

27 October 2014 *For immediate release*

The Poetry Society presents the winners of the SLAMBassadors national youth poetry slam 2014!



Sadia Ahmed performing at the
Tower Hamlets Regional Slam

The judges of the **Poetry Society's SLAMBassadors 2014** national youth poetry slam have chosen a stellar group of seven winners and 13 highly commended poets from approximately 900 entries from all across the UK – more than double the number of entries received in 2013. Spoken word superstar **Kate Tempest** joined the Artistic Director of SLAMBassadors **Joelle Taylor**, **Bea Colley** from the Southbank Centre and **Tom MacAndrew** from the Poetry Society to undertake the task of finding the very best poems from a batch of unrivalled size and quality.

The seven winners come from all over the country and their poems are as varied and diverse as the winners themselves. Aged between 13-18, these amazing young people have explored with great clarity and emotional power the subjects that matter to them most, from war and gang culture to feminism and living with autism.

Kate Tempest said of the winning poems: 'It was such an amazing collection of voices, beautiful language and captivating performances. I felt honoured and privileged to judge SLAMBassadors.'

There are seven overall winners of SLAMBassadors in 2014, four girls and two boys, all of whom will perform at the winners' showcase at **Southbank Centre, London** on **31 October**:

- **Sadia Ahmed** – 'Emotional Euthanasia'. Tower Hamlets, London. Age 13.
- **Ibukun Badmus** – 'Prayer'. Hackney, London. Age 14.
- **Abdallah Alselami** – 'The Missile That Flies'. Brent, London. Age 13.
- **Jemima Higgins** – 'Paper Dolls'. Northern Ireland. Age 17.
- **Saoirse Lennon** – 'Double Digits'. Buckinghamshire. Age 17.
- **Tommy Sissons** – 'Bittersweet'. Brighton. Age 18.
- **Kate Walters** – 'Love Note'. Coventry. Age 17.

The 13 commended poets are: **Liv B**, **Danny Baalbaki**, **Troy Banxx**, **Foyre Jalloh**, **Charlotte Knowles Cutler**, **Nimatu Marah**, **Issy Prior**, **Bethany Rose**, **Karen Sarmiento**, **Alex Tweedale**, **Amani Uddin**, **Ross Walcott** and **Slawek Wozniak**.

Four of the winners entered the competition independently, uploading videos of themselves performing their poems, and three were encouraged to enter after taking part in school workshops run by the SLAMBassadors programme.

Continues over

For further information

Telephone Robyn Donaldson
on 020 7420 9886 or email
marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk

The Poetry Society,
22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX
Tel: 020 7420 9880 Fax: 020 7240 4818
www.poetrysociety.org.uk

Page 1 of 3

The seven winners receive ongoing support from the Poetry Society, including a spoken word masterclass to guide them through writing a set for performance at Southbank Centre, a year's mentoring from Joelle Taylor and membership of the Poetry Society. This is all topped off with a chance to perform at Southbank Centre alongside feature spoken word acts **Mark Grist** – a fantastic springing-off point for any spoken word artist's career.

One of the winners, Kate Walters, is autistic. She explained that 'SLAMBassadors gives me the opportunity to stand up and speak without the need to conform to social rules; I can just talk, and because of that, it's the best platform for communication that I could possibly imagine. To have the opportunity to bring that to a wider audience is just amazing!'. Another winner, Saoirse Lennon, explained:

'I've always struggled with expressing emotion effectively... [but] I began writing and found comfort in that because I was expressing all my anxieties and getting them off my chest....To have been filmed whilst performing to my workshop class, that was a big step for me. But when I answered the phone to Joelle and she told me I had won I was overwhelmed, I had always loved writing but never thought I was really talented, it was just something I did to keep a balance.... I'm absolutely honoured to have this opportunity.'

Since it began in 2002, the Poetry Society's SLAMBassadors championship has recognised dozens of young writers who have gone on to further success. **Aisling Fahey**, recently appointed Young Laureate for London, was a SLAMBassadors winner in 2009. Other previous winners include **Chris Preddie** who went on to receive an OBE; widely-published touring artist **Anthony Anaxagorou**, and **Kayo Chingonyi** and **Jay Bernard** who have just been published in the new Bloodaxe anthology *Ten: The New Wave*.

The **2014 winners' showcase** will take place in the Clore Ballroom, Royal Festival Hall at the Southbank Centre in London on the 31st October, 4-7pm, featuring performances from all seven winners and sets by leading spoken word artists **Mark Grist** and **Joelle Taylor**. The event also includes live VJ-ing from **Ben Evenett** and **Florence Kennard** (mentored by **VJ Danielle Harper** in collaboration with **Ideas Tap**) and DJ-ing from **Hussain's House**. There is also the opportunity to hear a new piece written for SLAMBassadors by young travellers from the People of the Road project called *The Ballad of Bird McCarthy*. The showcase event is free and more information is available on the Southbank website. <http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whatson/slambassadors-uk-86339>. Admission is free.

SLAMBassadors 2014 was made possible through support from **John Lyon's Charity** and **Tower Hamlets School Library Service**.

– ENDS –

Photographs of the winners are available on request.
For further information please contact Robyn Donaldson on 020 7420 9886
or email marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk.

Notes to Editors:

SLAMBASSADORS UK

SLAMBassadors UK is the Poetry Society's dynamic national spoken word championship aimed at 12-18 year olds. Led by Joelle Taylor since 2002, it was known originally as the Rise Slam and then the Respect Slam. Since 2008, SLAMBassadors has pioneered the use of online technology to enable filmed entries to be submitted. Well-known poets and spoken word artists perform and deliver slam and performance poetry workshops in schools and youth groups, enabling the young participants to create their own poems/ raps around the theme of 'identity'. Films of each young poet performing their poem are then uploaded to the Poetry Society YouTube channel where they are judged by a panel of professional performance poets alongside independent entries made by other young poets. These films then remain as a permanent archive of both the artistry of young people and as a socio-political barometer of their thoughts and ideas. SLAMBassadors is as much about the opinions of young people as it is about the forms they choose to write and perform in.

THE POETRY SOCIETY

The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote a "more general recognition and appreciation of poetry". Since then, it has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. With innovative education and commissioning programmes

Continues over

For further information
Telephone Robyn Donaldson
on 020 7420 9886 or email
marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk

The Poetry Society,
22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX
Tel: 020 7420 9880 Fax: 020 7240 4818
www.poetrysociety.org.uk

Page 2 of 3

and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, the Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages. It publishes the magazine *The Poetry Review*, runs the National Poetry Competition, the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and the youth performance poetry championship SLAMBassadors UK. A registered charity, the Poetry Society is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. www.poetrysociety.org.uk

JOELLE TAYLOR

Joelle Taylor is the Artistic Director for SLAMBassadors UK, the national youth slam championships run by the Poetry Society. Joelle is also the coach of the UK team and delivers masterclasses and ongoing mentoring for young poets and spoken word artists (aged 12-18). She has a wide experience of working in both primary and secondary schools as well as tutoring adult poetry courses (Arvon Foundation, Poetry School, Cardboard Citizens). Her new poetry collection *The Woman Who Was Not There* is published by Burning Eye Books. She is on the OCR GCSE curriculum for secondary schools, and featured in the recent series *Educating the East End* on Channel 4.

KATE TEMPEST

Kate Tempest was born in 1985 and grew up in South-East London where she still lives. She started out as a rapper, toured the spoken word circuit for a number of years and began writing for theatre in 2012. Her work includes *Balance*, an album recorded with her band Sound of Rum; *Everything Speaks in its Own Way*, a collection of poems published on her own imprint Zingaro; *GlassHouse*, a forum theatre play for Cardboard Citizens; and the plays *Wasted* and *Hopelessly Devoted for Paines Plough*, both published by Methuen. Her epic narrative poem *Brand New Ancients* won the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry and is published by Picador. It completed a sell out run in the UK and New York and won a Herald Angel at Edinburgh Fringe. *Everybody Down*, her debut solo album, came out on Big Dada Records in 2014 to critical acclaim, including a Mercury Award nomination. Her most recent collection of poetry *Hold Your Own* is published by Picador. She is currently touring the new collection and also touring *Everybody Down*. Her debut novel *The Bricks that Built the Houses* is to be published by Bloomsbury in 2016.

MARK GRIST

Mark Grist is a poet and Educational Consultant based in Peterborough. He has been, variously, Poet Laureate of Peterborough, Chief Bard of the Fens and Edinburgh Fringe Slam Champion, and has recently been on two national tours, whilst also completing an MA in Creative Writing at Goldsmith's University in London. His double act, *Dead Poets*, appeared on BBC 6 Music with Steve Merchant, and was shortlisted for the Wooda Arts Award.

For further information

Telephone Robyn Donaldson
on 020 7420 9886 or email
marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk

The Poetry Society,
22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX
Tel: 020 7420 9880 Fax: 020 7240 4818
www.poetrysociety.org.uk