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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local speech and drama studio celebrates national success as three students named NZ Speech & Drama Ambassadors.

Rotorua-based drama educator Jennifer Wicks is celebrating a standout year, with three of her students named among just 22 recipients nationwide in the prestigious NZ Speech & Drama Ambassadors Awards.

All three Rotorua recipients were taught by Wicks through **Theatrics Speech and Drama Academy**, highlighting nearly three decades of dedication to developing confident, capable young communicators. Wicks, who runs Theatrics, has spent 27 years teaching drama, including five years as a curriculum drama teacher and more than two decades as a private Speech and Drama and Public Speaking tutor. She is also an Accredited Performance Examiner with Speech New Zealand, a role she has held for six years.

"This recognition is incredibly special, not just for the students but for what it represents," says Wicks. "Speech and drama builds confidence, resilience, and the ability to communicate with clarity and purpose. Seeing these students recognised at a national level is hugely rewarding."

The three Rotorua Ambassadors are:

Matilda Moffat – Junior category

- Having trained with Wicks since she was five, Matilda is now approaching seven years of study and is currently working towards her Grade 3 Speech and Drama exams. Matilda was named Most Promising Performer (Under 10) at the Rotorua 2025 Speech and Drama Competition and won first place for her Mrs Trunchbull characterisation, which she also performed at school assembly and showcase events. She continues to build her stage experience with multiple roles in her school production and as a speech finalist at school level. Matilda is in Year 7 at John Paul College.

Sam Jensen – Intermediate category

- A dedicated student with Theatrics since age seven, Sam is currently working towards Level 5 in his Speech and Drama exams. Last year he won the national GreatTALK speech competition in the year 8 division for his speech imagining what Aotearoa/NZ would look like if we had adopted the Māori version of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840. He also won the trophy for highest marks in Light Verse at the 2025 Rotorua Speech and Drama Competition among other accolades. Sam is in year 9 at Rotorua Lakes High School.

Gargi Vaidya – Senior category

- One of Wicks' long-term students, Gargi trained from Year 4 through to Year 13, graduating from Theatrics Academy in 2024 with an Associate Performance Diploma with Distinction. She is now pursuing a conjoint degree in Global Studies (International Relations and International Business) and Law while contributing to multiple leadership and advocacy roles, including as Executive Committee member for Global Studies (Marketing and Social Media Manager), Campaign Officer for Amnesty Campus, and a member of the TEDx Youth curation team.

The NZ Speech & Drama Ambassadors Awards recognise outstanding young people across Aotearoa who demonstrate excellence not only in performance, but also in leadership, creativity, and community contribution.

"This year's Ambassadors were selected for their ability to bring more than performance to the stage," states Michelle Anderson, spokesperson for the awards. "They represent the future of the art form as confident communicators who inspire others both on and off the stage."

For Wicks, the recognition reinforces the broader value of speech and drama education. "It's not just about performance. It's about giving young people the tools to express themselves, to lead, and to contribute meaningfully in whatever path they choose."

With three of the country's 22 Ambassadors coming from Rotorua, specifically from Theatrics, Wicks says it's a strong signal of the depth of talent in the region. "Rotorua has some exceptional talent and it's great to see my students recognised on the national stage. These students are proof of what's possible with commitment, support, and a willingness to step outside your comfort zone."

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Gargi Vaidya



Sam Jensen



Matilda Moffat

