



# MELBOURNE WRITERS FESTIVAL

# FESTIVAL REPORT 2025

We respectfully acknowledge that Melbourne Writers Festival takes place on the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation, in particular the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung peoples.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the more than 65,000 years of storytelling that has taken place on the lands and waterways of this Country. Sovereignty was never ceded.

# ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

Melbourne Writers Festival brings writers and readers together to be inspired, challenged and thrilled by an excellent, creative and surprising program of events celebrating books and ideas.

Since 1986, we have entertained hundreds of thousands of readers as the flagship annual writers festival of our UNESCO City of Literature. MWF ignites conversations across Melbourne and inspires curiosity and connection.

In 2025, we welcomed **over 130 writers** and **21,000 audience members** to **70 events** across four extraordinary days.

'I had an incredible time and enjoyed every event and workshop. There was a vibrantly warm and generous atmosphere throughout, and every time I spoke with attendees and readers, this impression was amplified and reiterated by them.'

– **Hannah Kent**, 2025 Festival Author

'A festival highlight was the unexpected moments of connection with strangers in the queue; after a few moments of conversation, we then walk away as friends.'

'I'll cherish seeing my daughter's face when she got her books signed and met her favourite author.'

– 2025 Festival Attendees



# MESSAGE FROM FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

## VERONICA SULLIVAN



What a magical 2025 Melbourne Writers Festival!

Melbourne's readers embraced this year's formally varied MWF program, which ranged from panels, talks and workshops to live podcasts, walking tours, afternoon tea events, intimate salons, multilingual

programming and events in translation, performance works and commissioned storytelling events.

We expanded to new venues across Melbourne's CBD, and introduced Pay What You Wish ticketing for many events, making MWF more financially accessible to existing and new audiences.

Audiences of all ages came together to celebrate books and writing in our City of Literature, with **over 21,000 readers** joining us at MWF – representing a **36 per cent increase in attendance** on last year's festival. We presented sold-out primary and secondary MWF Schools programs and a remarkable **41 sold-out events** in the public program.

The 2025 Festival was filled with memorable moments. The breathtaking Opening Night readings and performances by **Rumaan Alam, Samantha Harvey, Hannah Kent, Solli Raphael**, and MWF's First Nations Guest Curators **Daniel Browning** and **Nardi Simpson** reflected on the festival theme of Magical Thinking, including a spellbinding musical performance with voice and possum-skin cloak by Nardi. **Marian Keyes** made hundreds of adoring readers laugh and cry (often simultaneously) at a special Mother's Day conversation about her extraordinary career. Philosopher **A.C. Grayling's** stirring closing address exposed the faultlines and possibilities of making peace in the culture wars.

There were also surprising moments of festival alchemy – like Booker Prize-shortlisted debut novelist **Yael van der Wouden** sharing her hilarious David Attenborough advice columnist impersonation, and **Jimmy Barnes** spontaneously breaking into Scottish folksongs during his interview with **Brian Nankervis**.

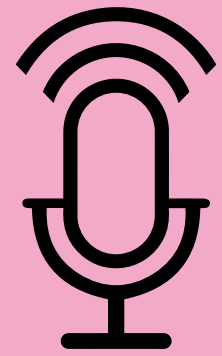
Every festival-goer will have their own personal moments that thrilled, surprised and moved them – from chance encounters in the signing queue to revelatory flashes of inspiration and connection.

MWF would not be possible without our funders, donors, partners, sponsors and collaborators. Your visionary support enables us to not only thrive in the present, but plan for the bright future of Melbourne Writers Festival. Thank you for embracing the magic that lingers long after the final page.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'VS', representing Veronica Sullivan.

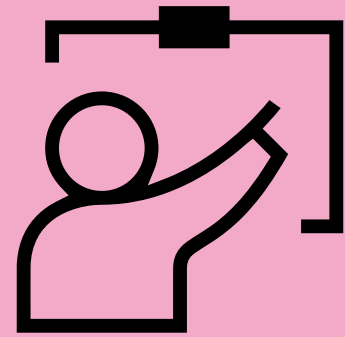
Veronica Sullivan  
Festival Director

# 2025 IN NUMBERS



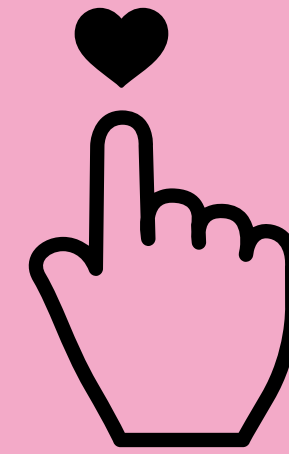
70

Events



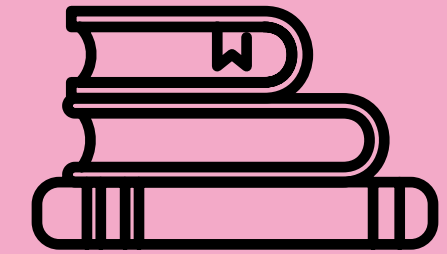
139

Writers and Speakers



83

Volunteers



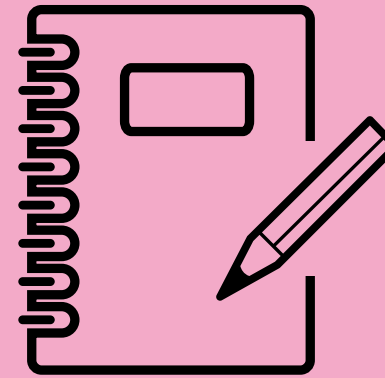
3,726

Books Sold



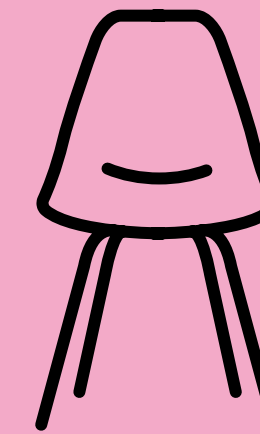
41

Sold Out Events  
**(59% of public program)**



1,321

Schools Attendance  
**(+9% Year-on-Year)**



21,084

Total Attendance  
**(+36% Year-on-Year)**

# ASAKO YUZUKI: BUTTER

WITH ALICE ZASLAVSKY

Supported by



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

ASK A QUESTION



[mwf25.com/butter](https://mwf25.com/butter)



Asako Yuzuki, Alice Zaslavsky and Emily Fukuda Molinaro  
at Asako Yuzuki: Butter, MWF 2025

# AUDIENCE IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT

This year's exciting lineup of Festival events connected with new and existing audiences across a range of channels.

47%

Increase in Box Office Revenue  
Year-On-Year

40%

First-Time Festival Attendees

49.3%

Average EDM Open Rate  
**(+13% Year-On-Year)**

5,081

Increase in eNews Subscribers

13%

Increase in Instagram Followers

90,500+

Total Social Media Followers  
and eNews Subscribers  
**(+12% Year-On-Year)**

# AUDIENCE BREAKDOWN

## GENDER

**80%**

Female

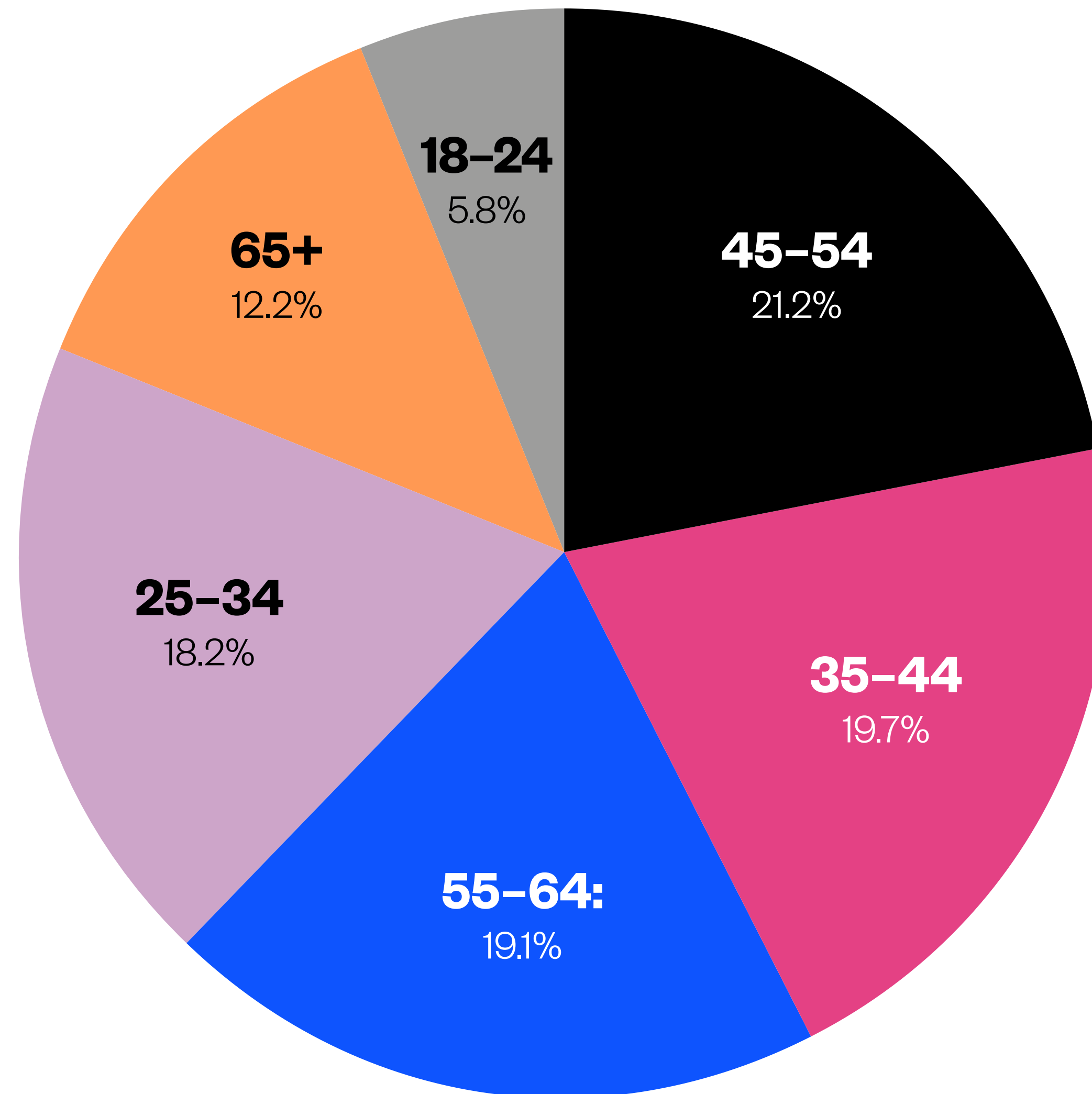
**11%**

Male

**9%**

Unknown

## AGE



## EXPERIENCE

**92%**

Plan to attend MWF next year

**92%**

Would recommend MWF to friends, family or colleagues

**93%**

Gained new insights or knowledge at MWF

# ARTISTS IN NUMBERS

At this year's Festival, acclaimed Australian and international authors and award-winning thinkers discussed their work and shared insights, inspiration and their unique creative perspectives.

139

Writers

19%

Emerging Writers

17%

First Nations  
Writers

37%

LGBTQIA+  
Writers

15%

Writers with  
Disability

88%

Australian Writers

12%

International  
Writers

Including writers from  
Argentina, Great Britain,  
Indonesia, Ireland, Japan,  
The Netherlands, South  
Korea, United Arab  
Emirates and the USA.



Maeve Marsden, Mariana Enríquez, Mikaella Clements and Onjuli Datta  
at Horror, Hauntings and Monstrous Femmes, MWF 2025



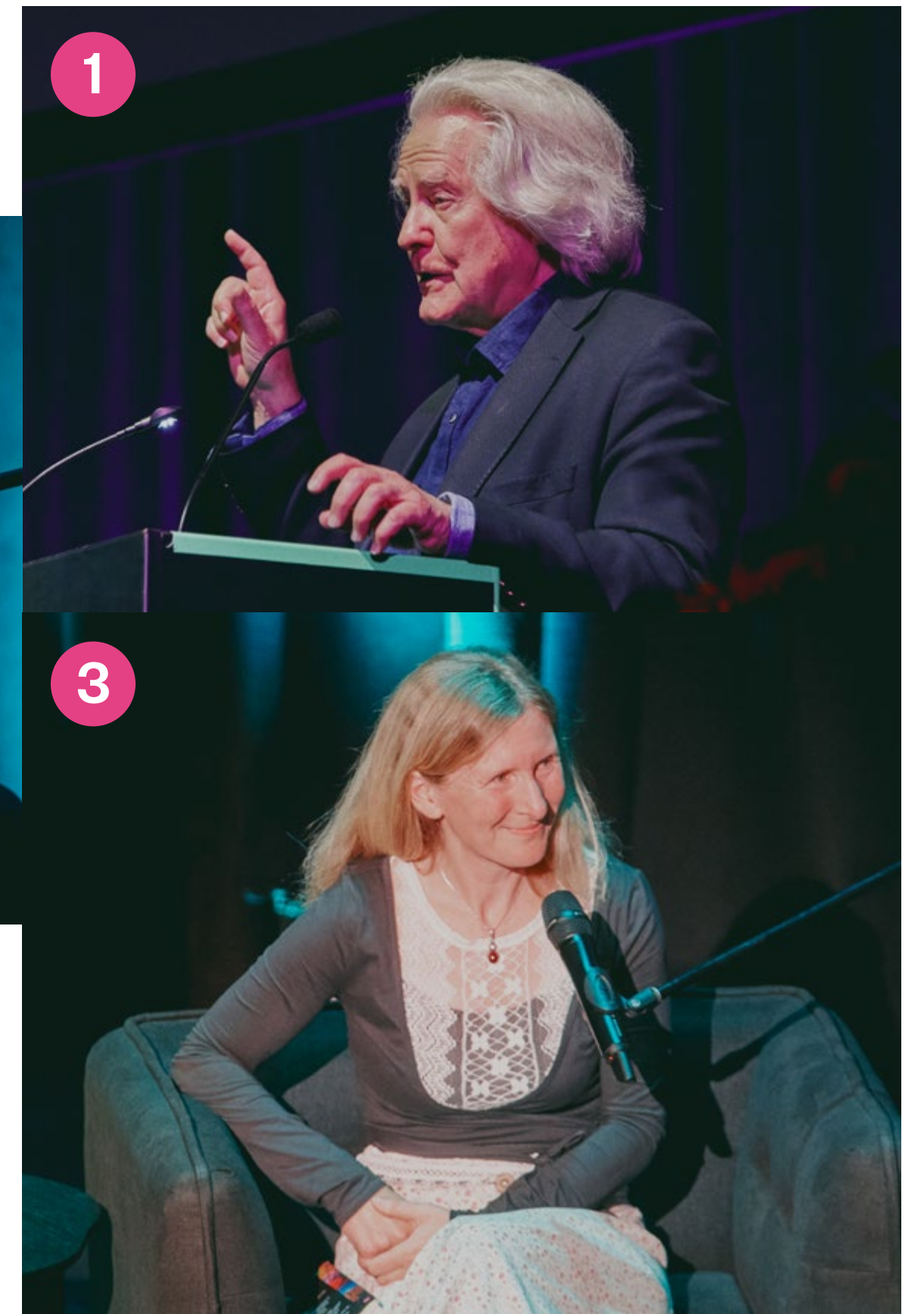
Jessica Townsend and Rachael King at  
Jessica Townsend: Silverborn, MWF 2025

# TOP-SELLING EVENTS

This year's ambitious lineup resonated with audiences – with over **59 per cent of the public program selling out** and a **36 per cent increase in attendance** on last year's festival.

## TOP TEN BESTSELLING EVENTS

- 1 A.C. Grayling: Making Peace in the Culture Wars
- 2 Marian Keyes: My Favourite Mistake (Sunday)
- 3 Samantha Harvey: Orbital
- 4 Jamila Rizvi and Rosie Waterland: Broken Brains
- 5 Jimmy Barnes: Highways and Byways
- 6 Hannah Kent: Always Home, Always Homesick
- 7 Marian Keyes: My Favourite Mistake (Saturday)
- 8 Colum McCann: Twist
- 9 Sarah Wilson: Living Fully in an Age of Crisis
- 10 Cancelling Culture





Yael van der Wouden signs copies of her book, *The Safekeep*, MWF 2025



I have a new word: Melbournesque. It was all so varied and poignant and energetic and respectful of old and new. I would love to come back.

– **Colum McCann**



I loved my events. The audiences were incredible. I signed a lot of books – and met beautiful people. So I left feeling that my cup was overflowing.

– **Anita Heiss**



It was an honour to participate in this year's festival. The panel was fun and engaging, and the other events I attended were all terrific. There was a great buzz about the whole festival.

– **Steve Vizard**



It was such a privilege to be part of the program. My first MWF event currently holds the record for the biggest solo event I have ever done. MWF is such a special festival, beautifully and thoughtfully curated (and with genuine, thought-provoking variety).

– **Kalliane Bradley**



Thank you, so much, for making me so welcome in Melbourne and for putting on an incredible festival with audiences that would be the envy of any festival anywhere. It was great fun.

– **Samantha Harvey**



What a deadly time I had. Thank you so much for working with me. It couldn't have been any better. The festival was wonderful!

– **Nardi Simpson**



A wonderful festival. Melbourne was alive – there was so much energy, magic and great conversations.

– **Cathy McGowan**



Melbourne Writers Festival is a beautifully organised, exhilarating high-point in the literary festival calendar. Great audiences, attentive and engaged, make visiting authors fall in love with the city as a place where the culture of books and ideas is so receptive.

– **A.C. Grayling**



# MWF SCHOOLS

The 2025 MWF Schools program brought stories to life for young readers and aspiring writers, covering a range of topics from slam poetry and spooky stories to queer identity, art, resilience and the power of imagination.

Primary students enjoyed interactive presentations that blended humour, heart and creativity led by the hilarious **Nat Amore**, bestselling author **Reece Carter**, visual storyteller **Nabeel Khan** and award-winning writer **Jess Sanders**.

Secondary students experienced thought-provoking sessions about growing up, writing truthfully and finding your place in the world, with an extraordinary lineup of writers including YA author **Robyn Dennison**, slam poet **Solli Raphael**, Yuin author **Gary Lonesborough**, and *New York Times*-bestselling author **Neal Shusterman** (USA).

The week wrapped up with a Melbourne-exclusive conversation with **Jessica Townsend**, one of Australia's most beloved children's authors.

## ATTENDANCE

1,321

attendees

17

events

5

days of  
programming

27%

first time at  
MWF

73%

repeat MWF  
attendees

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## AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

100%

Improved students'  
understanding of how  
identity is expressed

91%

Improved students'  
ability to share their  
points of view

82%

Improved students'  
understanding of structure  
and language



# BOOK SALES

Readings, our Official Festival Bookseller, reported a 19 per cent increase in sales on last year. The following titles were the top ten bestsellers of the 2025 Festival.

<i>Broken Brains</i> by Jamila Rizvi and Rosie Waterland	<i>Always Home, Always Homesick</i> by Hannah Kent	<i>Butter</i> by Asako Yuzuki	<i>My Favourite Mistake</i> by Marian Keyes	<i>Kitchen Hymns</i> by Pádraig Ó Tuama	<i>Silverborn</i> by Jessica Townsend	<i>The Safekeep</i> by Yael van der Wouden	<i>All Better Now</i> by Neal Shusterman	<i>Orbital</i> by Samantha Harvey	<i>Twist</i> by Colum McCann

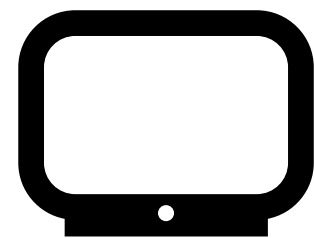
# PR AND MEDIA

## Coverage Highlights



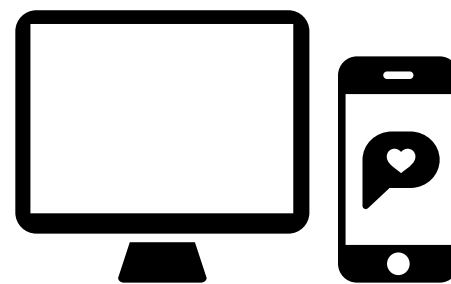
# PR AND MEDIA

A total of **865 media mentions** were secured across the Festival campaign period, with extensive coverage across major print, online and broadcast (radio, podcast, TV).



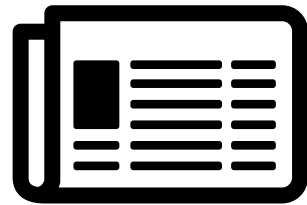
**564**

Broadcast Mentions



**242**

Online Media Mentions



**51**

Print Mentions

## Sentiment

**83%**

Positive

**14%**

Neutral

## Total Potential Reach

**55,020,024**

Over 90 days

## Top media coverage

- 1 *The Age*
- 2 *ABC*
- 3 *Australian Financial Review*
- 4 *The Guardian*
- 5 *The Project*

# Thank you to our Government Partners

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## Government Partners



Thank you to  
our Partners  
and Supporters

Principal Partner



Major Partner



Major Venue Partner



Major Media Partner



Presenting Partners



Festival Partners



Supporting Partners



Media Partners



# Thank you to our Donors

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## Literary Epic

\$25,000+

Edward Federman

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## Novella

\$5,000+

Anita Apsitis OAM and Graham Anderson

Debra Russell

Gianna Totaro

Tony Wheeler AO and Maureen Wheeler AO

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## Short Story

\$1,000+

Sally Browne AM

Susanne Dahn AM

Jane Kunstler

George and Rosa Morstyn

Hutchings Family

Mark Rubbo OAM

Jutta Scherer-Cowen

Bernadette Trifiletti



Thank you