

Your feedback is important to us!

We would love to hear about your experience of today's performance which will contribute to continued research on creative heritage.

To access a quick anonymous survey, please use this QR code or type in the URL below:



tinyurl.com/3wd7akcc

Your responses will help us develop creative heritage practices and assist in understanding the importance of cultural heritage for migrant communities.

Cultivating Cultures: Expanding Memory

- A CREATIVE HERITAGE EVENT

Cultivating

Cultures: Expanding Memory

About this event...

This event showcases the commitment of contemporary artists from various cultural backgrounds to the idea of **creative heritage**. Creative heritage, an initiative by Dr Lauren Istvandy, empowers communities to tell stories using music, dance, poetry and other art forms that connect the past with the present through reflection on heritage collections. In this concert, we celebrate migrant journeys and settlement in Queensland through thought-provoking contemporary expressions of identity and belonging.

We wish to extend sincere acknowledgement to the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways on which we live and work, and pay respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge First Nations people as the original storytellers, music makers, dancers, and knowledge holders of this land, who have welcomed wave after wave of migrants to this place. This research was conducted on the land of the Yugarabul, Yuggera, Jagera, Turrbal, and Quandamooka peoples.

This project is funded by the Australian Research Council and Griffith University, with support from the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research and the Creative Arts Research Institute.

Read more about this project at www.creative-heritage.org



Cultivating

Cultures: Expanding Memory

Acknowledgement of Country

Waveney Yasso

Welcome

Dr Lauren Istvandy

My Ukraine

Catherine Likhuta, Maria Brereton, Iryna Pyrog, Yuliya Bodai

A bird after a name / Let's make a bridge / From Anzali to Cleveland

Sage Masuleh, Cieavash Arian

Kotahalu Mangalya

Kuweni Dias Mendis, Chinthi Rajapakse, Nadeeka Rathnayake

I Can Thrive

Shirin Majd, Reza, Peta Wilson

Home Song

Yuliya Bodai, Iryna Pyrog

Pish Ballah (Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down) / Border Dash

Zemzemeh

MY UKRAINE

Catherine Likhuta (composer, piano), Maria Brereton (flute),
Iryna Pyrog (voice), Yuliya Bodai (voice)

This is a patriotic song about Ukraine, written from the perspective of an expatriate. It talks about the beauty of Ukrainian nature, connection to the land, and how Ukrainians carry their history, folklore, art, and traditions wherever life takes them.

Is there such a country on Earth
Where valleys go further than the eye can see,
And where one feels intoxicated by the blossoming orchards,
Where meadows become one with the horizon?
I know that such a country does exist,
And I'm praying for it to the Lord,
So that he would protect it and give it happiness,
My dear Ukraine.

Ukraine: your gardens, rivers and fields,
Ukraine: I treasure them more than the life itself.
My dearest Ukraine, please always be with me,
In my heart and in my soul...
In my heart and in my soul.

I love you for every single young tree
That dresses up in blossoms in the Spring,
And for the magical celestial ring
That I see in the summer skies every night,
For the clear blue sky as far as the eye can see,
And for your rivers, so mighty and vast,
They are deep as my feelings for you,

*In my heart
and in my soul*

My dear Ukraine...

Ukraine, your gardens, rivers and fields,
Ukraine, I treasure them more than the life itself.
My dearest Ukraine, please always be with me,
In my heart and in my soul...
In my heart and in my soul.

Prayers and music, fairytales and nursery rhymes,
They are the precious childhood memories, so very dear for the soul.
I will preserve them, I promise you that.
Passed from generation to generation, and now they are on my new homeland...
Very distant from you but so nurturing to me and now also so dear....

Ukraine, your gardens, rivers and fields,
Ukraine, I treasure them more than the life itself.
My dearest Ukraine, please always be with me,
In my heart and in my soul.
In my heart and in my soul.

Catherine Likhuta (b. 1981) is an award-winning Ukrainian-Australian composer, pianist, and recording artist whose music pulses with emotion, rhythmic vitality, and the spirit of her Ukrainian heritage. Performed at Carnegie Hall, Glyndebourne Opera House, and across the globe, her works are celebrated for their power and humanity. catherinelikhuta.com

A BIRD AFTER A NAME / LET'S MAKE A BRIDGE / FROM ANZALI TO CLEVELAND

Sage Masuleh (poet), Cieavash Arean (oud, tar)

Two pieces are written in the classical Persian poetic form known as the ghazal. The first piece uses the bird as a symbol of migration, representing those who leave everything behind in search of a better life. The second and third pieces use free verse, creating a connection between Brisbane and Gilan, Sage's hometown.

A BIRD AFTER A NAME

At six o'clock
the bird broke free of its cage
rose into the sky
joined the sea of clouds
became a fish in flight
It flew into the heart of night
though it knew
it could have stayed
like the city pigeons
perched on some chimney
content with belonging

But the bird
lover of stories
enchanted by legends
wild
mad
kept its eyes on the horizon
chasing a dream already fading

It darted for crumbs and grain
fluttered from promise to promise
never nesting
never raising life
the highway's dirty air
settled on its wings
and turned them black

How many flights toward nowhere
how many restless nights
it built a nest
on a chimney
as if that could be home
But no
and all who passed
seeing its blackened wings
called it a crow
it saw its reflection
in the still water
and cried
what a mistake I've become

It thought perhaps
it must burn
rise in flame
stitch the sky with motion
so that its birth from ashes
might light the way for others

It carried a twig from home in its beak
still craving flight
and once again
it set off
searching for a name
that has never been spoken

LET'S MAKE A BRIDGE

The grace of rivers, I join the seas,
and with the seas, I find my way back
to that distant home of mine.
Maybe I'll return with tear-soaked letters,
carried gently by the wind,
unafraid of being caught behind borders.

The whales already know of my loneliness –
how my heart longs
to watch the sun set over the ocean.

Tell the fish that a homesick poet
is dreaming of a journey
to a southern port.

Tell the Redbud trees not to worry –
a purple carpet has settled across my street.
My heart feels heavy,
but with the kindness of the sun,
I can still release
Gilan's rainy clouds to the wind.

FROM ANZALI TO CLEVELAND

Brisbane pours its golden rain upon my head.
The breeze gently rocks the boats,
Lulling the seagulls to sleep.

The sea is watching me
With its wide, jewel eyes.

Will these waters carry me to Anzali,
When the Caspian – the largest lake on earth –
Leads to nowhere?

I pour my tears into little Cleveland's bay,
Hoping a single drop may find its way
Home.

Sage Masuleh (Sajedeh Jabbarpour) is an Iranian poet. She has published two poetry collections: *Disconnected Words* (2015) and *Feminine* (2020), both of which have won multiple literary awards in Iran. *Feminine* has reached its fourth edition. She is set to publish her third book in the coming months.

Instagram: @sajedeh_jabbarpour; **linkedin.com/in/Sagemasuleh**

Cieavash Arean was born in Tehran, Iran. A self-taught musician playing a number of instruments such as barbat, kamanche, ney, tar, flute, daf, zorna, ghoshme, flute and piano accordion. Cieavash has performed at Woodford Folk Festival, QPAC, Customs and Government House, Brisbane Multicultural Festival and Brisbane Festival, among many others.

KOTAHALU MANGALYA

Kuweni Dias Mendis, Chinthi Rajapakse, Nadeeka Rathnayake

Kotahalu Mangalya is a significant ritual in Sri Lankan culture marking a girl's transition into puberty. The ceremony weaves together a series of customs and rituals led by women, invoking specific cultural roles, knowledge systems, and responsibilities traditionally reserved for them. These sacred practices are designed to prepare the young girl for her future roles as woman, wife, and mother, while celebrating her emergence into womanhood. The ritual establishes her new identity within the social fabric of the village, transforming a personal milestone into a shared communal celebration.

This performance offers an insight into this ancestral ritual, one that many within the diaspora can no longer perform due to the constraints of time, resources, Western influence, and the fragile threads of cultural continuity within migrant life. Through re-imagining **Kotahalu Mangalya** in a contemporary context, the work becomes an act of remembrance and reclamation, bridging what has been lost with what continues to live within embodied memory.

Scene 1: The girl, confused: in seeing blood, experiencing her first menses, adults isolate her from the household.

Scene 2: The elders preparing for the celebration: the elders using ancient utensils to prepare traditional sweets.

Scene 3: The making of a golden milk potion: making of a skin potion using traditional utensils and applying it.

Scene 4: Becoming the woman: where the girl takes her first maiden bath and claims her womanhood.

Kuweni Dias Mendis (b. 1979) is a Sri Lankan-born, place-based conceptual artist working across movement, sound, film, installation, markings, and sculptural ritual objects. Her immersive works invite audiences into direct, embodied experiences. www.kuweni.com

Chinthi Rajapakse migrated from Sri Lanka to Australia 13 years ago and works as a General Practitioner on the Gold Coast. She is passionate about traditional Sri Lankan Kandyan dancing and participates in many Sri Lankan events showcasing her heritage.

Nadeeka Rathnayake is passionate about Sri Lankan culture. Based on the Gold Coast, she is a senior scientist in environmental chemistry and geochemistry.

I CAN THRIVE

Shirin Majd (voice), Reza (setar), Peta Leigh Wilson (piano)

This piece layers the Persian lullaby "Lay Lay" with verses inspired by Sufi poet Rumi. Drawing on personal stories of arriving and settling in a new land, this piece expresses the complexities of shifting between homelands and finding belonging through music and voice.

La la la, tulip flower,
The leopard cries in the mountain.
La la la, poppy flower,
Your father has gone – may God be with him.

I came here to sing, to dance, with love
I came with an open heart
I bring passion burning as phoenix
I will fly toward the light
Breaking all the doors and the gates

I found people in a detention centre
and they looked just like me
I sang to them over the fence
I sang songs to give them morale

And they saw us surround them
And they shed tears, felt happy again

I was not afraid of the regulation
I was afraid of the people who obeyed
the regulation
It was hard to unchain my mind
Now I can speak my mind, I can be myself
I can thrive

La la la, tulip flower,
The leopard cries in the mountain.
La la la, poppy flower,
Your father has gone – may God be with him.

"I came with
an open heart"

Shirin Majd is an Iranian-Australian classical singer, teacher and artistic director with Masters degrees in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy from Griffith University. Her work blends Western classical music with Persian poetry and contemporary performance, exploring migration, freedom, and identity through powerful cross-cultural expression. *Instagram: @shirinmajdofficial* www.shirinmajd.com

Reza is a musician and composer whose artistic journey began in Tehran in the late 1980s. With a lifelong dedication to performance and teaching, his music bridges cultural memory and contemporary expression.

Peta Leigh Wilson is a dynamic Brisbane-based musician with a Master of Music from QUT and more than two decades of professional experience. A versatile performer and accomplished session musician, she infuses every performance with creative energy, distinctive artistry, and a signature touch of jazz flair.

HOME SONG

Yuliya Bodai (voice), Iryna Pyrog (voice)

This song is about migration, belonging, and the bittersweet feeling of building a new life far from home. Holding on to our cultural heritage helps us in our migrant journey.

There's a story in my life, the one I wanna tell
I moved so far away from home, all I knew so well
New house and job and friends and wow!
This is my new life
But some days I just really miss all I left behind.

Home is my heart, it will be forever
Though we are apart
I'll never
Let you outta sight
Let you outta mind
Never, cause I'm always yours
And you're always mine

I will put on traditional embroidered shirt
When my heart yearns

And it will be as if I wrap myself up in home,
even for a moment,
You and I are so far away from each other
and time does not heal
Each thread of this embroidery seems to bind us

*"Home is my heart,
it will be forever"*

Home is in my soul forever and ever
My footprints are there
Please don't forget me when the night comes
and don't forget me when the day comes

My heart is here with me
But my soul is kind of there
One step, one decision and we are to be here
Only migrants know what this trick is about:
Start new life overseas, so your dad will be proud.
You were forced to leave or you wanted to,
you are brave
We now have our own startups here
Whether you are at home with your family
or here alone
In any way everyone goes through difficult stages

Home is in my soul forever and ever
My footprints are there
Please don't forget me when the night comes
and don't forget me when the day comes

Yuliya Bodai is a singer-songwriter with well-known hits and co-author of a Eurovision winning song. She is also a Ukrainian activist and co-founded the "Ukrainian music band" with Iryna to promote Ukrainian culture in Australia.

Iryna Pyrog is a singer, actress, beauty expert and Ukrainian activist.
Instagram: @ukrainianmusicband @irynapyrog @yuliyarai

PISH BALAH (UP, FORWARD, LEFT, RIGHT, DOWN) / BORDER DASH

Zemzemeh

Pish Ballah (Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down) is an original song about severe oppression in Iran during the 1980s.

Border Dash is the story of fleeing from oppression in search of a new home and belonging.

PISH BALAH (UP, FORWARD, LEFT, RIGHT, DOWN)

Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down

Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down

Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down

Whatever I say, you all reply:

"Amen"

My words, my deeds, all moral advice.
I am Kaveh, yes, burning with rage,
My soul at the brink from Zahhak's dark plague.

Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down
Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down
Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down
"Glory to the Creator, brothers of devils abound."

Rigid minds, no bend,
Chasing goals with no end.
Confessions of the crooked,
Red and black united,
No progress – only regress,
Freedom trapped in distress.
A freefall, so fast,
The reward of betrayal cast.
Religion brings only humiliation,
Virtue descends into wickedness,
Representation becomes usurpation,
Leadership turns to crime,
Honour vanishes in absence,
Foolishness and vulgarity thrive,
Inherently evil,
Dirty within, despite the facade.

[Khomeini:] "Be afraid of the day that these people realise what is the actual truth of your essence, resulting in an explosion."

Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down

Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down

Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down

"Glory to the Creator, brothers of devils abound."

The house is in ruin, the leader commands a strike,
Chaos becomes the means to incite unrest,
Reflections of revolution in a stagnant pool,
Feet in the stirrup, chasing a mirage,
Drowning in bitterness,
Prayers go unanswered,
Prostrations unheeded,
Fasting without merit,
Endurance without affliction,
Purity has disappeared without limit,
Beggars in robes speak deceit,
Clerics gorging while people decay,
Obsessed with women's veils all day.
A country without a leader,
Guidance twisted in sacred texts,
Knowledge scarce,
A nation stuck in muck.
Dreams vanished,
Friendships damaged,
All nerves, no calm,
Life, a storm.

One moonlit night,
Blood in the prayer hall's light,
Rostam and Sohrab fight,
A reckoning ignites.
One moonlit night,
Blood in the prayer hall's light,
Rostam and Sohrab fight,
A reckoning ignites.

Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down
Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down
Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down
Up, Forward, Left, Right, Down

*"Freedom
belongs
to those
who fight
from all
angles"*

Yeah, yeah, yeah – jaw clenched, jaw tight,
Yeah, yeah, yeah – bricks fly tonight.
Last night I sought counsel with my elders,
Cast the stars, read omens like fortune-tellers.
When will autumn end – when comes the spring?
A voice from the shadows whispered, "You poor thing.
Sitting, waiting, for someone to bring you freedom?
For this road, your life must be the ransom – believe 'em."

Freedom belongs to those who fight from all angles,
Today, women, life, freedom is the slogan,
The nation's awake, its youth will not tire,
The end for traitors to the people is the gallows and fire.

Long live Iran

BORDER DASH

The day... finally arrives.
You think you're ready.
But how do you pack your past into one small bag?
How do you say goodbye to everything...
...when you don't know if you'll ever come back?

I was leaving.
Holding my brother, tighter than ever before.
Holding back tears,
Staring into mum and dad's eyes like they were the last stars I'd
ever see.
And I was stoned.
Hash in my blood, because clarity would break me.
This was a border dash...
Life in disguise.

Six of us, dressed like the ones we feared.
Revolutionary guards
That's how we had to look.
There were too many checkpoints.
Too many questions.
And no papers...
No rights.
So we spoke in their tongue.
Flipped their rules with deeper knowledge than they owned.
Called "brother"
and suddenly,
we were trusted.
Just enough.

We reached the border town.
And were passed on again
To men with darker trades.
People? Arms? Drugs?
Didn't matter.
We were currency too.

Drove all night.
Desert roads.
No lights.
Just fear.
Just dust.
And stars that did not speak.

Early morning.
No border line.
Just a whisper in the wind:
"You're not home anymore."

From there...
To Karachi.
Where dreams got stuck in checkpoints.
Where hope got caught in someone's pocket.
Mochko.

Notorious

Half our money – gone.
Just to move.
Just to not be buried in silence.

Karachi didn't want us either.
The West shut its doors.
So we turned
To fakes.
Fake names.
Fake passports.
Fake hope.

We moved on foot.
On whispers.
Across lands that didn't know our names.
With a drug runner as our guide.
Because no one else would take the risk.

We reached India
And lost the rest.
The money.
The illusion.
The safety.

No UN.
No nation.
No saviours.
Only the streets,
and what little dignity we could earn
by surviving them.

And then
Somehow
A door opened.
Australia.
Humanitarian grounds.

I landed here.
This strange, shiny silence.
Too clean.
Too still.
Too far from the noise that lived in me.

They say it's over.
But it's not.

You leave your country...
And you float.
In purgatory.
Not living,
Not dying.
Not fully welcome.
Not fully lost.

Safe
but still burning.

Safe
but still
burning

A refugee is not a title.
It's a wound.
A scar that moves with you.
We don't come here to take.
We come...
Because we had nowhere left to go.

We hide our pain.
We smile through our fear.
We survive.

But we all dream of one of two things:
To go back...
Or to finally... finally...
Belong.

Siyavash Doostkhah, a refugee from Iran, has been studying and performing music since 1988. Through all his work, Siyavash harnesses the transformative power of music, visual expression, and storytelling to preserve, reinterpret, and reimagine cultural narratives, keeping tradition alive while pushing it into new, globally resonant forms.

Greta Kelly's shah kaman, a spike-fiddle, her microtonal modes and vast pallet of textures has been described as "hauntingly beautiful" (Joe Sidek, Rainforest Fringe Festival, Malaysia). She's studied and collaborated with renowned musicians from Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, Czech Republic and France, and cut her teeth in the experimental Brisbane scene. **Instagram: @zemzeme_music facebook.com/zemzeme music zemzeme.au**