

Australian Chamber Orchestra and University of Melbourne launch life-changing music program for Victorian primary school students

The **Australian Chamber Orchestra** and the **University of Melbourne** will launch an award-winning music and string instrument learning program, **ACO Foundations**, at Melbourne's **Belle Vue Park Primary School** in Glenroy on **Monday 10 February**.

The only model of its kind in Australia, ACO Foundations is a research-based program that has been proven to improve children's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural development through the daily practice of a string instrument within the classroom environment. The pedagogical model of the program is based on research that shows that playing a musical instrument can make permanent beneficial changes to the structure and functioning of the brain.

Underpinned by the core belief that all children deserve access to a quality music education, ACO Foundations was designed by the ACO as a scalable model to be implemented in low socio-economic schools across Australia. It was first launched by the ACO at St Marys North Primary School in New South Wales, with funding and support from the University of Melbourne enabling the expansion of the program to Victoria.

Primary school students participating in ACO Foundations are provided with a violin or cello and undertake an intensive, classroom-based music program which includes:

- **Weekly instruction** with a specialist ACO instrumental teacher;
- **Daily practice sessions** with the classroom teacher;
- **Ensemble participation** and performance opportunities; and
- **Regular visits from ACO musicians**, who practice with the children and inspire their development.

Belle Vue Park Primary School will be the first Victorian school to implement ACO Foundations, following the ACO successfully delivering the program to over 150 students every year at St Marys North Primary School in New South Wales since 2018. An Evaluation Report on the program released in 2023 revealed that, alongside the expected development in musical skills, participating students at St Marys North Primary School developed:

- **Improvement in cognitive and academic ability**, including verbal and written communication, and mathematical reasoning;
- **Improved emotional and behavioural development;**
- **Increased engagement and motivation at school;** and
- **Improved physical development.**

"I see a shift, I see how kids connect. And I know it's the music, there's nothing else that has changed in the school over their time, the only thing that has changed is the music."

– YEAR 1 CLASSROOM TEACHER, ST MARYS NORTH PRIMARY SCHOOL

In recognition of the success of the program, ACO Foundations was awarded the New South Wales Secretary's Award for Outstanding School Initiative in 2023.

ACO Artistic Director **Richard Tognetti** said: *"The research has shown that access to a quality music education has far-reaching benefits in children's lives. We in the ACO have a national platform and it is our civic duty to provide children, particularly those from disadvantaged circumstances, with access to music and learning an instrument. The results are life changing."*

"I thank the University of Melbourne for their vision and commitment in partnering with the ACO to expand this important program so that Victorian school students will also receive the benefits of a music education."

The Faculty of Fine Arts and Music Melbourne Conservatorium of Music Director, **Professor Richard Kurth** said: *"The Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne is committed to music education and to amplifying its value for all students in Victoria."*

"The Melbourne launch of the ACO's enormously successful music education program is also the start of an exciting new research collaboration between the University of Melbourne and the ACO. Researchers from the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music and the Faculty of Education will study the impact of the ACO Foundations program over the five-year pilot period, while our music and education students will be the beneficiaries of training and placement opportunities via the program. The University is proud to support a highly acclaimed, evidence-based initiative which will positively impact everyone involved."

The University of Melbourne has been the exclusive University Partner of the ACO since 2020 and combines the world-class musical expertise of the ACO with the University's educational excellence and wide-reaching influence. In addition to bringing the ACO Foundations program to Victoria, the partnership also provides professional training opportunities for students at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music within the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music.

Launch Details

Monday 10 February at Belle Vue Park Primary School, Morell Street, Glenroy

11.30am – 12pm Performance by the Australian Chamber Orchestra for the students and school community

12-12.15pm ACO musicians meet years 1-2 students and distribute violins and cellos

Media filming, photography and recording will be permitted at the launch. Interviews with ACO musicians, the Principal of Belle Vue Park Primary School and academics from the University of Melbourne are available upon request.

Contacts

Caitlin Benetatos, Head of Communications, Australian Chamber Orchestra
caitlin.benetatos@aco.com.au
0422 934 693

Sam Burt, Communications Coordinator, Faculty of Arts and Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne
sam.burt@unimelb.edu.au
0466 808 788