

First Nations Artist Residency Program

Melbourne International Jazz Festival, the Australian Art Orchestra and Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation 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 from MIJF to develop a new work.
- A performance outcome at the Melbourne International Jazz Festival 2027, including a separate performance fee.
- A \$7,500 professional and artistic development bursary from the AAO.
- Producing support and mentorship from MIJF and AAO staff to develop and present the work.
- Consultation session(s) with a member of AAO's First Nations Artistic Advisory Circle (Kutch Edwards, Brenda Gifford, Adam Manning and David Arden)
- Mentoring and consultation with Songlines Music Aboriginal Corporation (Uncle Rob Bundle).
- Ticketing package for MIJF 2026/27 and artistic/industry networking opportunities.

About Melbourne International Jazz Festival

Now in its 29th 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 150 performances and events showcasing 600 international and local artists and attracting over 65,000 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.

About The Australian Art Orchestra

The Australian Art Orchestra (AAO) is an agile music organisation and one of Australia's leading contemporary ensembles with a through-line of improvisation, rooted in jazz and experimental practices. Under the artistic leadership of Aaron Choulai, its work constantly seeks to stretch genres and break down the barriers separating disciplines, forms and cultures. It explores the interstices between the avant-garde and the traditional, between art and popular music, between electronic and acoustic approaches, and creates musics that traverse the continuum between improvised and notated forms.

About Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation

Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation is the leading organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music and events in Victoria. The organisation hosts some of Victoria's largest Indigenous music events, providing a valuable contribution to Indigenous social and economic development through the arts by promoting ownership, cultural pride and unity. Songlines' artistic aim is to promote, support and present contemporary Indigenous music, arts and culture and to stimulate dialog around the role of Indigenous arts in Australian culture.

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 2027 Melbourne International Jazz Festival. The work will be developed over the course of 15 months (May 2026 – October 2027), with producing assistance from MIJF and AAO towards the delivery of the project, based around the needs of the successful candidate. The date, time and venue of the premiere performance will be mutually agreed upon between the recipient and MIJF.

Please note, the commissioned work is for a band/ensemble of your choosing. The Australian Art Orchestra are available to provide guidance, mentorship and producing support as part of the program, but are not engaged as a performing ensemble for the commission.

Part Two: Professional and Artistic Development

The program leader will also receive a \$7,500 bursary to support their professional and artistic development. How you use this funding is up to you, but we do ask as part of the application that you put together some ideas of how you might like to use the funds. Below are some examples of what the bursary could be used for:

- Mentoring sessions or lessons with musicians/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

You'll lead this part of the program, with support from MIJF and AAO and access to their networks and industry connections. We'll discuss your professional and artistic development plans before the program begins, have regular catch ups throughout, and at the end of the program to reflect on the journey.

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 2027 MIJF program.
- Be available to perform at MIJF between 14-24 October 2027 (dates TBC), for which the artist will be paid a separate performance fee.
- Regularly communicate with MIJF and AAO staff on the progress of their commission and professional/artistic development activities.
- Commit to being available for media/promotional opportunities as reasonably requested from time-to-time by MIJF, AAO, and/or Songlines.

Timeline

- Monday 20 April 2026, 12pm – Applications open
- Tuesday 19 May 2026, 6pm – Applications close
- June 2026 – October 2027 – Project development: New work and professional development
- 14-24 October 2027 – Performance as part of Melbourne International Jazz Festival (exact date/time TBC)

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Application Process

Please submit the following application materials [via our online form](#) by 6.00pm AEST on Tuesday 19 May 2026.

- 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 commissioned work for your MIJF performance?
 3. What is your proposal for investing \$7,500 toward your professional and/or artistic development in 2026/27? (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 Executive Producer 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 successful candidate.

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 (14-24 October 2027, exact date/time of performance TBC).

Please note that your \$7,500 professional/artistic development bursary 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 can I propose for my commission?

You can propose anything! Your commission could be a brand-new project or a significant reworking of an existing work incorporating elements of jazz and improvisation. Whether it's a solo work, a collaboration, something written for your band or a small/large ensemble, the program is designed to support creative freedom and exploration, so feel free to dream big and shape a project that reflects your artistic vision.

Feel free to get in touch prior to applying if you are unsure whether your idea is suitable for the program. We would be happy to talk through your ideas and how to best communicate them in your application.

Please note that while there are no formal requirements around the length of the commission performance, we are looking for a full performance rather than one new/short piece. The performance at MIJF will ideally be its own show at the festival, rather than being part of a line-up style event.

Can I collaborate/perform with the AAO?

The Australian Art Orchestra are available to provide guidance, mentorship and producing support as part of the program, but are not engaged as a performing ensemble for the commission.

What does the professional development process look like?

You will meet with MIJF and AAO staff to chat about your commission and what you might like to use your professional and artistic development cash bursary for. MIJF and AAO staff can help to brainstorm ideas to support your career and creative needs and help to design a program that suits your needs. Examples of what the funding could be used for:

- 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

We'll discuss your professional and artistic development plans before the program begins and reconnect at the end to reflect on the journey. MIJF and AAO staff are available to help manage costs and schedules through regular check-ins over the course of the 15 months.

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

The 2025/26 program leader is Sachém, a recording artist, storyteller, and cultural documentarian who blends lyricism, spoken word and hip-hop to craft narratives that honour his heritage and lived experiences. Raised between Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) and Adelaide, he is connected to his Noonuccal roots while also drawing from his lineage in the Black American diaspora to create music that is both grounded and global. His debut album *easier said than done* is releasing October 2025.

Composer and percussionist Adam Manning was selected to be the 2024/25 First Nations Artist Residency program leader. Born on Awabakal/Worimi Country, and with Kamilaroi kinship, Manning crafted a new suite, *First Rhythms*, and performed with members of the AAO. As part of his program, he also attended the AAO's Australian improvisation Practicum.

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 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 Edean on clarinets, Andrea Keller on piano, Helen Svoboda on bass, Joe Brown McLeod on didgeridoo/clapsticks, and Maria Moles on drums. You can read more about Brenda's performance [here](#).

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.

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

Previous Melbourne International Jazz Festival programs can be found here:

<https://www.melbournejazz.com/about-us/festival-archive/>

If you would like to know more, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Merinda or Tom at MIJF.

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

You can find out more about the AAO here: <https://www.aao.com.au/projects>

If you would like to know more, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Aaron at AAO.