

Fine music celebrated

By **ANDREW HARRISON**

A CONVERSATION with violinist Ian Cooper is akin to roaming the FM dial.

With bow in one hand and a 1926 version of a 1714 Stradivarius in the other, Cooper punctuates his points with snatches of music, such as Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* or the opening of Saint Saens' *Danse Macabre*, which can rapidly become something more modern.

It is an example of Cooper's repertoire, spanning cabaret to classical, which once manifested itself as a soloist on Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* with Roy Slaven and HG Nelson's Club Buggery house band, the Nissan Cedrics.

Cooper is in Mount Isa with other guest instrumentalists and singers combining with those born and bred in the North West for the Queensland Music Festival's (QMF) Mount Isa Celebrates concerts.

Festival artistic director James Morrison has assembled a diverse group, including Cooper, pianist Ambre Hammond and singer Emma Pask, for tonight's (and last night's) concerts at the Mount Isa Memorial Civic Centre, in West Street.

The violin virtuoso was born



Guest violinist Ian Cooper and pianist Ambre Hammond invite the city to hear its own symphony orchestra.

into a family of musicians and began playing at the age of four, the first pupil of his mother - a teacher of the Suzuki method, which aims to teach children language and instruments as early as possible.

Cooper's time was taken up

with lessons, practice, rehearsals and competing in eisteddfods.

"It's different when your mum's the teacher," Cooper told the *North West Star* during a break in rehearsals.

"It's not like going to visit someone else's for two hours a week."

There was no avoiding it. Practice was twice daily, before breakfast and dinner.

Carrots were literally the incentive, Cooper said.

In his own words, he did not enjoy the practice sessions until the budding performer began winning competitions.

Cooper made his debut at the Sydney Opera House aged six, and by 12 he had performed with the Vienna Boys Choir in the Austrian capital. He trained at the NSW Conservatorium from the age of eight and later, mentored by French violinist Stéphane Grappelli, swung to gypsy jazz.

He appeared on Silverchair's 1996 album *Freak Show* and the Hoodoo Gurus' 2010 pressing *Purity of Essence*, and among collaborators including the late performers, sexy soulman Barry White and Aussie rocker Doc Neeson, of The Angels, and guitarists like Tommy Emmanuel and the Grigoryan brothers.

Cooper is also a qualified pilot, which gives him the ability to soar in other respects.

After the Mount Isa concerts, he is off with fellow guests Hammond, percussionist John Morrison, tech crew, electric keyboard and minimal drum kit to Burketown in an eight-seater plane to start a northern Queensland tour, which takes in

Atherton, Innisfail, Palm Island, Charters Towers, Gladstone and Cape York peninsula.

It was a feature of the QMF under Morrison's direction to reach out to the state's remote hinterland starved of musical experiences and opportunities to see live performers. The belief is its inhabitants may enjoy the events and be inclined to seek out orchestras on their next visit to the big smoke.

Cooper did a similar tour during the last QMF in 2013 with pianist Simon Tedeschi, visiting places such as Birdsville, where attendance to their concert exceeded the village's population by half, drawing its audience from across Queensland's south-west.

He hoped it would continue with future festivals so he can add Longreach, "the dream of every pilot" he said, because of its association with the foundation of Qantas, Emerald and the Torres Straits Islands, which he only knew as dots on the map, to his flight plans.

Cooper said he drew his energy and inspiration from the people, who lived in the harsh lands he flew leisurely above at 160 knots and 6000 feet, because the cow cockies and grey nomads worked hard to attend these concerts.