

Dr Anthony Garcia
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To the Queensland Arts Project Fund Assessment Panel,

Re: Letter of Support – Menaka Thomas

To whom it may concern,

I am pleased to support Menaka Thomas and her application to the Queensland Arts Project Fund for the creative development of a new immersive performance work in collaboration with composer, sound designer and producer Guy Webster.

I am a guitarist, composer and educator whose practice has focused extensively on improvisation, intercultural collaboration and experimental approaches to music-making. I am the Founder and Artistic Director of Sounds Across Oceans and a teaching academic at The University of Queensland School of Music. My work has involved collaborating with artists across diverse musical and cultural traditions and exploring how music, improvisation and interdisciplinary practice can create new forms of artistic expression.

I have known Menaka for a number of years through Brisbane's music and arts community and have had the opportunity to work with her in different capacities. We worked together through the BrisAsia Festival, where Menaka contributed as an Assistant Producer, and I have also come to know her artistic practice through her work as a singer, songwriter and collaborator. I have invited Menaka to contribute as an artist to events and projects I have been involved with, giving me direct experience of both her creative practice and the professionalism and collaborative approach she brings to her work.

Menaka has developed a distinctive artistic voice informed by her foundations in South Indian Carnatic music alongside contemporary songwriting and collaborative practice. Importantly, she also demonstrates a strong curiosity and willingness to move beyond familiar ways of working. I see this project as a valuable next stage in that development.

The proposed collaboration with Guy creates an opportunity for Menaka to investigate a more integrated relationship between voice, body, movement, breath, sound and technology. Her backgrounds in Carnatic music, Bharatanatyam and yoga provide a rich musical and embodied vocabulary from which this exploration can grow. Developing skills in live looping and vocal manipulation will also expand the ways she can create and communicate in a live performance environment.

Of particular value is the project's commitment to experimentation rather than beginning with a predetermined musical outcome. Creating new material through improvisation, listening and exchange allows the artists'

respective practices to influence one another. Guy's experience across sound design, composition, dance and theatre complements Menaka's practice and has the potential to generate a distinctive contemporary performance language.

This approach connects strongly with my own experience of collaborative and intercultural music-making. Through Sounds Across Oceans and projects including JADE New World Collective, I have seen the value of creating spaces where artists can experiment across musical, cultural and disciplinary boundaries. Sustained creative exchange can move beyond simply placing different traditions alongside one another and allow genuinely new artistic ideas and languages to emerge.

I am also interested in the project's exploration of the relationship between performer and audience. The use of spatial sound, movement and audience interaction offers the potential to create an experience outside a conventional concert format, while the work's different musical, cultural and embodied influences provide multiple points of connection for audiences.

The planned intimate public showing is an appropriate way to test these ideas while retaining the exploratory nature of the development. It will provide Menaka and Guy with valuable audience and peer feedback and establish a foundation from which the work could develop further, including through expanded lighting, visual and spatial elements and presentation in other performance contexts.

I strongly support Menaka undertaking this period of focused artistic development. From my experience working with her as both an arts professional and an artist, I know her to be thoughtful, collaborative and committed to the quality of her work. I believe this project represents a meaningful progression in her practice and has the potential to contribute an original new work to Queensland's contemporary and intercultural arts landscape.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Anthony Garcia

Guitarist, Composer and Educator

Founder and Artistic Director, Sounds Across Oceans

School of Music, The University of Queensland

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Garcia', with a stylized, flowing script.