

# Australian Festival of Chamber Music Submission to Creative Australia / National Cultural Policy Consultation

## Strengthening Regional Cultural Ecosystems through Festivals, Artists and Indo-Pacific Exchange

The Australian Festival of Chamber Music welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next National Cultural Policy. As one of Australia's most significant fine music festivals, and the only major chamber music festival held in the tropics, AFCM is entering a transformative new chapter as it relocates to Cairns–Gimuy from 2026. This move positions the Festival to contribute meaningfully to national cultural priorities: **regional audience development, artist pathways, strong cultural infrastructure, cultural tourism, First Nations cultural leadership and international engagement**. AFCM's 2026–2029 Strategic Plan identifies five priorities: building a festival of national and international significance in northern Queensland; growing audiences and revenues; enhancing artistic, social and economic impact; expanding capacity development programs; and ensuring organisational sustainability.

AFCM supports Cairns Regional Council's NCP submission, particularly its call for targeted national investment in **regional audience development, regional creative workforce development, and creative development and commissioning**. Council's evidence base demonstrates that Cairns is already a vibrant, inclusive and creative regional city, but that gaps in funding, accessibility and infrastructure continue to limit the sector's full potential. AFCM believes Cairns–Gimuy now offers a nationally significant case study for how a regional city can connect high-quality artistic programming, First Nations cultural leadership, tourism, community engagement and creative workforce development.

AFCM recommends that the next National Cultural Policy and Creative Australia investment settings include a dedicated focus on **regional festivals as cultural infrastructure**. Festivals such as AFCM are not simply presentation platforms; they are commissioning engines, artist development environments, audience-building mechanisms, tourism drivers, civic gathering points and international connectors. In regional Australia, where professional arts infrastructure is often thinner than in capital cities, festivals play an amplified role in sustaining cultural activity, connecting local artists with national and international peers, and creating pathways for audiences to experience diverse and ambitious work.

For this reason, AFCM endorses CRC's proposed national initiatives: a **National Regional Audience Development Fund**; investment in **regional creative workforce and artist pathways**; and a **Regional Commissioning and Cultural Exchange Program**. These mechanisms would support multi-year engagement, regional touring, paid internships, fellowships, mentorships, micro-credentials, commissioning and co-commissioning opportunities, and First Nations-led cultural initiatives. They would also enable organisations such as AFCM to build long-term programs that grow audiences, retain creative talent, strengthen regional identity and connect local communities with national and international cultural networks.

AFCM's own strategic contribution to this policy agenda is the proposed **Indo-Pacific New Music Exchange — IPANEME**. IPANEME would be a distinctive national platform led from northern Australia, positioning AFCM and Cairns–Gimuy as a convening point for composers, musicians, sound artists, producers, presenters, funders, policymakers and cultural leaders working globally and across the Indo-Pacific. The concept responds to a clear gap: there is currently no dedicated platform in Australia or the broader Indo-Pacific for new music practitioners to present work, exchange ideas, build touring and commissioning relationships, and connect with international presenters and producers.

IPANEME would operate as both a **marketplace and cultural exchange platform**, combining live and digital presentation, pitching, critical dialogue, networking, professional development and curated showcase opportunities. Its proposed model includes full tour-ready works, excerpts of tour-ready work, works in progress, new project pitches, forums and debate, networking programs, and key events linked to AFCM. In this way, IPANEME would extend AFCM's role from festival presenter to regional cultural infrastructure: a platform that supports Australian, First Nations and Indo-Pacific artists to build international visibility, new partnerships, touring opportunities and co-commissioning pathways.

IPANEME also aligns strongly with Revive's existing commitments to international cultural engagement, including strengthening arts collaboration and exchange, cultural diplomacy, and creative links with the Indo-Pacific region. It would translate these national priorities into a practical regional mechanism: an Indo-Pacific exchange platform based in Cairns–Gimuy, connected to a major international festival, and grounded in northern Australia's proximity to Asia and the Pacific. This would demonstrate that Australia's international cultural leadership need not be driven only through capital-city institutions; regional festivals can also act as agile, place-based platforms for cultural diplomacy, artistic innovation and long-term sector development.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise that regional Australia is not peripheral to national cultural life. It is where many of Australia's most distinctive stories, landscapes, audiences and cultural futures are being shaped. AFCM urges Creative Australia and the Australian Government to embed regional cultural ecosystems as a core national priority, with long-term investment in audiences, artists, commissioning, First Nations leadership, cultural infrastructure and Indo-Pacific exchange. Through AFCM's relocation to Cairns–Gimuy and the development of IPANEME, northern Australia can become a nationally significant model for how regional festivals deliver local value, national impact and international cultural connection.