

Hosted by **H.G. Nelson**

BUSH SLAM puts poets and poetry in motion across Australia to discover the true heart of the country.

New six-part series premieres on

ABC1 TUESDAY 29 DECEMBER, 2009 @ 8.00PM

BUSH SLAM is produced by Freehand Productions in association with ABC TV. Series Producer: Matt Scully; Director: Chris Thorburn.
ABC TV Head of Arts & Entertainment: Amanda Duthie; Executive Producer: Debbie Lee

Images are available on www.abc.net.au/tvpublicity

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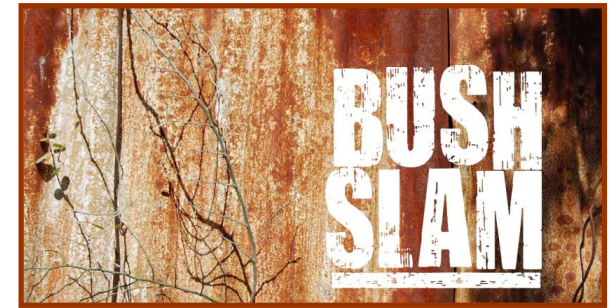
SCREEN
AUSTRALIA



Sharpen your pencils and lick your biros for a television series like no other!

BUSH SLAM: three days, two poets, one town... finding the heartbeat of the nation in verse.

BUSH SLAM puts poets and poetry in motion across Australia to discover the true spirit of the country.



Our host **H.G. Nelson** (Greig Pickhaver) is at the wheel of the **BUSH SLAM** bus. Each week he is taking two very different artists to explore a rural community and meet its people. Each poet is given just three days to capture the heart of the town in verse – and then the tricky bit, to perform their work before the locals in a live head-to-head poetry slam for a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down!

BUSH SLAM features Australia's leading poets and songwriters, including **John Kinsella, Geoff Goodfellow, Sam Wagan Watson, Emily Ballou, Joel Ma, Melinda Schneider** and **James Blundell**. Together, their writing covers a vast spectrum of styles, from bush poetry, to country, to hip hop.

Part travelogue, **BUSH SLAM** visits six quintessential Australian towns – **Stanley** in Tasmania, **Blinman** in South Australia, **Corryong** in Victoria, **Yarrabah** in Queensland and **Cowra** and **Lightning Ridge** in New South Wales.

They're all locations that in some way resonate with the Australian story - our relationship with the land, the treasures that lay beneath it, of fire and flood, of colonisation and Indigenous life and beliefs. By meeting the towns' inhabitants and exploring their heritage, we come to understand a little more about Australia and ourselves.

BUSH SLAM is also about the creative process of writing and it's H.G.'s job to rummage through the poet's tool box and drill into a world that's often secretive and hidden. What is it that inspires our leading wordsmiths? How do they transform their experiences into lines on a page? And what makes a good poem, anyway? The results are not always what you may imagine. Our poets are under the pump and there's precious little time for writer's block as the "slam" approaches!

THE POETS



EMILY BALLOU
Poet & Author



EZRA BIX
Poet, Writer & Actor



JAMES BLUNDELL
Songwriter & Performer



ALISON CROGGON
Poet & Author



KATE FAGAN
Poet & Folk Musician



GEOFF GOODFELLOW
Poet



CAROL HEUCHAN
Bush Poet



JOHN KINSELLA
Poet, Writer & Editor



JOEL MA
Hip Hop Artist



MORGANICS
Hip Hop Artist & MC



MELINDA SCHNEIDER
Country Songwriter & Performer



SAM WAGAN WATSON
Poet

Ep 1: ABC1 TUESDAY 29 DECEMBER 2009 @ 8PM

COWRA, NSW

CAROL HEUCHAN & JOEL MA



BUSH SLAM goes to Cowra in mid-western New South Wales and tackles the present day issues and the unique history that surround this agricultural region.

H.G. Nelson guides Melbourne hip hop artist, Joel Ma, and Hunter Valley bush poet, Carol Heuchan, on a three-day visit to the town, throwing down the challenge to write a poem that captures the heart and soul of Cowra, and then to perform their verses in front of the citizens at the “slam”.

The big story in Cowra is the Japanese Breakout that took place in 1944 during World War II. At the site of the old POW camp, Joel tries to imagine what it would be like to be on the run as an escapee in the vast Australian countryside.

Carol meanwhile, is deeply moved by what she finds at the Japanese War Cemetery, the only one outside of Japan. Returned Australian Servicemen had to reconcile their strong feelings to care for the Japanese graves, but it is the mothers of the soldiers lying here in a foreign land that captivate Carol.

H.G. and Joel seek more details about the Cowra Breakout at the Visitors' Centre, but for Joel, the history of the Breakout is only a veneer. He resolves to explore the social issues confronting Cowra, including male suicide and the boredom that confronts the youth.

Carol sticks to the tourist path and visits the Lachlan Valley Railway Museum to learn more of the ghosts that inhabit some of the carriages. Although lighthearted, the theme of dying and loss keeps emerging. Carol reveals her own tragic story and for the first time writes about it.

Joel's conundrum is whether to tell it like he sees it, or to be polite to the people of Cowra. To this end, he only just finishes his poem 20 minutes prior to the slam.

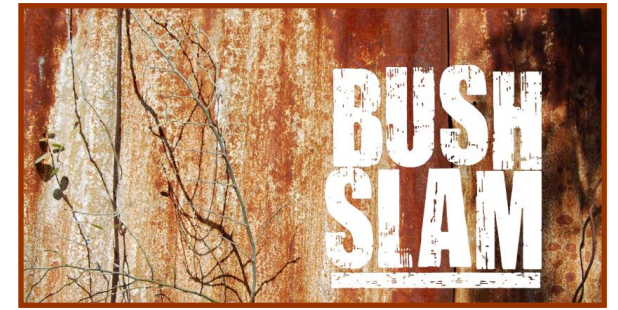
In the beautiful setting of the Cowra Japanese Gardens, two poems are performed that tackle hefty emotional and social subjects.



Ep 2: ABC1 TUESDAY 5 JANUARY 2010 @ 8PM

STANLEY, TAS

JAMES BLUNDELL & GEOFF GOODFELLOW



BUSH SLAM drops anchor in the fishing town of Stanley on the northwest coast of Tasmania. Blue-collar poet, Geoff Goodfellow, and country musician, James Blundell, step ashore to capture this charming town's character in verse in just three days and perform their poems to the citizens in a poetry slam at the local pub.

H.G. and James kick off proceedings with a trip to the top of "The Nut", an old volcano that towers above the town.

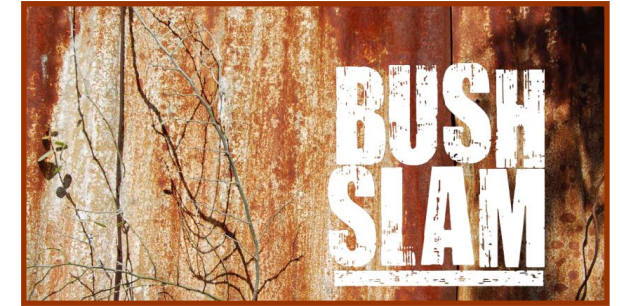
Meanwhile, Geoff, who has recently recovered from throat cancer, is drawn toward the local fishing industry that has reinvented itself to remain viable. He is inspired by the people who make their living from the sea and takes a trip out to a seal colony on board a tourist charter boat. The big success story in town is the farmed octopus industry and Geoff visits the processing plant and gives an impromptu performance of his poems to the workers. But Geoff is also taken with the weatherboard cottages, stone buildings and tin roofs that dominate the town's architecture. He remains cagey about his poem right up to the time of performing it to the townsfolk.

James takes a different path and talks to the parents of Patrick Hursey, a young man who was lost in a tragic accident at sea, hoping it may provide the basis of a poetic tribute to their family and the town. But there is also the seductive tale of Juliana's ghost that inhabits the stately Highfield House. James offers a fascinating insight into the songwriting process and demonstrates how his poem takes on a different hue when put to music.

This picturesque profile of one of Australia's prettiest towns culminates in a lively performance of two poems to the enthusiastic crowd at the Stanley pub.

Ep 3: ABC1 TUESDAY 12 JANUARY 2009 @ 8PM

CORRYONG, VIC EMILY BALLOU & EZRA BIX



H.G. Nelson finds himself high in the saddle as **BUSH SLAM** arrives in the Murray River high country, in northern Victoria. Poets Emily Ballou and Ezra Bix are challenged to capture the spirit of the area that inspired Australia's greatest poem. The Snowy Mountains and the towns of Tintaldra and Corryong provide an evocative setting for the Bush Slammers. It was in this country in the 1880's that Banjo Patterson was inspired to write *The Man From Snowy River*, Australia's best-known poem about a daring horseback chase to retrieve a prize colt on the run through the mountains.

To understand just how important poetry is to the place, H.G. first takes Ezra to meet the "poet in the post office", Betty Walton. It becomes obvious that the slammers are going to have to be on their game to measure up to the Snowy's bush ballad standards – rhyme is not only enjoyed, it's expected.

Meanwhile, Emily goes to witness a cattle muster performed on horseback, which is becoming rarer as modern methods, such as motorbikes, encroach on the romantic territory of the true bushman. Emily finds more to base her poetry on in the landscape – deep gullies, bleached bones, sloughed snake skins and sparkling rivers. Emily's experience is made all the more difficult by the fact that she has flown straight from Scotland to appear in **BUSH SLAM** and has to battle the compound effect of jet lag and insomnia. There is nothing for it other than making it part of her poetic journey.

Ezra sets out to discover the truth behind the legend of *The Man from Snowy River* by visiting the grave of Jack Riley, widely touted to be "The Man" himself. While taken by the facts behind the legend, it's Victoria's bushfires that consumes Ezra and he meets with the local Country Fire Authority to explore the nature of their heroism.

To cap off their three-day experience, Emily and Ezra witness an exciting reenactment of *The Man From Snowy River* with whips cracking, brumbies galloping and wheeling down rugged hills. They even get to hear the poem recited by a genuine bush stockman.

The head-to-head **BUSH SLAM** at the pub showcases two very different styles of poetry to the delight of the gathered crowd.