

Media Release
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Ahmed 'Knowmadic' Ali named Edmonton's seventh Poet Laureate

Edmonton – On July 1, 2017, Ahmed Ali will become Edmonton's newest Poet Laureate. The award-winning poet, also known as 'Knowmadic', is a full-time writer, actor, comedian, public speaker and youth worker who inspires with his dynamic, thought-provoking and humorous poetry.

"Becoming Edmonton's Poet Laureate is beyond an honour and accomplishment," said Ali. "It is a testament that art is boundless and that it does not recognize borders. It also affirms my belief that our experiences are a collection of poems that are written into history."

Born in Mogadishu, Somalia, Ali and his family left Somalia to escape the civil war in 1989. He experienced intense culture shock, first moving to Italy then Canada, and quickly learned what it meant to be different. During his youth Ali struggled to value his culture and religion, while managing confrontations with fellow students and authority. After a trip to visit his family in Somalia, Ali returned to Canada with a new outlook on life. He enrolled in Comedy Writing and Performance at Humber College in Toronto, Ontario, eventually returning to Edmonton to support his family's transition back into Canada. Ali performed his poetry for the first time during the Edmonton Poetry Festival where he met Titilope Sonuga. Sonuga introduced him to Rouge Poetry, where he instantly fell in love with spoken word and led him to become one of the founding members of the Breath in Poetry Collective. He has since become the first Somali spoken word champion at the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word; toured Wales, England, where he facilitated poetry workshop in a correctional facility, represented Canada at an International Literary conference; and, received the Northlands Emerging Artist Award in 2015.

"The City of Edmonton is proud to welcome Ahmed Ali as our newest Poet Laureate," said Mayor Don Iveson. "With his diverse and unique background, he is sure to bring a new style and perspective to our city. I look forward to hearing some of Edmonton's stories come alive through his poetry."

More than an accomplished poet, Ali uses his talents to inspire and uplift the local community. Since 2009, Breath in Poetry has provided a safe performance space, cultivating a vibrant workshop and performance opportunity for Edmonton's emerging literary and spoken word poets. Ali brings poetry into the lives of Edmonton's youth including at The Green Room's spoken word program, and Edmonton Public Schools through in-class readings and residencies. He teaches poetry as a positive form of self-expression and exploration of identity. As a poet and community builder, Ali brings a contagious positivity and inclusivity to everything he does.

Supported by The City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Arts Council and the Edmonton Public Library, the role of Edmonton's Poet Laureate is to reflect the life of the city through readings and poetry. As an ambassador for the literary arts, the Laureate brings poetry into a range of official and informal city events.

"We have been fortunate to experience a wide range of poetic styles and viewpoints from our Poets Laureate. Current Poet Laureate Pierrette Requier is deeply embedded in Edmonton's francophone community, and with her experience as a teacher, is excellent at engaging with children and youth," said Edmonton Arts Council Executive Director, Sanjay Shahani. "Ali brings to the role his extensive experience as a leader in Edmonton's vibrant spoken word scene, his passion for bridging diverse cultures, and above all, his contagious positivity that we believe will inspire citizens of all walks of life."

Ahmed Ali will serve a two-year term as Edmonton's Poet Laureate. Pierrette Requier's term as Poet Laureate ends on June 30, 2017.

"EPL is proud to support this program as we truly believe it is vital to share Edmonton's stories, including through the powerful medium of poetry," said Pilar Martinez, Chief Executive Officer of the Edmonton Public Library. "We have been fortunate to hear many poets' words about our city, and are eager to have Ahmed "Knowmadic" Ali's poetic contributions over the next two years."

Keep informed about Ali's events by following @AKnowmadic on Twitter and Facebook.

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The Edmonton Arts Council is a not-for-profit organization that supports and promotes the arts community in Edmonton. The EAC works to increase the profile and involvement of arts and culture in all aspects of our community life.

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