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**Western Edge continues to lateralise its Artistic Leadership team and welcomes in new Chair and Board members**

Western Edge continues to evolve its lateral leadership model by creating an artistic leadership team of five diverse artists who will be supported by new Board members and new Board Chair, Veronica Pardo.

Veronica Pardo has been leading the work on cultural equity in Australia for more than 15 years, heading peak organisations such as Arts Access Victoria and Multicultural Arts Victoria. Veronica has worked with more than 150 cultural organisations, focusing on issues such as racial equity and justice, cultural safety, diversity and inclusion. She is currently on the Board of VicHealth and is the outgoing Chair of Next Wave. Joining Veronica will be two new Board members: Anushka Wijendra and Liss Gabb, with experience in business strategy, governance, digital strategy and marketing (Anushka) and arts management, creative producing, community development and youth mental health (Liss).

My work has been at the pointy end of change working with communities that are very important to me – predominantly communities of colour and communities of people with disability – around issues of representation in the arts,” Veronica Pardo says.

“My passion is to ensure that I walk with communities who have experienced marginalisation and to ensure that any organisation that I work with then creates opportunities for the leaders from those communities to take over. I’m interested in melting my expertise with Western Edge to see if we can be a powerful agent for change in the sector.”

Western Edge CEO Penny Harpham acknowledges the enormous contribution of outgoing Board members, particularly that of outgoing Chair Jock Jeffries, who led the company through a leadership transition and COVID-19.

“Jock’s service to Western Edge has been invaluable. His passion for the arts and young people, humility to listen deeply, and his expertise in finance and youth services has ensured this company survived one of the hardest periods of its history and came out the other side staying true to its core values and mission. Both Jock and I are thrilled at what Veronica’s expertise and leadership will undoubtedly seed and grow for young people and communities across Melbourne’s West,” Penny Harpham says.

Western Edge is also excited to announce the appointment of Chanella Macri and Stephen Nicolazzo as new co-Artistic Directors, joining John Marc Desengano to helm the company’s artistic leadership for 2022 and beyond.

Chanella Macri is an actor, writer and theatre-maker whose credits include *Looking for Alibrandi*, *The View from Up Here* and *Australian Realness*. A previous Lead Artist for Western Edge, Chanella has worked in various capacities since 2019, including co-directing *The Watching* and co-developing one of the company’s flagship productions, *Lele, Butterfly*.



A second-generation Samoan-Italian immigrant, Chanella's own practice is both deeply informed by and embedded within her community. Her appointment will not only build on the company's intersectional approach to practice, but also help to further engage communities in the West.

"Western Edge is an organisation grounded deeply in community. We come as we are and we bring our whole selves to work. I look forward to deepening our connections with communities across the West and also with diaspora communities nationally, so that our work can always be informed by the nuances, complexities and joys of the many cultures and communities of our young people," Chanella Macri says.

Stephen Nicolazzo is a theatre director who has directed for Melbourne Theatre Company, Malthouse Theatre, Belvoir, Griffin Theatre Company, Arts Centre Melbourne and Arts House. His works have won 12 Green Room Awards, including Best Direction in 2017 (*The Happy Prince*), as well as a Sydney Theatre Award. In 2022, he directed the world premiere of *Looking for Alibrandi*.

As Western Edge continues to expand the scope of its professional development program, Stephen's wealth of experience in the industry will help to provide a bridge into the sector for young, emerging artists.

"Western Edge has come through a massive transformation over the past few years with co-Artistic directors Tariro Mavondo and Penny Harpham working towards a shared vision for a thriving community of next-generation artistic and cultural leaders borne from Melbourne's West. This vision is well and truly in motion, with artists who have trained through Western Edge now working in stage and screen, and taking up leadership positions in this company and elsewhere. I am honoured to continue this work and create more opportunities for artists in the company who are seeking a pathway into the performing arts," Stephen Nicolazzo says.

Alongside John Marc Desengano, the co-Artistic Directors will be supported by Artistic Associates Amarachi Okorom and Tennessee Mynott-Rudland, further cementing the lateralisation of artistic leadership within Western Edge as the company continues to evolve.

John Marc, who began his position as co-Artistic Director in January 2022, reflects on the new leadership model and what it means for culturally diverse artists in the company and for the sector at large:

"I was sad to see Robert Young leave as co-Artistic Director in April due to personal reasons, but it opened up fruitful conversations around what diverse artists need right now to be able to step into leadership roles, while maintaining their own practice and family and community responsibilities. Creating a leadership collective allows us to leave the company to focus on our artistic or personal work at times, with enough of our fellow leadership team around to keep the company steady until our return, and vice versa. It's circular, it's fluid, and it's expanding the community to create more space for more voices to lead, share and grow," John Marc Desengano says.



With regard to the new makeup of the company’s artistic and Board leadership, Penny Harpham says: “I am excited that every member in our Artistic leadership team has had a journey through Western Edge. John Marc and Chanella have been Lead Artists since 2019; Tennessee has worked with the company as Stage and Production Manager also since 2019, and Stephen was one of our first Masterclass Artists in 2018. Amarachi’s journey is the most exciting for me of all, from starting out as a participant in 2017 to becoming a Support Artist, Lead Artist, Sub30 Collective member and now the company’s Artistic Associate. This is what Western Edge is all about – a company where young diverse artists are actively encouraged to take up leadership roles. I am honoured that Veronica Pardo – an expert in lateral leadership models, diversity, inclusion and accessibility – will be guiding us through this next chapter of the company’s trajectory.”

### **About Western Edge**

Western Edge is a not-for-profit arts organisation creating safer spaces for young artists from Melbourne’s west to tell their own stories, with their own voice, in their own way.

Working across core programmatic areas of community youth theatre and professional development, we create opportunities for young people and artists to explore creativity, learn new artistic practices, gain on-the-job employment, and develop as artistic and cultural leaders.

Interviews and images available upon request.

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