

SLAMBassadors^{UK}

The Poetry Society announces the six winners of SLAMBassadors 2013

“As a SLAMBassadors judge I don't think I have ever listened to such beautiful, touching, witty and insightful poetry before. It wasn't what I was expecting and it blasts away all the negative stereotypes of teenagers we have ever known. Amazing!” – Spoken Word icon **Hollie McNish**

On 24 September, the SLAMBassadors 2013 judges Joelle Taylor, Hollie McNish and Bea Colley came together to watch a shortlist of 33 original spoken word films centred around the theme of 'Identity', and select just six to represent the UK. After eight hours of deliberation they made their selection and we are delighted to announce that the following six young spoken word artists were chosen as the winners of SLAMBassadors 2013:

AAKIFAH ABOOBAKAR, ANNA-ROSE THOMAS, JENNY BURVILLE-RILEY, NAFEESA MOHAMMED, OLLIE O'NEILL and SAMILAH NAIRA

Joelle Taylor, Artistic Director and National Coach, said: “I cannot wait to meet this year's winning SLAMBassadors UK solo slam team. It is always difficult, if not heart-breaking, to whittle down such amazing and soulful entries to a small number.”

The all-female line-up will join Joelle Taylor in an intensive master class on 31 October, helping them to develop their performance skills to produce a full set for a SLAMBassadors showcase. This work will be premiered in the Clore Ballroom, Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, London, on **1 November at 4pm**. They'll have the chance to perform in support of Hollie McNish, in a show that will also feature underground DJs and live VJ-ing, from a pair of lucky VJs chosen in an online competition in association with **Ideastap**. As well as receiving ongoing mentoring, the winners will also be invited to participate in a new commission to write poetry inspired by and for a First World War exhibition by the **London Transport Museum** in 2014.

The judges said the following of the chosen artists and their pieces:

Aakifah Aboobakar – 'One Word, One Name'

“Aakifah has chosen not to share her film with the general public for religious reasons. Her winning poem details the reasons for this and is a strong and beautiful defence of all women who demand the right to choose what they wear.”

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Anna-Rose Thomas – ‘She’

“Anna-Rose has written some of the most confrontational and soul-ripping poetry we have ever heard. Her poem, ‘She’, will be remembered for years and years to come. In our estimation it is one of the most profound pieces written by a young woman coming to terms with gender identity in 2013. Her use of language is powerful, heart-breaking and imagistic beyond belief.”

Jenny Burville-Riley – ‘Identity Projected’

“Extraordinary use of metaphor, simile and wild, passionate imagery that immediately stunned and won over the judges from Jenny, also a winner of the prestigious Foyle Young Poet of the Year Awards this year. A remarkable achievement.”

Nafeesa Mohammed – ‘Tattoos’

“A beautiful, elegant writer of passionate free verse poetry that she breathes further life into on stage. Nafeesa was also the overall winner of the Buckinghamshire Slam Championships, also organised by SLAMBassadors.”

Ollie O’Neill – ‘Dyke’

“Dark, haunting, powerful, magnetic... These are just some of the words that go some of the way to explaining Ollie’s writing and performance craft. Quite stunning. Dyke is a positive and power-filled poem that will inspire thousands of people to be proud of themselves and their journeys.”

Samilah Naira – ‘Denied Identity’

“Samilah is a writer of complexity, passion, fury and layers. Some of her lines had the judges slapping the tables. It is difficult to believe that she is only 14 years old and she has written something that helps to define life itself. The spoken word world needs artists like this.”

– ENDS –

Joelle Taylor, SLAMBassadors Artistic Director, is available for interview. To find out more, please contact Robyn Donaldson on 020 7420 9886, or email marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk

Notes to Editors:

• **SLAMBassadors UK** is the Poetry Society’s dynamic national spoken word championship aimed at 12-18 year olds, which on its inception in 2008 pioneered the use of online technology to submit entries, and to create a national archive of youth poetry. Well-known poets and spoken word artists perform and deliver slam and performance poetry workshops in schools and youth groups, enable the young participants to create their own poems/ raps around the theme of Identity, and then film each young poet performing their poem. These films are then uploaded to the Poetry Society YouTube channel where they are judged by a panel of professional performance poets. Crucially, these films remain as a constant 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.

• **Hollie McNish** has released two poetry albums, *Touch* and *Push Kick*, both to critical acclaim, and a first collection of written poetry, *Papers*. She has appeared in venues as diverse as Glastonbury festival, Ronnie Scott’s Jazz Bar, and Cambridge University, and has had poems commissioned by Radio 4 *Woman’s Hour*, WOW festival, Tate Modern and Channel 4 *Random Acts*. She performs across the UK as well as abroad, with previous tours and residencies in Belgium, Australia, France and Portugal, and for the British Council in Latvia and Poland. She is a former UK Slam champion and represented the country at the World Slam, coming third. In May 2013 she released a poetry film *Mathematics* to YouTube. It has gained over 1.2 million hits and is still rising.
www.holliemcnish.com

• **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 Master Classes and ongoing mentoring for young poets and spoken word artists (aged 12-19). She has a wide experience of working in both primary and secondary schools – and is the Poet in Residence at both Kingsmead Primary in Hackney and Newstead Wood School for Girls in Kent – as well as tutoring adult poetry courses (Arvon Foundation, Poetry School, Cardboard Citizens).

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• **VJ-ing Competition in association with Ideastap** - the Poetry Society and Ideastap are looking for two emerging VJ artists to support the poets' performances at the annual national final for SLAMBassadors UK in the Clore Ballroom at the Southbank Centre and have a masterclass with professional VJ Danielle Harper. Please apply by submitting your CV and a visual track to the poem 'Last Poet Standing', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GasEftVfyLL>. Joelle Taylor and VJ Harper will then select the lucky pair from all the uploaded entries.

• **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 and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, the Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages. It publishes the magazine *Poetry Review*, runs the National Poetry Competition, the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and the youth performance poetry championship SLAMBassadors UK. www.poetrysociety.org.uk