 6pm

Lake Wānaka Centre
\$35/\$20 Students
70 minutes, no interval

Sunday 29 March, 5pm

Te Atamira, Queenstown
Tickets: teatamira.nz

This company truly are the best at storytelling
ThreeWeeks



Wright&Grainger have a beautiful gift for taking Ancient Greek stories and hauling them into the 21st century, translating the touching and keeping the human truth intact.
The Wee Review



Sponsored by



HEALTHCARE IN CRISIS

Our healthcare system is in critical condition. Doctors raise the alarm about staff shortages and burnout. Patients share stories of long wait times and delayed diagnoses. Building new hospitals and patching up old ones is expensive. What can we do to reach a healthier and fairer future for Aotearoa New Zealand?

Rob Campbell is former chair of Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand, and Chancellor of Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau (Auckland University of Technology).

Lucy O'Hagan spent 20 years as a GP and practice owner in Wānaka and her first book, *Everything but the Medicine* is out now. An expert in wider public health issues, **Boyd Swinburn** is Professor of Population Nutrition and Global Health at Auckland University.

Sponsored by



Sunday 29 March, 11am

Lake Wānaka Centre
\$25/\$15 Students
60 minutes, no interval

FEEL THE FEAR

There's a saying that goes "do one thing every day that scares you". Should you? Our speakers share their disparate experiences of, and approaches to, fear. In 2022, New Zealand rally driver **Emma Gilmour** became the first-ever woman driver for McLaren Racing and was the first woman to win a round of the New Zealand Rally Championship (NZRC). At 26, **Lisette Reymer** was appointed Newshub's Europe Correspondent, covering events including the Ukraine war and the Israel-Gaza conflict. She was named 2024 Reporter of the Year and her book *No, I Don't Get Danger Money* is out now. Former bassist for the iconic New Zealand band Split Enz, **Mike Chunn**'s career as a touring musician was cut short by agoraphobia. He is a board member of Anxiety NZ and CEO of the Play It Strange Trust.

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Emma Gilmour



Lisette Reymer



Mike Chunn



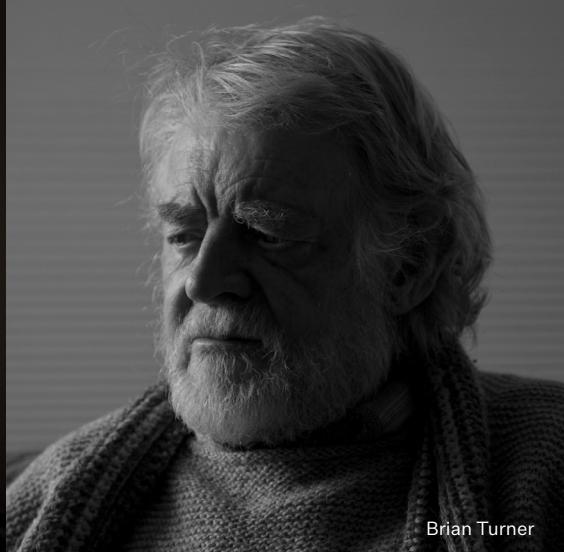
Shaneel Lal



India Logan-Riley



Jillian Sullivan



Brian Turner

PEOPLE HAVE THE POWER

From Nepal to Brazil to the United Kingdom, youth-led protests are demanding urgent action on social, environmental and political issues. Connected through digital platforms, Gen Z activists mobilise across borders to challenge inequality, authoritarianism, climate inaction and systemic injustice. Our panel of Aotearoa Gen Z activists discuss the issues they are fighting for and what civic engagement looks like in the 21st century. **Shaneel Lal** is a political commentator and founder of the Conversion Therapy Action Group. **India Logan-Riley** (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Ngāti Hawea, Rongomaiwha and Rangitāne ki Wairarapa) is the Project Manager for an initiative developing a policy framework for climate justice and constitutional transformation with hapū, young people, unions and frontline communities. **Lola Fisher** leads youth-run media outlet Create Happy Media, and is CEO of Gen-Z Aotearoa, which connects youth-led organisations to build collective power.

Politician and community organiser **Rohan O'Neill-Stevens** (Ngāti Apakura) will chair. They served as a Nelson City Councillor and Deputy Mayor between 2019 and 2025, one of the youngest elected local government leaders in Aotearoa.

Sunday 29 March, 3pm

Lake Wānaka Centre

\$25/\$15 Students

60 minutes, no interval

Sponsored by

**The
Guardian**

TAKING OFF - A CELEBRATION OF BRIAN TURNER

Poet, environmentalist, sportsman, journalist, biographer and playwright **Brian Turner** ONZM died on the 5th of February 2025 at the age of 80. In 2021, Atoll Records released *Voices of Men*, an album of NZ composer Janet Jennings' music; it includes the song cycle 'Taking Off', based on a poem of the same name by Turner. In this session, Turner's partner **Jillian Sullivan**, an accomplished writer, poet and environmentalist, shares some of the diverse aspects of Brian's full and celebrated life.

We also explore with composer **Janet Jennings** her reasons for choosing to set 'Taking Off' to music, and her process to create a sound world that celebrates the chosen text. The session finishes with a performance of 'Taking Off' with **Robert Tucker**, recently described as "NZ's hardest working baritone", and Auckland-based international pianist **David Kelly**.

Sunday 29 March, 5.30pm

Lake Wānaka Centre

\$25/\$15 Students

60 minutes, no interval

Sponsored by

roa
CREATING DESTINATIONS FOR GOOD

BRIAN TURNER PHOTO: Grahame Sydney

KIWI COUNTRY: TE RADAR & RUTH SPENCER

Based on the acclaimed book *Kiwi Country: Rural New Zealand in 100 Objects* this show celebrates not only the objects they've found, but some of your own! Bring in your curious, your hidden-in-plain-sight, your weird, your broken and your nostalgic objects for others to admire.

Te Radar and Ruth Spencer will fossick through their favourites from the book and from your own selections, telling the untold stories lurking in our rural bits and pieces. Both in presentation and in conversation with the audience, they'll uncover history, hilarity and heart, the artefacts of a new kind of archaeology that remind us who we are.



Sunday 29 March, 8pm

Lake Wānaka Centre
\$35/\$20 Students
60 minutes, no interval

Sponsored by



FESTIVAL CAFÉ & BOOKSHOP

Indulge your taste buds and get your coffee fix at the Festival Café, brought to us by Federal Diner and Fedeli, available during the Aspiring Conversations long weekend. Join us daily in the Armstrong Room from Friday through to Sunday. Meet up with friends, connect over good food and great conversation. Bar open for evening events.

The Paper Plus bookshop will be set up for the duration of Aspiring Conversations, and some of our speakers will be available for signings.



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BECOME A CHAMPION

of the Southern Lakes Arts Festival Trust

Champion the arts and make a difference!

Information

Venue

Lake Wānaka Centre

89 Ardmore Street, Wānaka

Booking Information

Book online aspiringconversations.co.nz or phone 0508 iTICKET / 0508 484 253.

Please note that there will be a fee charged by iTicket for purchases over the phone.

For help with booking tickets, please email support@iticket.co.nz or phone 0508 iTICKET / 0508 484 253.

Our **Box Office** and info kiosk in the Lake Wānaka Centre will be open daily throughout Aspiring Conversations from **27 March to 29 March**.

When To Book

Creative Circle, Benefactors, Patrons and Sponsors have access to priority booking online from 7pm on Thursday 22 January until 9pm on Sunday 25 January.

General ticket sales begin at 9am on **Monday 26 January**. We will have an **in-person Box Office** open for one day only on 26 January at the **Wānaka Community Hub**, 34 McDougall Street, Wānaka. Come along to get your tickets early and say hello!

Door Sales

Door sale allocations are available for shows not already sold out. These tickets will be on sale at the venue 30 minutes prior to performances.

Save on booking fees and secure a seat for almost every session with the **Aspiring Pass**. For **\$270 + BF**, the pass gives you access to all Aspiring Conversations events, except SELENE.

There are a limited number of passes available.

While a seat is guaranteed for passholders, **please arrive at least 10 minutes early** to ensure access to the session.

Booking Conditions

The Southern Lakes Arts Festival Trust and Aspiring Conversations reserves the right to alter without notice the advertised schedule of artists, performances or programmes. Any unavoidable changes will be advertised on the festival website, and through our social media channels.

In the event of cancellation, the ticket price will be refunded. There will be no postponements. Transaction/service fees are non-refundable.

Tickets are subject to availability and issued according to the best available.

Student tickets require a valid Student Identification Card on entry to the session.

Tickets are non-transferable between performances.

Ticket prices include GST. A \$2 ticket booking fee and transaction fee applies to all ticket purchases.

Your tickets will be emailed to you to download to your mobile device for scanning at the venue.

Sessions at Lake Wānaka Centre are allocated seating, except for SELENE, which is General Admission.

View full booking terms and conditions online via our website. For any festival queries, please email us at info@festivalofcolour.co.nz.

Ticket Exchange

While we do not offer refunds, if you find you are unable to attend a show, we have a **ticket exchange board** for individuals to buy and sell their tickets in the Lake Wānaka Centre from Friday 27 March.

Accessibility

For any specific accessibility needs, contact ticketing@festivalofcolour.co.nz.

Wheelchair access is available for all venues. For further information, and if you require assistance to access a festival venue or will be attending with a service dog please contact us in advance.

Safe Space

The Festival is committed to providing a safe space for everyone. We have a zero tolerance for discriminatory and bullying behaviours.

Health & Safety

The festival is required to comply with the latest Government health advice at the time of the event. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of our community first and foremost. If a guest speaker gets sick and can no longer travel or participate, events may be postponed or cancelled. We will offer exchanges or refunds to our ticket holders in this instance.



Sessions at a glance

More information about each session can be found on the page in the programme or on the website www.aspiringconversations.co.nz

Friday 27 March

The Burning House: Nightsong Play Reading

5.30 pm – Lake Wānaka Centre

True Stories Told Live: Lost & Found

8 pm – Lake Wānaka Centre

Saturday 28 March

Breakfast with Papers

9 am – Lake Wānaka Centre

Building on the Treaty

11 am – Lake Wānaka Centre

Trickle-down Economics

1 pm – Lake Wānaka Centre

Taking Action on Climate Change

3 pm – Lake Wānaka Centre

Selene

6 pm – Lake Wānaka Centre

Sunday 29 March

Healthcare in Crisis

11 am – Lake Wānaka Centre

Feel the Fear

1 pm – Lake Wānaka Centre

People Have the Power

3 pm – Lake Wānaka Centre

Selene

5 pm – Te Atamira, Queenstown

Taking Off - A Celebration of Brian Turner

5.30 pm – Lake Wānaka Centre

Te Radar - Kiwi Country

8 pm – Lake Wānaka Centre

Aspiring Conversations is organised by the Southern Lakes Arts Festival Trust that also runs the biennial celebration of the arts - The Wānaka Festival of Colour. The next festival takes place 3 April -11 April, 2027.

If you like what you see here and would like

to know more about supporting Aspiring Conversations or the Festival of Colour either as a volunteer, performer, sponsor or to make a donation then please get in touch today - info@festivalofcolour.co.nz.

We'd be delighted to hear from you.

Many thanks to our generous Patrons

Anonymous	Ket & Sandy	Katy MacPherson	Nick Brown &
Anonymous	Hazledine	Mary & Warwick	Mary Smit
Hannah Acland	Hugh & Mary	McSherry	Annabel &
David & Sue Baker	Holmes	Julian Miles	Adam Spiers
The Next Chapter	Alison Hazledine	Al Monro	Helen Tait
Wānaka	& Ian Howie	Marion & Jacqueline	Ben & Debra Taylor
Henrietta Brownlee	Anna Hiatt &	Murphy	Meg Taylor
Sara & Trevor	Andrew Oorschot	Phillida Perry &	Philip Tremewan
Crawford	Richard & Helen	George Savill	John & Penny Wilson
Phillipa Crawford	Howarth	Helen O'Connell &	Sophie Ward
Annalie Downie	Jarvie Plumbing	Stephen Collins	Helen & Anna Ward
Marilyn & Peter	Robert Kaplan &	Tony & Pip O'Regan	Matt Whimp &
Duncan	Dorothy Fennell	Ron & Sue	Sarah Kemp
The Arthouse	Derek Kirke &	Pynenburg	Trevor Williams &
Wānaka	Lorraine Scott	Jerry & Shirl Rowley	Rosemary Ahern
Annabel Elworthy & Prue Wilson	Christine &	Lynaire Ryan &	Judith Williamson
Lynne & Ralph Fegan	Dafydd Lewis	Richard Todd	Annabel Wilson
Anna Findlay	Marie Lewis &	Mike & Kat Saegers	& Martin Dykes
Marion Franks &	Bryan Lloyd	Josie & Philip	Hamish &
Dean Carroll	Janet Lennox	Sanford	Linda Wixon
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Book now

aspiringconversations.co.nz
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Save the dates now for our next
Wānaka Festival of Colour
3 - 11 April 2027

Follow our socials for live updates



@Festivalofcolour
#Festivalofcolour

COVER: Mat Doyle, Head of Music, Mount Aspiring College, Wānaka.
Taken for the Locals' Photo Project, Festival of Colour, 2023.

PHOTO: Victoria Sheridan

**ASPIRING
CONVERSATIONS**

Festival of Ideas & Kōrero