
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PIANO AWARD

Australian National Piano Award 2026 Rules and Information

for the 17th biennial Award presentation
5 – 10 October 2026

Australian National Piano Award Shepparton Incorporated

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Mission

The Australian National Piano Award champions Australia's finest young pianists, offering career-defining opportunities before international adjudicators in a world-class biennial competition. Hosted in Shepparton, it unites national talent and community, enriching regional Victoria through inspiring performances and exceptional music, guided by an enduring commitment to artistic excellence and cultural growth.

Australian National Piano Award

The Australian National Piano Award is a prestigious biennial event showcasing the finest emerging classical pianists in Australia.

Acclaimed for its international standard of excellence, the Award offers a platform for outstanding musicians aged 21 to 35 who are Australian citizens, permanent Australian residents or have lived in Australia for at least four of the five years prior to the Award.

For almost 35 years, Shepparton in regional Victoria has been home to the Award – a world-class piano festival that has become a cornerstone of Australia's classical music scene.

Co-founded by the late Professor Max Cooke OAM and Darryl Coote, and administered by the Board of the Australian National Piano Award Shepparton Incorporated, the Award was created to uncover and celebrate the natural artistic talent and technical mastery of Australia's next generation of concert pianists.

Unlike many piano competitions, finalists cannot win the Award with a single standout performance. Instead, they must perform a demanding and diverse range of solo recitals, demonstrating technical brilliance, expressive maturity and artistic depth across works by composers such as Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Messiaen, Vine and many others.

Every two years, a panel of esteemed adjudicators selects a group of finalists from submitted audition recordings. These finalists then compete in a week-long public recital series at Riverlinks Eastbank in Shepparton, in pursuit of over \$75,000 in prize money.

The level of artistry expected is of true international calibre – finalists must cultivate the ability to connect audiences with some of the greatest moments in classical piano literature.

More than a competition, the Award is a significant educational and artistic milestone. It provides exposure, professional development and a vital stepping stone to international competitions and solo performance careers.

Managed by a dedicated team of volunteers, the Award remains an aspirational highlight of the classical music calendar and a powerful launchpad for Australia's most formidable young pianists onto the world stage.

Award Artistic Director

Wendy Lorenz is the Award Artistic Director, advising the Award Board on repertoire requirements and adjudication procedures. She does not participate in the selection of Award finalists or in adjudication at the Award week in Shepparton during October 2026.

2026 Award adjudicators

- Associate Professor Rae de Lisle (New Zealand)
- Amir Farid (Australia / USA)
- Timothy Steeves (Canada / USA)

2026 Rules and Information

These are the official rules for the 2026 Australian National Piano Award.

While the Award Board reserves the right to amend rules in general, no changes will be made to the 2026 Award rules.

To ensure consistency and fairness, the Award Board will strictly enforce all repertoire and timing requirements.

Key dates

Application deadlines for the 2026 Award

- October 2025 – Online applications open
- 20 March 2026 – Online applications close
- 8 May 2026 – Applicants notified

Schedule for the 2026 Award

- 29 May 2026 – deadline for Award finalists to submit biographies and headshots
- 26 June 2026 – deadline for Award finalists to submit completed repertoire forms
- 3 – 4 October 2026 – Award finalists arrive in Shepparton
- 4 October 2026 – Welcome Reception for Award finalists and adjudicators
- 5 – 8 October 2026 – Solo recitals
- 9 October 2026 – Semi final
- 10 October 2026 – Grand final and prize presentation

Eligibility

To be eligible for the 2026 Award, applicants must:

- be aged between 21 and 35 on the Award application closing date
- be an Australian citizen, permanent Australian resident or have lived in Australia for at least four of the five years prior to the Award application closing date
- not be a previous First Prize recipient

Additional conditions:

- Award adjudicators will not assess any Award finalist to whom they have given regular individual lessons in the 18 months prior to the Award week.
- The Award Board reserves the right to refuse entry to any applicant who may have or who may become involved in a conflict of interest.

Assessing applications

The Award Board Secretary and Artistic Director will coordinate the application process.

All uploaded audition recordings will be reviewed by the Award adjudicators.

Award finalists will be selected by the Award adjudicators and be invited to perform at the Award week in Shepparton during October 2026.

Award adjudicators will assess applications based on:

- the technical demands of the chosen repertoire and the level of mastery demonstrated
- understanding of the national, historical and cultural context of the works
- the stylistic, emotional and intellectual qualities shown in performance
- the consistency of standard across various styles and throughout the selection

Application form

The online application on the Award website is scheduled to open in October 2025.

Award applications will close at **5pm AEST Friday, 20 March 2026**.

Late submissions will not be accepted.

Applicants must complete the online application form and upload the following:

Curriculum Vitae

Applicants must upload a Curriculum Vitae outlining:

- Degrees, qualifications and formal studies
- Performances, prizes, scholarships and awards
- Relevant professional experience and future ambitions

Birth Certificate

All applicants must upload a copy of their certified Birth Certificate.

Identity verification

Australian citizens must upload a copy of either their:

- certified current valid Australian passport, or
- other certified official documentation proving Australian citizenship

Applicants who are not Australian citizens must upload a copy of a:

- certified proof of permanent Australian residency, or
- statutory declaration confirming they have lived in Australia for at least four of the five years immediately prior to the Award application closing date

Audition recording

Applicants must submit an audition recording/s encompassing three distinct compositional styles, uploaded as an uncompressed WAV file. Up to three separate recordings may be uploaded.

The duration of all recordings together must equal 20-30 minutes of unedited performance, recorded within 18 months prior to the Award application closing date.

While the full audition recording does not need to be recorded in one continuous take, each individual item must be unedited.

The recording must include three distinct compositional styles, each selected from a different Repertoire Group as outlined in the 2026 Award Rules and Information.

Applicants are fully responsible for the quality and format of the recording.

Only uncompressed WAV files will be accepted. The Award will not convert files submitted in other formats and incorrect file formats will not be accepted.

\$80 entry fee

Applicants must pay the \$80 entry fee via EFT to:

- Account name: Australian National Piano Award Inc.
- Bank: Bendigo Bank
- BSB: 633 000
- Account: 154 440 754
- Description: Applicant's full name

Applicants must upload a copy of the EFT receipt as proof of payment.

Notifying applicants

After reviewing all submitted audition recordings, the Award adjudicators will select the Award finalists to perform at the Award week in Shepparton during October 2026.

All applicants will be officially notified of the outcome by **Friday, 8 May 2026**.

Biography and head shot

By **Friday, 29 May 2026**, Award finalists must submit a:

- 500-word biography (in Word or PDF format)
- professional high-resolution colour head shot (JPEG, 1 to 2MB)

Submissions must be emailed to: info@australianpianoaward.com.au

Repertoire form

Following adjudication, Award finalists will be emailed a link to the online repertoire form.

By **Friday, 26 June 2026**, Award finalists must complete the repertoire form detailing their performance program during the Award week.

Only repertoire submitted through the official, completed online form will be accepted.

If the form is not received by the due date, the Award finalist will forfeit their place in the Award and the Award Board will approach the next highest-ranking applicant from the reserve list.

Logistics and accommodation

Award finalists will be billeted in Shepparton for the duration of the Award week, from **Saturday, 3 October 2026 or Sunday, 4 October 2026** through to **Sunday, 11 October 2026**.

Billeting is generously provided by local volunteers who open their homes to Award finalists.

Award finalists are expected to treat all hosts with the utmost kindness and respect, including responding promptly to all communications and requests.

Award finalists are responsible for their own travel arrangements, logistics and expenses to and from Shepparton.

During their stay, transport for Award finalists will be provided to all recitals and practice facilities.

Any other persons accompanying Award finalists will not be billeted and must arrange their own accommodation and transport while in Shepparton.

Repertoire Groups

Group A	Music of the Baroque period, up to and including Johann Sebastian Bach
Group B	Music of the Classical period after Bach, including Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert
Group C	Music of the Romantic period, from the 19th century up to and including 1900, excluding works by Beethoven and Schubert
Group D	French Impressionist works and all music from 1901 – 1950
Group E	Music composed from 1951 onwards

Repertoire Group notes

- Any repertoire queries should be addressed to the Award Artistic Director.
- The completion date of the work is the relevant one.
- Award finalists must include one Australian work in Recital 1 or Recital 2.
- Transcriptions or arrangements are permitted, but will be treated as works by the arranger, dated from the year of the arrangement.
- It is not possible for works for prepared piano and works not using the traditional keyboard to be performed during the Award week.
- A required complete work which is not performed in its entirety within the minimum and maximum time limits, will not be considered by the Award adjudicators.

Definition of 'work' or 'complete work'

For the purposes of the Award, a 'work' or 'complete work' refers to a unified, self-contained composition. Please note:

- For example, several Preludes by Debussy would not constitute a 'complete work'.
- However, a unified work such as the complete Book 1 or complete Book 2 of Brahms' Variations on a Theme by Paganini, would be considered a 'complete work'.
- A Bach Prelude and Fugue is regarded as a 'complete work'.

Definition of 'music'

For the purposes of the Award, 'music' refers to one or more movements from a sonata, suite or other multi-movement composition. It may also refer to a complete, self-contained work.

Including a complete sonata in Recital 1 and a complete work in Recital 2 enables Award finalists to demonstrate:

- the ability to maintain musical interest and direction over an extended duration
- a clear understanding of the formal structure of a large-scale composition

Solo recital requirements

Award finalists will present a minimum of two public solo recitals before the adjudicators at the Award week in Shepparton during October 2026.

Each recital has a maximum of 45 minutes duration (with a small variation allowed – see timing considerations below).

Award finalists may be stopped if this time limit is exceeded. While there is no set minimum duration for each recital, individual works must adhere to the specific minimum and maximum timing requirements.

Repertoire selection is a key part of the adjudication process. Award finalists must present a balanced program that includes works from at least four Repertoire Groups, demonstrating a broad and equitable level of technical and interpretive challenge.

All works must be performed from memory, unless a written exemption has been granted by the Award Board no later than **Friday, 24 July 2026**.

Award finalists are responsible for ensuring their chosen repertoire fits within the time limit and complies with all stated requirements.

An Award official will record the timings of all recitals during the Award week.

Timing considerations

A timing variation of up to 10% is permitted for any individual program requirement.

For the complete recital, a maximum variation of 5% is allowed.

Timing will commence with the first note of a work and conclude with the final note.

In multi-movement works, spaces between the movements will be included as part of the performance time. Audience applause is not included in the timing of individual works.

Breaks between separate works are excluded from the overall timing, but must not exceed one minute each.

Supplying hard copies of sheet music

Award finalists must provide one hard copy (not digital) of all sheet music scheduled for performance during Award week.

All submitted sheet music must be clearly labelled with the Award finalist's name and indicate whether the work will be performed in Recital 1 or Recital 2.

At the Welcome Reception in Shepparton on **Sunday, 4 October 2026**, Award finalists must submit their sheet music to the Award music coordinator, who will forward it to the Award adjudicators.

For published works, a commercially published edition must be supplied.

For unpublished works, Award finalists must provide sheet music – whether handwritten, photocopied or computer-generated – that is clear and detailed enough to allow accurate interpretation by a professional performer.

All submitted materials must comply with copyright laws.

Recital 1 requirements

For Recital 1, Award finalists must present a repertoire program encompassing the following:

- one complete Sonata from Group B
- 15 to 20 minutes of music from either Group C or Group D (not both)
- up to 10 minutes of music from another Repertoire Group not yet represented in the repertoire program

Australian work

In either Recital 1 or Recital 2, each Award finalist must include one Australian work with a minimum duration of 4 minutes.

This may be a complete work or a selection of movements from a sonata, suite or other multi-movement composition.

The Australian work may either fulfill one of the recital's listed requirements or be presented in addition to them, provided the overall recital timing is not exceeded.

Recital 2 requirements

For Recital 2, Award finalists must present a program of repertoire not presented in Recital 1.

The repertoire program for Recital 2 must include:

- one complete work (15 to 25 minutes) from either Group C or Group D (but not both), provided that the selected group was not significantly represented in Recital 1.
- 15 to 20 minutes of music, which may include works from:
 - Group A and/or Group E, or
 - other works from any Group/s, other than the Group chosen in the first requirement for Recital 2.

Australian work

See notes above in Recital 1 requirements about performing an Australian work.

Progression to Recital 3 (semi final)

After the completion of Recital 2 by all Award finalists, a number of them will be selected by the Award adjudicators to perform in Recital 3 (semi final).

Recital 3 (semi final) requirements

For Recital 3, the repertoire program must include 5 to 10 minutes of music not previously performed in Recitals 1 and 2, selected to engage a general audience.

The remainder of the repertoire program for Recital 3 may include works previously performed in Recital 1 and Recital 2.

Award finalists may propose additional music of their choice, subject to consultation with and approval by the Award Artistic Director during the Award week in Shepparton.

The Award Artistic Director will provide procedural advice only and will not influence the selection of individual works or the performance.

Recital 4 (grand final) requirements

For Recital 4, the 5 to 10 minutes of music from Recital 3 that appeals to a general audience must be included.

The remainder of the repertoire program for Recital 4 may replicate Recital 3 or include works previously performed in any of the preceding three recitals, subject to consultation with and approval by the Award Artistic Director during the Award week in Shepparton.

No new works may be introduced in Recital 4.

The Award Artistic Director will provide procedural advice only and will not influence the selection of individual works or the performance.

Order of recitals

The order of recitals will be determined by ballot prior to Award week.

The ballot will be conducted by the Mayor of the City of Greater Shepparton or a nominated Council representative.

The recital order will be announced at the Welcome Reception for Award finalists and adjudicators on **Sunday, 4 October 2026**.

Award finalists may not request changes to the recital order.

At the conclusion of the Welcome Reception, all finalists are required to attend a detailed briefing covering schedules, practice arrangements and recital times.

Practice facilities

The Award Board will arrange daily practice facilities with a grand piano for each Award finalist, scheduled in alignment with their recital program.

Many of these facilities are generously provided by local volunteers – sometimes in their own homes. Award finalists are expected to treat all practice spaces and hosts with the utmost kindness and respect.

For any questions regarding scheduling or access to practice facilities and recital venues, finalists must contact the Award music coordinator.

Mutual respect and encouragement

Award finalists are encouraged to demonstrate mutual support of their peers throughout the Award week by attending the following key events:

- Final solo recitals on the **evening of Thursday, 8 October 2026**, which will conclude with the announcement of semi finalists
- The semi final on the **afternoon of Friday, 9 October 2026**
- The grand final and prize presentation on the **evening of Saturday, 10 October 2026**

Promotion

Award finalists must be available for promotional and publicity opportunities in the lead up to and during the Award week.

Award finalists are expected to respond promptly to all Award communications and requests.

Documentation

The Award Board reserves the right to film and record finalists and Award-related events, as well as to share short excerpts (1 to 3 minutes) via official digital channels, including social media.

To protect copyright and privacy, no audio, visual or audio-visual recordings or photographs of Award finalists may be made by anyone other than official photographers and recordists engaged by the Award Board.

All performances and recordings made during the Award Week become the property of the Australian National Piano Award Shepparton Inc. and may be broadcast or reproduced without notice or payment of royalties to the Award finalist.

The Award Board will not release any recordings of performances other than through an official CD, which may be issued at a later date.

Prizes

\$33,000 First Prize

- \$28,000 The City of Greater Shepparton Prize
- \$5,000 The Daphne Turnbull Bursary for music career development

The First Prize recipient may be offered other recital engagements with a performance fee subsequent to the Award.

\$13,000 Second Prize

- \$10,000 The Fairley Foundation Prize
- \$3,000 The Daphne Turnbull Bursary for music career development

\$7,000 Third Prize

- \$5,000 The Beleura, John Tallis Prize
- \$2,000 The Daphne Turnbull Bursary for music career development

Special Prizes

- **\$1,000 The Max Cooke Encouragement Award**
Sponsored by the Australian National Piano Award
- **\$1,000 The Shepparton News Prize**
Best performance of a work by Bach
- **\$1,000 The Leona and Bruce Sterling Prize**
Best performance of a work by Mozart or Beethoven
- **\$1,000 The Jenny Houlihan Prize**
Best performance of a work by Haydn or Schubert
- **\$1,000 The Pam Wells Prize**
Best performance of a work by Chopin
- **\$1,000 The Horton Family Prize**
Best performance of Romantic-era repertoire (excluding Chopin) or 20th century music up to 1950
- **\$5,000 The Andreadis Family Australian Composition Commission Prize**
Best performance of music composed from 1951 onwards
- **\$5,000 Prize for best performance as voted by the audience**

The Andreadis Family Australian Composition Commission Prize

The prize supports the commissioning of a new work by an Australian composer. The commissioned piece is intended to be premiered and performed by the prize recipient at a later date.

The commissioned work may take the form of a solo piano piece, a chamber work including piano or a piano concerto.

The recipient may choose any Australian composer for the commission.

A complete score of the commissioned work must be submitted to the Award Board within twelve months of the prize being awarded.

Notes about Prizes

- The First, Second and Third Prizes are fixed and will not be divided or combined.
- All other Award finalists who are not recipients of the three major prizes and who complete all required solo recitals will each receive \$500, supported by GV Hearing Clinic.
- The Special Prizes may be awarded based on performances given at any stage during the Award week. These may be awarded irrespective of whether the Award finalist progresses to the semi final or grand final, provided the Award adjudicators determine that a performance is of exceptional quality.
- Following consultation with the Award Artistic Director, adjudicators may choose not to award a Special Prize if no performance meets the required standard. In such cases, the prize may be redirected to recognise excellence in another area where special qualities have been identified.