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Mayor Karen Bass and Los Angeles Public Library Announce Brian Sonia-Wallace as L.A.'s Poet Laureate

LOS ANGELES (April 29, 2026)—Mayor Karen Bass, in partnership with the Los Angeles Public Library and the Department of Cultural Affairs, today announced Brian Sonia-Wallace as Los Angeles' Poet Laureate, marking a new chapter in one of the City's most distinguished literary programs. A nationally-recognized poet, Sonia-Wallace is known for composing spontaneous poems on his 1938 Remington typewriter for passersby, transforming everyday spaces into sites of creativity and connection. In celebration of [National Poetry Month's](#) 30th Anniversary, Brian made his first stop at Central Library where he typed his inaugural poem. Watch the announcement [here](#).

"Poetry belongs to every Angeleno, and Brian Sonia-Wallace has a wonderful gift for bringing people together through its power," said Mayor Bass. "I am proud to name him our next Poet Laureate and look forward to the inspiration and connection he will foster across the many communities that make up our great city."

City Librarian John F. Szabo added, "The Poet Laureate plays a vital role in connecting Angelenos to literature and to one another. We are thrilled to welcome Brian Sonia-Wallace, whose innovative approach to poetry meets people where they are and invites them into a creative process."

Selected through a competitive, citywide process, Sonia-Wallace will serve a one-year term as a cultural ambassador for Los Angeles, helping to elevate poetry, expand access to the arts, and engage communities through public programming.

"My guiding vision is simple: a Poetry City, where every neighborhood has access to poetry as connective tissue," said Sonia-Wallace. "L.A. is full of poets! Why shouldn't every coffee shop and bookstore have a poet-in-residence? There's the possibility in this role to create a blueprint for that enduring ecosystem."

The City of Los Angeles Poet Laureate program, established in 2012 as a collaboration between the [Los Angeles Public Library](#) and the [Department of Cultural Affairs](#), aims to inspire civic dialogue and celebrate the city's cultural richness through written and spoken word. Since its inception, the Los Angeles Poet Laureate program has honored some of the nation's most esteemed literary voices, including Eloise Klein Healy, Luis J. Rodriguez, Robin Coste Lewis, and Lynne Thompson.

"Brian Sonia-Wallace is an acclaimed poet and cultural worker who has an inspiring ability to bring poetry into the public square," said Daniel Tarica, General Manager of the Department of Cultural Affairs. "Sonia-Wallace's work connects us through our shared humanity, and with his commitment to intercultural exchange, environmental and social justice, and LGBTQ+ rights, Sonia-Wallace will bring a voice and vision to Angelenos that

connects communities through a shared love of poetry. As Los Angeles' next Poet Laureate, we look forward to celebrating Los Angeles' rich history of poetry together as a city.”

The Poet Laureate role is to serve as a visionary storyteller who illuminates the present, imagines new possibilities, and inspires emerging writers, thinkers, and young people to find their creative voices. The Poet Laureate will engage communities through inclusive poetry events, with a special focus on reaching residents who have limited access to poetry or expressive writing.

About Brian Sonia-Wallace

Brian Sonia-Wallace is a Los Angeles–based poet, educator, and public artist whose work lives at the intersection of poetry, civic space, and queer community care. His path to poetry began unexpectedly. As a child, he used drawing to connect with others. Reading and writing came later, and not easily. Because he was placed in remedial reading and struggled with typing, his mom made him type a page a day at age ten. He quickly realized poetry, with its line breaks, moved much faster. So he began writing a poem every day for years. The practice stuck.

In young adulthood, after being laid off from a job, Brian took a 1960 Smith Corona typewriter onto the streets of Los Angeles and began composing poems on the spot for passersby, attempting to pay his rent through poetry. This experiment became the origin of RENT Poet, a project grounded in the belief that poetry can be immediate, personal, and accessible. Influenced by his organizing work around street vending, he developed a model of creative exchange that meets people where they are—in parks, transit hubs, and public gatherings—transforming poetry into a shared, real-time experience.

What began as a solo endeavor has grown into a collaborative enterprise. RENT Poet now brings teams of poets to weddings, corporate events, and Pride celebrations, creating one-on-one typewriter poems for thousands each year while generating paid opportunities for artists. The project reflects Brian’s guiding belief that “everyone deserves a poem.”

Brian is the author of *The Poetry of Strangers* (HarperCollins, 2020) and *Maze Mouth* (Moon Tide Press, 2023), and his writing has appeared in *Rolling Stone*, *The Guardian*, and *Lit Hub*. A former Poet Laureate of West Hollywood, he has completed residencies with organizations including Amtrak and the Mall of America. He teaches through the UCLA Extension Writers Program and holds an M.A. from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, in arts for activism. Brian grew up bilingual in Culver City and Santiago, Chile, and works in English and Spanish.

In 2021, he received a Poet Laureate Fellowship from the Academy of American Poets, supporting his efforts to expand poetry access through innovative, community-centered programming. Across his work, he remains committed to honoring individual stories and reimagining poetry as a living, participatory art form.

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