

Australian Festival of Chamber Music

January 15, 2026

Rising global composer to create musical tribute to Cairns World premiere to headline Opening Night of Australian Festival of Chamber Music 2026

CAIRNS–GIMUY, QLD — Young composer **Sam Wu**, who grew up in Melbourne and now calls Washington home, has been commissioned to create a major new musical work celebrating the **150th anniversary of Cairns–Gimuy** as a city, with its **world premiere** to feature as a highlight of the **Opening Night Concert** of the **Australian Festival of Chamber Music (AFCM)** in 2026.

The commission, supported by Cairns Regional Council, marks a significant double milestone: honouring Cairns–Gimuy's anniversary and launching the first-ever AFCM to be staged in Cairns–Gimuy, ushering in a bold new chapter for the internationally acclaimed Festival.

The new work will be performed by Festival Artists including internationally celebrated pianist **Piers Lane** (born in North Queensland), **AFCM Artistic Director** and renowned British violinist **Jack Liebeck**, alongside **Emmalena Huning, Stefanie Farrands, Julian Smiles, Lloyd van't Hoff and Josh Batty**.

Described as a cinematic soundtrack to Cairns–Gimuy, the work will be shaped by the city itself. Wu will draw inspiration from local artists, music students, landscapes and community stories, developed during a recent immersive stay in the region and meetings with the **Mayor of Cairns**.

Sam Wu is the **first AFCM Emerging Composer-in-Residence**, thanks to support from Music Australia and Creative Australia. The 2026 Festival program will also feature work from Sam's past repertoire.

Wu has also been commissioned to create a new work specifically for the AFCM Fellowship Ensemble, through the Emerging Composers Program. This second commission forms part of the **AFCM Pathways Program**, and will be performed at AFCM 2026 by the Orpheus Quintet. The Quintet will tour the new work in **Cairns, Mossman, Innisfail, Townsville, Charters Towers and Ayr** ahead of the Festival. The composition will also be recorded and released, accompanied by a music video filmed on location during the Festival.

In the past week Sam has led school workshops at **Trinity Anglican School** and **St Augustine's College**.

In yet another coup, Sam has been appointed an **Ambassador for Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ)**. He will spend 7 days in the region, experiencing the Great Barrier Reef, rainforest and local culture, while engaging with schools and the wider community.

"Sam is a young composer of exceptional talent with a remarkable international trajectory," said **AFCM Executive Director Ricardo Peach**. "His ability to connect place, people and story through music makes him the ideal artist to create a work of this significance for Cairns–Gimuy."

Sam said as the inaugural Pathways Program composer he was delighted to be commissioned to write not one, but two pieces for AFCM!

“While one commission is tailor-made for the Orpheus Quintet, and the other for the Cairns Regional Council celebrating the city's 150th birthday, both pieces are inspired by my recent visit to Cairns, a vibrant city where rainforest meets reef,” he said.

Wu has collaborated with leading orchestras and organisations across five continents, including orchestras in Philadelphia, Minnesota, Melbourne, Tasmania, Macao and Shanghai, the New York City Ballet, Cabrillo Festival and Sydney International Piano Competition. He holds degrees from Harvard, Juilliard and Rice University, and is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of Theory and Composition at Whitman College in the United States.

“Hosting the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Cairns–Gimuy for the first time is a big moment for our city,” said **Cairns Mayor Amy Eden**. “To open the Festival with a world premiere created for this occasion makes it even more special, because it’s a celebration we can all share, while showcasing our city on a global stage.”

“As we mark 150 years of Cairns–Gimuy, this project is a meaningful way to reflect on where we’ve come from, where we’re heading, and to create something new that speaks to the people of Cairns.”

From **24 July to 1 August 2026**, the Australian Festival of Chamber Music will unfold across Cairns–Gimuy over nine glorious winter-sun-filled days, presenting world-class chamber music against the backdrop of the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef.

The full 2026 AFCM program will be announced on Monday 2 February, with tickets on sale to AFCM Friends the same day, and to the general public on Monday 2 March.

Australian Festival of Chamber Music: 24 July – 1 August, 2026

MONDAY 2 FEBRUARY: tickets on sale to AFCM Friends

MONDAY 2 MARCH: tickets on sale to the general public.

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AFCM is supported by the Queensland Government through Tourism and Events Queensland and Arts Queensland; Cairns Regional Council; the Ian Potter Foundation; and the Australian Government through Music Australia and Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body.

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