

First Nations Artist Residency Program

Melbourne International Jazz Festival, the Australian Art Orchestra, and Songlines Aboriginal Music respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our festival and activities take place, the People of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, as well as to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the wider Melbourne community and beyond. We are honoured to contribute to the over 60,000 years of music making and culture that has taken place on this land.

Program Overview

The First Nations Artist Residency Program is an artistic and professional development initiative presented in partnership between the Melbourne International Jazz Festival (MIJF), the Australian Art Orchestra (AAO), and Songlines Music Aboriginal Corporation. The program supports the career development of a First Nations musician with a practice in jazz, improvisation, singer-songwriter music, hip-hop, soul, or contemporary art music and its composition.

The successful candidate will receive:

- A \$7,500 commission fee to develop a new work.
- A performance outcome at the Melbourne International Jazz Festival 2026, including a separate performance fee.
- Up to \$5,000 for professional and artistic development opportunities, as negotiated with the AAO.
- Mentorship with AAO to develop and present the work, and the option to participate in the AAO's yearly program of creative workshops.
- Producing support and mentorship from MIJF staff to develop and present the work.
- Consultation session(s) with the AAO's First Nations Artistic Advisory Circle (Kutcha Edwards, Brenda Gifford and David Arden)
- Mentoring and consultation with Songlines Music Aboriginal Corporation (Uncle Rob Bundle).
- Ticketing package for MIJF 2025/26 and artistic/industry networking opportunities.

Timeline:

- 23 June 2025 – Applications open
- 28 July 2025, 5pm – Applications close
- August 2025 – October 2026 – Project development: new work and professional development
- 16-25 October 2026 – Performance as part of Melbourne International Jazz Festival (exact date/time TBC)



Program Partners

Melbourne International Jazz Festival

Now in its 28th year, the Melbourne International Jazz Festival is Australia's leading platform for the promotion of jazz and improvised music. Over ten days in October, the Festival's annual program features over 130 performances and events showcasing 600 international and local artists and attracting over 60,000 attendees. Alongside a bold artistic program of commissioned works, world premieres, and cross-cultural collaborations, MIJF delivers a year-round sector development program aimed at fostering the next generation of Australian talent. The First Nations Artist Residency Program sits within the organisation's broader Artist Development Program, which seeks to promote diversity and inclusion in jazz and improvised music.

Australian Art Orchestra

The Australian Art Orchestra (AAO) is an agile music organisation and a multi-faceted, flexible chamber orchestra that creates dynamic music with a through-line of improvisation, rooted in jazz and experimental practices. The ensemble revolves around a regular and diverse pool of collaborators drawn from all over Australia, with international guests added to the mix, expanding and contracting numbers to adapt instrumentation to specific projects. Now under the artistic leadership of Aaron Choulai, the AAO continues to push the boundaries of art music, finding new connections to Hip-hop, the music of our region and expanding our professional networks in Asia. Embracing its leadership responsibilities, the AAO dedicates itself to energising the next generation of creative musicians, creating professional development and career opportunities.

Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation

Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation is the leading organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music and events in Victoria. Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation hosts some of Victoria's largest Indigenous music events, providing a valuable contribution to Indigenous social development through the arts.

Program Details

Part One: Commission and Performance at Melbourne International Jazz Festival

The program leader will receive a \$7,500 commissioning fee to develop a new work for presentation at the 2026 Melbourne International Jazz Festival. Over the course of 15 months (July 2025 – October 2026), the AAO will advise and assist with professional development towards the delivery of the project. The date, time and venue of the premiere performance will be mutually agreed upon between the recipient and MIJF.

Part Two: \$5,000 towards professional and artistic development

The program leader will receive up to \$5,000 toward professional and artistic development opportunities, based on the experience, needs and aspirations of the successful candidate. Examples of how this money could be used include but are not limited to:

- Mentoring sessions or lessons with artists/creative professionals of your choosing
- Participation at an industry-networking event such as APAM or Big Sound
- Attendance at festivals, performances, or events, for the purpose of creative research and/or networking
- Short courses or workshops aimed at upskilling in areas such as new approaches to composition, marketing, social media, self-management, or music administration
- Travel costs associated with professional development activities

This component of the residency program will be driven by the successful recipient, supported through the shared networks and industry connections of MIJF and AAO. The program leader will also have the option to participate in the AAO's yearly program of creative workshops.

Eligibility Criteria – who can apply?

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander musicians currently residing in Australia are eligible to apply. The program is open to a broad range of musical genres with the aim to support experimentation and improvisation within and across genres.

Artist Requirements

The successful applicant must:

- Commit to the development of a new work for performance as part of the 2026 MIJF program.
- Be available to perform at MIJF between 16-25 October 2026, for which the artist will be paid a separate performance fee.
- Regularly communicate with the AAO and MIJF staff on the progress of their professional development program and commission.
- Commit to being available for media/promotional opportunities as reasonably requested from time-to-time by MIJF and/or AAO.



Application Process

Please submit the following application materials [via our online form](#) by 5.00pm AEST on Monday 28 July 2025.

- Short answers to the following questions:
 1. Provide a brief summary of your experience as a musician and/or composer.
 2. What is your proposal/concept for the new work for your MIJF performance?
 3. What is your proposal for investing up to \$5,000 toward your professional and/or artistic development in 2025/6? (see pg. 2 for examples)
- Up to 3 representative audio/video samples of your performance work (online links preferred – i.e. Bandcamp, Soundcloud, Dropbox, YouTube, Vimeo, please provide passwords where necessary)

Shortlisted applicants will be contacted by MIJF to arrange a short interview, either in-person or online. Our panel team comprises MIJF, AAO and First Nations representatives.

If you require any help completing this application form and would like to discuss alternative application methods, including video or phone applications, please get in touch with Merinda, Tom or Aaron on the details below.

For any questions or assistance with your application please don't hesitate to contact us on:

Merinda Dias-Jayasinha, MIJF Associate Producer & Programs Coordinator on merinda@melbournejazz.com or by calling (03) 9001 1388

Tom Browne, MIJF Senior Producer & Programmer on tom@melbournejazz.com or by calling (03) 9001 1388

Aaron Choulai, AAO Artistic Director on aaron@aao.com.au or by calling 0498 692 264

[CLICK HERE TO APPLY](#)



Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to be a jazz musician to apply?

No! The program is open to a broad range of genres, including but not limited to jazz, soul, hip-hop, art music, and other forms of improvised music. If you're unsure, get in touch with us and we can chat about the kind of music you make.

Is the program open to artists at all stages of their career?

It sure is – from emerging artists right through to seasoned pros, the First Nations Artist Residency is designed to be tailored to the individual needs and career aspirations of the recipient.

Do I need to be a composer?

You do not need to identify as a composer. If you are a creator or producer of music, then we are keen to hear from you. That said, you will need to feel confident communicating your musical ideas with other musicians so that you can present your commission at MIJF. You don't necessarily need to have training as a composer or use traditional methods of writing music.

I am based outside of Melbourne – can I apply?

Yes! The First Nations Artist Residency Program has been adapted to allow for flexible schedules during the development of your commission for presentation at the Melbourne International Jazz Festival (16-25 October 2026, exact date/time of performance TBC).

Please note that your \$5,000 professional development fund can be used to cover travel to/from Melbourne throughout the year. However, flights and accommodation for your performance at MIJF will be covered separately. Reach out if you want to discuss your individual requirements prior to applying.

What does the professional development process look like?

We will have an initial meeting to discuss how you would like to use the funding to support your professional and creative development, which we will then help design to suit your needs. From there, you will have regular supervision meetings with a member of the AAO's artistic team to workshop the commission over the course of 15 months.

What has the First Nations Artist Residency been like in previous years?

The inaugural program leader in 2021 was award-winning musician, dancer, director and proud Djab Wurrung/Gunditj Mara and Ngarrindjeri man, **Amos Roach**. With support from the AAO, Amos composed *Six Seasons*, a suite of music which he premiered at the Melbourne Recital Centre during MIJF 2021. The work featured



Amos on yidaki, Maria Moles on drums, Adrian Sherriff on trombone/shakuhachi, and Stephen Magnusson on guitar, as well as the Murrundaya Yepengna dancers.

In 2022 the program leader was composer and Yuin woman, **Brenda Gifford**. Brenda presented her commission *Moriyawa* at the Melbourne Recital Centre, inspired by the migration of whales and their significance in stories of creation. The performance featured Brenda on saxophone, Reuben Lewis on trumpet and electronics, Aviva Endean on clarinets, Andrea Keller on piano, Helen Svoboda on bass, Joe Brown McLeod on didjeridoo/clapsticks, and Maria Moles on drums. You can read more about Brenda's performance [here](#).

The 2023/24 resident artist was award-winning Noongar woman and Naarm-based vocalist and artist, **Bumpy**. In 2024, Bumpy presented her deeply moving and personal commission, *Tooni* at Arts Centre Melbourne's Fairfax Studio. Bumpy was supported to develop the work over an 18-month period, including travelling to Noongar Boodja with her mother. Bumpy said, "The trip back home with my family was an incredible reminder of the power that runs in my blood. A reminder to share stories with our old people and deeply listen. To step out and see how impactful the people directly around us are. And to continue practising your sovereign rights, cultural practices and language".

In August 2024, MIJF and the AAO announced composer and percussionist **Adam Manning** as the 2024/25 First Nations Artist Residency program leader. Born on Awabakal/Worimi Country, and with Kamilaroi kinship, Manning wears many hats—musician, artist, designer, producer and researcher at the University of Newcastle, NSW. He has shared the stage with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and his compositions have also found a home on ABC Classic. Through his expert use of percussion, Manning's rhythmic expressions connect him to Land, People, Culture and Story—articulating the natural frequency (heartbeat) of Ngaya Barray (Mother Earth). Adam Manning says of the program: "I'm incredibly excited to dive into this residency and explore new ways to connect rhythm and culture".

Where can I find more info about the Melbourne International Jazz Festival?

If you would like to know more, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Merinda or Tom at MIJF. Previous Melbourne International Jazz Festival programs can be found [here](#).

Where can I find more info about the Australian Art Orchestra?

If you would like to know more, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Aaron at AAO. You can find out more about the AAO [here](#).

Where can I find more info about Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation?

You can find out more about Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation [here](#).