



Photograph: Olivia Condous

Meredith Music Festival

The 33rd year of this beloved festival allowed local acts to shine even brighter than before

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Time Out says

The first weekend of December marked the annual convergence of thousands of music lovers to a tiny rural town in regional Victoria, for the return of Meredith Music Festival (MMF). It had big shoes to fill after a ripper event last year, featuring big-name headliners that generated even bigger hype.

But this year, the anticipation in the lead up had a different energy, with speculative rumblings that the line-up didn't quite meet the high standard of previous iterations. For some festivals, this might spark a drop in ticket sales - but for those in the know, this festival isn't like the others. Once again, as is the case every year, it was completely sold out.

In fact, Meredith Music Festival continues to sell out essentially instantaneously completely unaffected by the turbulence that has perturbed so many Aussie festivals recently. Outsiders might be baffled by this, especially as it's a totally indie event, but this festival has a genuine cult following. The loyal attendees that immediately snap up all the tickets each year understand the ethos of the festival and wholeheartedly embrace it, star-studded line-up or not. MMF has a culture that encourages punters to be open-minded, curious and lean into the new or unknown. The 2025 edition was another shining example of this.

Early in the first evening, Folk Bitch Trio captured the crowd by opening their set with an a capella cover of Talking Heads' 'This Must Be The Place' before soaring through an emotive set. The band hail from Northcote and found the limelight this year with their debut album *Now Would Be A Good Time*, filled with lilting three-part harmonies. It was their inaugural MMF performance, but they adeptly captivated the entire amphitheatre.

The night that followed traversed through a diverse musical program – from Saya Gray tearing up a double-necked guitar to psychedelic jazz from Melbourne's Brown Spirits soundtracked the sunset and Pa Salieu's afrobeats (marred by a very raspy voice he apologised mid-song for).

The big-name act of the first night was Perfume Genius, whose songs were emotionally charged but didn't quite make an impact on his audience, as it felt like he didn't genuinely connect with the crowd. Aussie electronic act Ninajirachi, fresh from three ARIA award wins, supercharged the stage late into the night with thumping EDM and even some dubstep – nostalgic sounds for many of the punters who would've spent their younger weekends clubbing in the 2010s. But for many other attendees, retiring to the campsite was the best decision to reenergise for day two.

Early risers on the Saturday morning were treated to singalong classics from the City of Ballarat Municipal Brass Band, one of the festival's many whimsical annual traditions. The musical bracket that followed was back-to-back Australian-

made bands, from charming 10-member group Mouseatouille making their debut at the festival to local punk-rock outfit the Peep Tempel (replacing the legacy act Colin Hay who sadly pulled out last minute due to illness).

As the afternoon waned, the music suddenly flipped to high-energy, danceable beats – as it does reliably every year. Dames Brown got the party started, a trio of Bonafide Detroit disco divas who are the voices behind hit house tracks like ‘Calling Out (Your Name)’ and ‘Heaven’. Their ecstatic energy bathed the crowd in euphoria, propelled further by the following act, Syrian singer Omar Souleyman. Backed by driving Arabic electronic beats inspired by the traditional dabke, there was no choice but to dance. While the audience was whipped into a frenzy, Souleyman stood steadily on stage, smiling and clapping along.

Brooklyn rock band TV on the Radio were the festival headliners, in the prime-time slot on Saturday night. The group weaved through their setlist with seasoned ease, their sound encapsulating early 2000s indie-rock – both angry and hopeful. But it was swiftly overshadowed by the act that followed, which was by far the most unexpected performance of the weekend. Atarashii Gakko, a Japanese girl group, charmed the crowd with J-Pop before genre-morphing from hip hop into techno, all with perfectly synchronised choreography and confetti cannons to finish. Looking around the crowd, everyone had the same expression – a mix of total awe and amazement.

The late-night DJ bracket was also entirely Aussie, with local fave RONA kicking off with a masterfully produced mix championing her Indigenous heritage. Since gaining success on the global stage, expectations were suitably high for HAAi to follow. While her set was packed with pumping beats that kept the crowd moving, it felt like she didn't quite make her mark. Waxo Paradiso, a beloved DJ duo of the Melbourne scene, closed out with the sunrise set. The final night of the festival finished with brilliant blue skies and golden sunshine, matched perfectly by Moony's ‘Dove (I'll Be Loving You)’.

Sunday was soundtracked with the softer sounds from the likes of Florist and Jack J, easing the festival to a gentle close. Sitting in the sun, reflecting on a weekend of so much great music, the previous qualms about headliners and line-ups felt trivial. In fact, many of the musical highlights throughout the festival

weren't the bigger names or international acts, but the up-and-coming local artists.

Perhaps the festival is prompting us to ponder: do we need a line-up stacked with international artists when there are so many worthy, world-class local gems? It's a poignant question at a time when Australian artists are disappearing from the charts. Homegrown acts, especially the ones who came up in Melbourne's thriving scene, hold the same deep reverence for the festival as its loyal punters. This sparks a mutual, electric excitement between artist and audience, making for truly special performances.

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Details



Event website:

mmf.com.au/



Address



Price:

\$514

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