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AOC

**PEKKA KUUSISTO:
LEGENDS & LUMINARIES**

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INSIDE

Inside you'll find features and interviews that shine a spotlight on our players and the music you are about to hear. Enjoy the read.

Cover.
Pekka Kuusisto
Photo by
Bard Gundersen

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WELCOME

We are delighted to welcome back the Finnish violinist Pekka Kuusisto to guest direct the ACO in a concert full of energy, invention and brilliant virtuosity.

Pekka has a deep and enduring musical friendship with the ACO. Having first performed with the Orchestra 25 years ago, he has since become part of our extended musical family, even becoming Artistic Director of our ACO Collective ensemble from 2016 to 2019. During his time with ACO Collective, Pekka directed and performed alongside dozens of incredible young Australian musicians in metropolitan and regional centres across the country, bringing his trademark artistic freedom and warmth to each concert.

It was during his tenure with ACO Collective that we, along with the Melbourne Recital Centre and a number of ensembles around the globe, commissioned the New York composer Nico Muhly to write a new concerto especially for Pekka. Nearly ten years later, we are thrilled to bring this concerto, *Shrink*, back to the stage where it will be performed alongside the Australian premiere of Californian composer Ellen Reid's *West Coast Sky Eternal*.

Thank you for joining us for this long-awaited reunion between Pekka and the ACO. I hope you enjoy the performance.



Richard Evans AM
Managing Director

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NEWS

Upcoming concerts
and the latest
announcements.

Latest News ACO 2027

Join us for an epic season celebrating tradition, transformation and transcendence. In 2027, Richard Tognetti brings you a season of extraordinary depth and ambition, that honours the past whilst championing the new, through music that is always moving.

Full-season Subscriptions and Flexi-subscriptions are now available.

Single tickets go on sale on Friday 9 October.

Secure your seats for 2027 at aco.com.au



1

On Tour Beethoven's Pastoral

12-25 NOV

Richard Tognetti directs the ACO in a thrilling season finale featuring an all-Beethoven program, including the composer's epic and transportive Sixth Symphony, "Pastoral".

Bach's Christmas Oratorio

8-11 NOV

Celebrate the festive season with Bach's revelatory choral masterpiece, led by Richard Tognetti and Pinchgut Opera Artistic Director Erin Helyard.

Nicolas Altstaedt

4-17 FEB

Experience infinite possibility and extraordinary kinetic energy when the world-renowned cellist returns to direct the ACO.



2

ACO On The Pier

ACO Up Close: Tomeka Reid Quartet

23 OCT

Cellist, composer and bandleader Tomeka Reid and visionary guitarist Mary Halvorson lead an acclaimed quartet in a rare Sydney performance of fearless, boundary-pushing contemporary jazz.

ACO Up Close: Suzanne Ciani

29 NOV

Suzanne Ciani makes music at the edge of a new world. The doyenne of electronic music, she pioneered sound design with early synthesizers in the 1970s, and her music remains inventive and irrepressible to this day.

1. ACO 2027
2. Richard Tognetti
3. Tomeka Reid
4. Anthony Marwood
5. The Nutcracker



3

ACO Up Close: Anthony Marwood with ACO Collective

7 DEC

British violin virtuoso Anthony Marwood reunites with ACO Collective for an evening of rare discoveries, connection and breathtaking playing, with Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in D minor, featuring Marwood as soloist, at its heart.



4

ACO Families

ACO Family Day: Vivaldi's Four Seasons

10-11 OCT

Bring the whole family to ACO On The Pier to experience a 30-minute classical music concert celebrating Vivaldi's beloved *Four Seasons*.

The Nutcracker

12-21 DEC

Join Clara in an enchanted dreamland as she befriends the Nutcracker and goes on a magical Christmas Eve journey in this mesmerising ACO Families production.

Created in collaboration with former Artistic Director of The Australian Ballet David McAllister, this clever adaptation of the much-loved ballet brings together Tchaikovsky's beloved music, performed live by an ACO Families string quintet, with dance and narration in an immersive theatrical experience.



5

A large-scale photograph of the ACO orchestra performing on a stage. The conductor, Richard Tognetti, is in the center, facing the audience. The orchestra members are seated in rows, playing various instruments including violins, violas, cellos, and double basses. The background is filled with a large, diverse audience seated in a concert hall. The lighting is warm and focused on the stage.

ACO

BEETHOVEN'S PASTORAL

12–25 Nov

Directed by Richard Tognetti

Newcastle, Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.

Richard Tognetti directs the ACO in a thrilling all-Beethoven finale featuring the beloved Sixth Symphony and lyrical *Triple Concerto* with pianist Konstantin Shamray and ACO Principal Cello Timo-Veikko Valve.

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*Transaction fee of \$8.50 applies

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Pre-Concert
Talks

Pre-concert talks take place 45 minutes before the start of every concert. See the ACO information desk for location details.

SYDNEY – CITY RECITAL HALL

Genevieve Lang

Sat 3 Oct 6.15pm

Tue 6 Oct 7.15pm

Wed 7 Oct 6.15pm

MELBOURNE RECITAL CENTRE

Andrew Aronowicz

Sat 10 Oct 6.45pm

Mon 12 Oct 6.45pm

MELBOURNE – ARTS
CENTRE MELBOURNE

Andrew Aronowicz

Sun 11 Oct 1.45pm

ADELAIDE TOWN HALL

Russell Torrance

Tue 13 Oct 6.45pm

PERTH – WINTHROP HALL

William Yeoman

Wed 14 Oct 6.45pm

CANBERRA – LLEWELLYN HALL

Bernard Rofe

Sat 17 Oct 6.45pm

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

Genevieve Lang

Sun 18 Oct 1.15pm

BRISBANE – QPAC
CONCERT HALL

Matthew Hodge

Mon 19 Oct 6.15pm

PROGRAM

Pekka Kuusisto Guest Director & Violin
Australian Chamber Orchestra

COMPOSER	TITLE	MIN
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (arr. strings)	The Magic Flute, K.620: Selections <i>Overture</i> <i>Duetto “Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen”</i> <i>Aria “Wie stark ist nicht dein Zauberton”</i> <i>Chorus “Das klinget so herrlich”</i> <i>Aria “Alles fühlt der Liebe Freuden”</i> <i>March of the Priests</i> <i>Aria “Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen”</i>	20
Nico Muhly	Shrink: Concerto for Violin and Strings* <i>I. Ninths</i> <i>II. Sixths</i> <i>III. Turns</i>	22
Interval		20
Ellen Reid	West Coast Sky Eternal <i>(Australian Premiere)</i>	15
Felix Mendelssohn (arr. strings)	String Quintet No.2 in B-flat major, Op.87 <i>I. Allegro vivace</i> <i>II. Andante scherzando</i> <i>III. Adagio e lento</i> <i>IV. Allegro molto vivace</i>	28

* Co-commissioned in 2019 by the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Melbourne Recital Centre, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, Mahler Chamber Orchestra with the kind support of the MCO Foundation, and Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

The concert will last approximately one hour and 50 minutes, including a 20-minute interval. The Australian Chamber Orchestra reserves the right to alter scheduled artists and programs as necessary.

ACO concerts are regularly broadcast on ABC Classic. Pekka Kuusisto: *Legends & Luminaries* will be broadcast on Saturday 14 November, 1pm AEDT and available on demand for 30 days after.

MUSICIANS ON STAGE



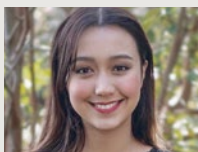
Pekka Kuusisto
Guest Director & Violin

Pekka plays the 1695 "ex-Sanders" Stradivarius violin, generously on loan from the Anders Sveaas' Charitable Foundation, ASAF.



Helena Rathbone
Principal Violin

Helena plays the 1732 'ex-Dollfus' Stradivarius violin on loan from anonymous Australian private benefactors. Her Chair is sponsored by Margaret Gibbs & Rodney Cameron.



Anna da Silva Chen
Violin

Anna plays an 18th-century violin made in the style of Pietro Guarneri of Venice, on loan from Jannie Brown. Her Chair is sponsored by Alenka Tindale.



Aiko Goto
Violin

Aiko plays her own French violin by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume. Her Chair is sponsored by Anthony & Sharon Lee Foundation.



Ilya Isakovich
Violin

Ilya plays a 1590 Brothers Amati violin on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. His Chair is sponsored by anonymous donors and Colin Golvan AM KC & Dr Debbie Golvan.



Liisa Pallandi
Violin

Liisa plays a 1759 Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin on loan from the ACO. Her Chair is sponsored by the Melbourne Medical Syndicate.



Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba
Violin

Thibaud plays his own 1842 Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume violin. His Chair is sponsored by The Minta Group.



Ike See
Violin

Ike plays his own 2021 Zygmuntowicz violin. His Chair is sponsored by Gus & Nanna Lehrer.



Tim Yu
Violin

Tim plays an 1850 violin by John Lott, in the style of Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù, on loan from an anonymous Australian private benefactor. His Chair is sponsored by Ralph Ward-Ambler AM & Barbara Ward-Ambler.



Maja Savnik*
Violin

Maja plays her own 1797 Giuseppe Gagilano violin.



Véronique Serret[#]
Violin

Veronique plays a 1900 Leandro Bisiach violin.



Hanne Skjeltbred[#]
Principal Viola

Hanne appears courtesy of the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra.



Elizabeth Woolnough
Viola

Elizabeth plays a 1952 A.E. Smith viola on loan from the ACO. Her Chair is sponsored by Terry Campbell AO & Christine Campbell.



Jacqueline Cronin[#]
Viola

Jacqueline plays her own 1912 Pedrazzini viola.



Nathan Greentree[#]
Viola

Nathan plays his own viola made in 2008 by New York-based maker Stefan Valcuha.



Timo-Veikko Valve
Principal Cello

Tipi plays a 1616 Brothers Amati cello kindly on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. His Chair is sponsored by Prof Doug Jones AO & Prof Janet Walker CM.



Melissa Barnard
Cello

Melissa plays an 1846 cello by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume. Her Chair is sponsored by Jason Wenderoth.



Julian Thompson
Cello

Julian plays a 1729 Giuseppe Guarneri filius Andreae cello with elements of the instrument crafted by his son, Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù, kindly donated to the ACO by the late Peter Weiss AO. His Chair is sponsored by the Stewart Family and Ms Julie Steiner AM & Prof Judyth Sachs.



Maxime Bibeau
Principal Bass

Max plays a late-16th-century Gasparo da Salò bass on loan from UKARIA. In Brisbane, Max plays a 19th-century Italian bass. His Chair is sponsored by Janet Matton AM & Robin Rowe, and Ros Morauta.

[#] Guest Musician

PROGRAM IN SHORT

Your five-minute read
before lights down.

Written by Russell Torrance



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

The Magic Flute, K.620: Selections

Arranged for string orchestra

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Magic Flute* is, of course, notable for myriad reasons. For this composer whose greatest achievements, arguably, were on the opera stage, and gave so much to the genre, this is his final opera. Or is it?

The Magic Flute is not an opera, strictly speaking – it is a Singspiel, a “Sing play”. Most of Mozart's operas are in Italian. It was in Italy that the teenage Mozart first cut his teeth as an opera composer. In any case, it was the fashion of the day for opera to be in the Italian language, regardless of the composer's nationality.

But a few times in his career, Mozart wrote in the Singspiel genre. As well as being in German (with spoken dialogue), a Singspiel tends to be lighter than an opera. That is certainly true for a lot of *The Magic Flute* with its many joyous, singable moments, especially from the bird catcher, Papageno.

Singspiels also traditionally have a magical element in the story and this takes us to another important ingredient in *The Magic Flute*, as suggested by the title.

When Mozart was composing this work, he had been a Freemason for seven years. Freemasonry was very different in the 18th century – it was by no means as secretive and esoteric as it became two centuries later. Nevertheless, it was a movement based on ritual, symbolism and magic.

This symbolism is an important part of *The Magic Flute* – from the ordeals undergone by Tamino, to the Queen of the Night, often seen as representing the Austrian Empress, who sought to ban Freemasonry. Other themes in the work are connected with Freemasonry – wisdom, brotherhood, truth and morality – and there is a tradition for the staging to be suitably strange and magical, adorned with stars and the pyramids mentioned in the libretto.

Whether or not by design, it is interesting that Mozart's final stage work should contain some of his greatest music, but also reveal such a fascinating and unusual part of his life.



Nico Muhly (1981-)

Shrink: Concerto for Violin and Strings*

Nico Muhly is an American composer who writes orchestral music, works for the stage, chamber music and sacred music. He's received commissions from the Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the ACO, the Tallis Scholars, and King's College, Cambridge, among others. He is a collaborative partner at the San Francisco Symphony and has collaborated extensively with artist including Philip Glass, Benjamin Millepied, Sufjan Stevens, and Paul Simon.

His concerto for violin and string orchestra, *Shrink*, was commissioned by the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Melbourne Recital Centre. The concerto is dedicated to Pekka Kuusisto, and received its world premiere by Kuusisto and ACO Collective in 2019. In *Shrink*, Muhly takes the concept of the traditional violin concerto and completely inverts it, focusing not on the monumentality of the orchestra, nor the virtuosity of his soloist, but the intricacy of how they work together.

Muhly writes:

"*Shrink* is in three movements. Each movement obsesses over certain intervals: the first, ninths; the second, sixths; and the final, a tiny set of anxious intervals between unisons and fourths. The overall structure suggests an intensifying focus on these small building-blocks, a process which is reflected in the speed of each movement. The first proceeds quickly, becomes aggressive, and dissolves into small fragments. The second movement is slow and taut, with a looped sequence of chords whose character becomes increasingly thick and heavy. The last movement is fast, nervous, and scattered, with occasional giant unisons coming in and out of focus."



Ellen Reid (1983-)

West Coast Sky Eternal*
Australian Premiere

Ellen Reid is one of the most innovative artists of her generation. An American composer and sound artist, her breadth of work spans opera, sound design, film scoring, avant-pop, ensemble and choral writing. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music for her opera, *prism*, in 2019. Reid's orchestral work has been performed by the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, among many others.

Reid writes:

"*West Coast Sky Eternal* is a study in perspective. I wrote it during a time of personal upheaval, both positive and negative, and the piece oscillates between the rhythm of life and a global sense of beauty and balance. Starting from a wide-angle panorama, the West Coast Sky of the title is the expanse of a landscape viewed from miles above, flecked with distant clouds. The choppy, workaday business of living pulls our attention earthward. Each human decision is a shard that becomes a monolith, spiraling maniacally inwards until the raw joy of life and death finally have us looking upward, back to the high place, where the frenetic movements of humanity resolve into calm order once again."



Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

String Quintet No.2 in B-flat major, Op.87

Arranged for string orchestra

Felix Mendelssohn wrote his first String Quintet in 1836, when he was 17 years old. Nearly 20 years later, the composer returned to the form at an extremely busy time in his life.

It was 1845, and Mendelssohn had just marked ten years as the musical director of the venerable Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, a post which took up a great deal of his time and energy. He continued to see great success in Berlin and London – he had just returned from his eighth trip to the British capital, and was already planning another for the premiere of his oratorio *Elijah*.

Mendelssohn had also just organised an appeal to raise money for the first ever memorial to JS Bach. (He ended up donating most of the cost himself.) And his daughter Lili had been born, bringing the number of Mendelssohn children to five.

It had also been two years since Mendelssohn had founded the Leipzig Conservatorium, and he still taught there, alongside Robert Schumann and Ignaz Moscheles. This is where, perhaps, some of the stress he must have felt became evident.

In contrast to how he is often perceived, Mendelssohn was prone to dark moods, no doubt a symptom of the neurological issues that probably killed him two years later. Students and fellow teachers at the Conservatorium bore the full brunt of this side of the composer.

So definitely time for a holiday – of sorts. Felix Mendelssohn travelled to Frankfurt late in 1844 and, in the spring of 1845, appeared there in a benefit concert for a flood tragedy. But the trip did give him headspace and some respite from his intense life in Leipzig. The composer wrote to his brother, “These are happy days!” It was in Frankfurt that Mendelssohn wrote his String Quintet No.2, one of his final chamber compositions.

Curiously, the composer did not want this work to be published (it was eventually published posthumously in 1851). He said to his Leipzig colleague Ignaz Moscheles that the piece was an “exercise in forms and the representation of ideas. Here you have

the reason why I have written so many compositions which have not and never should be printed.”

It is a strange assessment by Mendelssohn of music that is such an expressive work of art, that shows his trademark vigour in the outer movements alongside the grand, sombreness of the third movement. One can only wonder whether the composer wanted to keep this music private for more personal reasons. That, after having found a period of calm in his busy life, he wanted to retain the moment – and the music that arose from it – only for himself.

Russell Torrance is an award-winning radio presenter and producer, and is currently the Mornings Presenter on ABC Classic. Russell's career began as an editor on the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and, as well as broadcast, has encompassed music teaching, composition and performance.

*Note by Australian Chamber Orchestra

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Richard Tognetti
Artistic Director

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— THE GUARDIAN UK, 2025.



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Finnish violin virtuoso Pekka Kuusisto's daring programming for the Australian Chamber Orchestra reflects their long and profound collaboration.

RADICAL MAGIC

Written by Jana Perković



Pekka Kuusisto's relationship with the Australian Chamber Orchestra runs deep. "It's a very long one," he tells me from his summer home in Finland. "It was Finnish pianist Olli Mustonen, a very close friend of Richard Tognetti's, and Steven Isserlis, the cellist, who introduced me to Richard, I think, 25 years ago. I did a few guest-directing tours with the ACO already in the very early 2000s. I've been in the ACO orbit for... forever."

Kuusisto has been visiting Australia since the 1990s, and was artistic director of ACO Collective, the ACO's educational and regional touring wing, from 2016 to 2019. He's returning this year with another daring program for the ACO. "The tour was originally scheduled for 2021. It's the longest Covid postponement I've had." He jokes: "After it's done, I think I won't have any traces of Covid left in my diary."

Kuusisto is a virtuoso violin player, boundary stretching composer and, increasingly, conductor. He is renowned for pushing the limits of what classical performance can be, and for adventurous programming, where he champions contemporary composers and freely crosses over into folk and electronic music. At 19, he was the first Finnish musician to win the International Jean Sibelius Violin Competition. He is currently Artistic Director of the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra and will be Chief Conductor of the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony

Orchestra from April 2028. But Pekka Kuusisto is a bona fide celebrity in my house owing to yet another towering achievement: he composed and performed the soundtrack for season one of the recent *Moomin* animated TV series.

Little whimsical Moomintroll, created by Swedish-Finnish artist Tove Jansson in the final days of World War II as a passionate rebellion against the rigidity of Nazism, is something of a Finnish national treasure. But, Kuusisto tells me, there is a particularly deep family connection at play. "My father wrote an opera about *Moomin* in 1974 together with Tove Jansson. We had little drawings [at home] made for him by Tove." The opera premiered less than two years before Kuusisto was born and may be why he and his friend, percussionist and sound engineer Samuli Kosminen, were asked to make an audition tape. "They asked us to make a song about, you know, just an ordinary day in Moominvalley," Kuusisto reminisces. "I was playing a very expensive 1728 Stradivarius at the time, and we made sure to have the violin at the very beginning of the track." He laughs. "So it got us the job."

For a year and a half afterwards, "we were constantly just writing and recording, writing and recording". To accommodate Kuusisto's extensive international touring, Kosminen often travelled to wherever Kuusisto was



playing, recording in hotel rooms and backstage at concert venues. The unusual soundtrack, imagined “like it could have been played in Moominhouse on handmade instruments, maybe weird instruments that Moominpapa could have brought from his adventures around the world”, sounds nothing like a cheap kids’ record. It is a series of whimsical, warm, folksy instrumentals. It is also representative of Kuusisto’s exquisitely joyful, eclectic and unpretentious musical output.

Kuusisto is known for engaging in radical, unusual projects. In 2014, he joined the Mahler Chamber Orchestra for a performance night that matched Bach, American minimalism, and electronica, with performances by contemporary dance ensemble Sasha Waltz & Guests, juggler Jay Gilligan, DJ Georg Conrad and video artist Lilllevan. With the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra he was the music director of DSCH, a high-concept visual concert based on Shostakovich’s music and life, performed by 18 soloists in costume. A 2018 recital in Wigmore Hall overlaid Bach and Steve Reich with photographs of cancer cells and readings by cancer researcher Suvi Savola. With Greenpeace, Kuusisto developed a version of Saint-Saëns’ *Carnival of the Animals* children’s concert that centres animal rights. “Any time somebody does something to expand the concert culture, the regularities and mechanisms of a normal concert, [every time] we go outside of that narrow field – I think it’s always worthwhile,” Kuusisto has said.

He also loves folk music, and will passionately discuss Sibelius’s debt to runic song. He conquered hearts and minds in London in 2016, when he wrapped up his Proms debut at the Royal Albert Hall with a singalong to a Finnish folk song. He likes to call his instrument the “fiddle”. In February 2026, he released *Willows* with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, a delicate record marking the passing of his parents and his brother, that brought together a luminous rendition of Vaughan Williams’s *The Lark Ascending* and new compositions by Caroline Shaw and Ellen Reid with traditional American songs in new arrangements by folk singer-songwriter Sam Amidon (who happens to be musician Beth Orton’s husband). This, Kuusisto says, is the kind of stuff he wants to do more of.

Kuusisto was always surrounded by music. His grandfather, Taneli Kuusisto, and his father, Ilkka Kuusisto, were composers and organists. His mother was a music teacher, and Kuusisto and his brother, the late Jaakko Kuusisto, started learning violin at kindergarten age. By the time they were seven and nine respectively, they were performing as soloists on Finnish national television, looking small, serious,

He conquered hearts and minds in London in 2016, when he wrapped up his Proms debut at the Royal Albert Hall with a singalong to a Finnish folk song.

Page 14–15.
Pekka Kuusisto.
Photo by Bard Gundersen

Page 16.
Pekka Kuusisto leading ACO Collective,
Melbourne Recital Centre, 2019.
Photo by Zan Wimberley

“It was hard to avoid becoming a musician; I’m happy I didn’t succeed.”

Page 18.
Pekka Kuusisto.
Photo by Bard Gundersen

Page 19.
Pekka Kuusisto leading
ACO Collective, Melbourne
Recital Centre, 2019.
Photo by Zan Wimberley

and with matching bowl cuts. They also have two half-sisters, dancer-choreographer and actor Lotta and dance teacher Sanna Kuusisto. “My family is completely musical,” Kuusisto said in an interview for the Philharmonia Orchestra. “It was hard to avoid becoming a musician; I’m happy I didn’t succeed.”

Kuusisto describes to me his musical upbringing as both ordinary and atypical: a “wonderful Hungarian early teacher” followed by a specialist in the French bow technique, all overseen by his mother. When Pekka and Jaakko Kuusisto were teenagers, the whole family moved to the United States so the boys could study at Indiana University with Miriam Fried and Paul Biss “to get that final, proper violin soloistic training”.

“All that was perfectly normal. But jazz and, later on, electronic music, improvised music and, finally, traditional, folk music – I think that was something that we had, that a lot of our fellow students and colleagues didn’t.” Kuusisto pins this on his father’s influence. Ilkka Kuusisto was sent to New York as a young man, to study religious music, and discovered jazz instead. “He wanted to be a sailor and have music as a hobby. But then he met jazz, and decided: ‘If music can do this, I want to be a musician.’ So sailing became a hobby and music became the job.”

Kuusisto vividly describes sitting by the piano with his brother and father: “He would play *Satin Doll* by Duke Ellington, for example, and one of





us would go to the bass end of the keyboard, play bass lines, and the other would go to the top of the keyboard and play an improvised melodic solo. Then we would change places, so that each one of us would get an understanding of what notes fit and what notes don't; what rhythms fit and what rhythms don't. The idea that you can invent your own music, even though you're a violinist, was part of the deal from the very beginning."

Fortunately for us, Kuusisto enjoys long-haul travel. "It feels, still, like borrowed time," he says. "Nowadays there is internet on most planes – but people still don't expect you to be fully available when you're travelling from Finland to Australia." And, he adds, "for some reason, I've always enjoyed existing in Australia. The general attitude, or what I perceive as the general attitude of people, is really hospitable. And the level of music-making is amazing.

"Through the ACO Collective, I felt like I had a real grasp on what kind of young string players are growing up in Australia." He mentions a dozen names who are now notable musicians in orchestras around the world. "The amount of really innovative, interesting young string players coming out of Australia is quite staggering. It feels really groundbreaking. People don't only get educated [in] how to play music and an instrument, but they get educated [in] how to invent a life in music. How to be curious about what it is that they really want to do in music. And that, that's brilliant.

"The amount of really innovative, interesting young string players coming out of Australia is quite staggering. It feels really groundbreaking..."



“On tour, once you’ve gotten the first couple of shows down, things start to happen between the musicians that are unrehearsable, that can only happen in concert, when everyone really knows the music very well. You start to take risks with each other.”

“For a long time,” he continues, “a lot of the top-level education in something like violin-playing has been focused on becoming a soloistic player. Maybe a quartet player. Or taking auditions, and then playing in an orchestra for 40 years. But I don’t think musicians in general are quite cut out to be placed on career paths.

“Because this [training] takes so much time and so much focus, there’s a danger that your way of looking at your professional life gets narrower and narrower. Then you make the mistake of accidentally believing that you were put on this earth to play in a violin section in an orchestra. And maybe you weren’t. I think it was Miles Davis who said that sometimes it takes a long time to sound like yourself,” he muses. “I think there is something about the instrumental education that can close your windows a bit. And that’s something I’ve felt with a lot of the kids that I got to work with in Australia – that their windows were open.”

In contrast, he says: “To invent a life of your own kind, in music, means discovering what you’re good at, and discovering what you’re interested in becoming better at. And then just try to build a community of musicians and see what you can do.” He names the example-setting ACO tours with ACO Collective, the education at the Australian National Academy of Music and Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and Musica Viva Australia’s

FutureMakers program, as particularly visionary parts of the Australian music ecosystem. “There are organisations that listen to young string players who say, ‘I wonder if I should develop interspecies music-making between birds and violin?’ And the organisation says, ‘Go for it, here’s a little bit of money, make a concert.’ And then something grows from that. That’s just insanely exciting.”

The centrepiece of Kuusisto’s program for the ACO is *Shrink*, a concerto for violin and strings by Nico Muhly, commissioned by the ACO and composed specifically for Kuusisto. It premiered at the Melbourne Recital Centre in late 2019. “We thought, ‘This is a fantastic piece of music, and we worked hard on it – we should tour it properly.’”

Also on the program is *West Coast Sky Eternal*, a new piece for string orchestra composed by Ellen Reid, a composer Kuusisto loves and champions. “Ellen Reid’s chamber opera, called *p r i s m*, is actually the reason I decided to study conducting,” he says. “I thought, ‘If being a conductor gives me the influence to program music like this one day, then it’s worth studying.’ I would go as far as to say that she is one of the most important voices in composition at the moment – so definitely a big feather in our cap to get to play her music around Australia.

“Ellen herself explains the piece as zooming in and out of landscape. As it happens with a lot of great music, I think everyone will hear bits and pieces of their own life in it. I will say only this: it’s extremely tricky, unbelievably fun to play.”

Muhly and Reid’s contemporary pieces are paired with works by two recognisable names. “Mozart and Mendelssohn are fitting with the theme of Nico [Muhly]. Because, if there’s a composer alive today who has the same sort of lightning-speed brain that I imagine Mozart and Mendelssohn would have had, or must have had, then Nico would be one of my top candidates.” Mozart is represented with *The Magic Flute*. Years ago, German festival director and cellist Jan Vogler introduced Kuusisto to a pile of anonymous arrangements of *The Magic Flute* for string quartets. Kuusisto decided to re-arrange them for a full string orchestra, and the concert will open with a selection from that “pile”. “We can’t play all the hits, because there’s not a single movement in *The Magic Flute* that isn’t a hit – we’d have two hours of an opener!”

The final piece is Felix Mendelssohn’s String Quintet No.2, arranged for string orchestra. “Arranging a string quartet for string orchestra is quite normal, but arranging string quintets – unfortunately – happens less often, because the balancing within the orchestra goes easily wrong. But now we have several players in the ACO who can swap between violin and viola – and that opened the possibility

of having the Mendelssohn quintet.” And, he adds enthusiastically: “It’s incredibly good! It’s one of my absolute favourite pieces of music. If Schumann had a really happy day, this is the kind of music he would have written. Plus, it sits on the instrument a lot better than any Schumann. It’s glorious fun.”

A few years ago, I heard Kuusisto describe the joy of something akin to improvisation within classical concerts: “It’s possible, sometimes, to make decisions that wouldn’t come to you in a rehearsal ... Something happens; the spirit moves you and suddenly something feels like a grand idea.” He described the special moment in which tiny bodily signals – a gesture, a movement – alerted other players to jump on board. “And the more you know the people you play with, the further you can take the situation. If you listen to great jazz groups or great traditional music groups that have played together for decades, you hear it instantly.”

So it’s no wonder that this is one of the aspects of playing with the ACO he cherishes the most. “Programming for the ACO, you know that everything is going to be played 10 or 12 times. One of the luxuries is that you can improvise a lot with the interpretation. On tour, once you’ve gotten the first couple of shows down, things start to happen between the musicians that are unrehearsable, that can only happen in concert, when everyone really knows the music very well. You start to take risks with each other.” His eyes light up. “The ACO is such a brilliant, risk-taking orchestra. I think the program will become a completely different animal during the tour!”

Jana Perković is a cultural critic and editor, living between Melbourne, Berlin and Copenhagen, who works in academia, the arts and private practice. She co-created a popular best-seller, *The Ideal City*, for IKEA’s innovation lab SPACE10, and edited Assemble papers between 2017–2020. Her critique and essays have been published widely in Australia and Europe.

Page 20.
Pekka Kuusisto and Nico Muhly,
Giant Dwarf, Sydney, 2019.
Photo by Cameron Emerson-Elliott

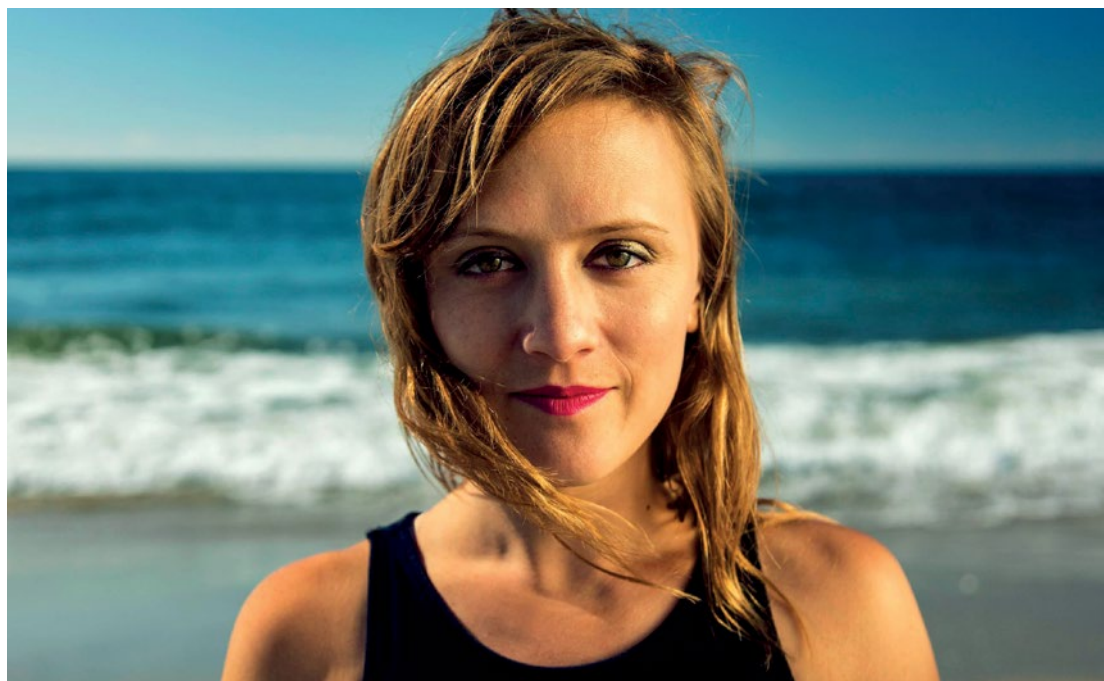




Ellen Reid composed *West Coast Sky Eternal* –
a paean to the Californian landscape – through a difficult
pregnancy, and it reflects the grit she needed to write it.

A SENSE OF PLACE

Written by Fiona Wright



When Ellen Reid composed *West Coast Sky Eternal* she was in the middle of one of the “most challenging physical experiences” of her life. Reid composed the piece while she was pregnant, a pregnancy that was “really rough”. She was sick all the time, for months on end; and was on the cusp of massive, unimaginable changes to her life and practice. “And I think,” she says, “you can hear that grit and struggle in the music.”

What strikes me most when Reid describes the piece – its opening vista of “a city from above”, its descent down to the human level of the street before a swoop back up and out to regain distance and perspective – is how her whole body becomes animated as she speaks. How her contained, serious-seeming self – she has an intense gaze, sits with her hands squarely folded – suddenly grows expansive, her arms thrown wide and her face alight.

West Coast Sky Eternal is a piece about a landscape, its sweeping beauty and the everyday struggle of the lives lived within it. It comes to rest, Reid says, somewhere where both of these contrasts can sit together, somewhere that isn’t simple, isn’t easy, but is all the more beautiful for it.

*

Reid is well-known for the diversity of her composing practice. Her orchestral work sits

alongside operas, films scores, choral pieces, avant-pop and sound design; she composes for concert halls, cinemas and open spaces. “I don’t like to do the same thing back-to-back,” she says and adds that having some distance from each newly-completed work helps her to “incorporate the learning” that comes with the creation of each piece, to “have access” to what she has discovered. “And,” she says, “it’s fun to change it up.”

I can’t help but suspect that this is only part of the reason for the breadth of Reid’s work, that part of her impulse to work across so many genres and forms comes from her student years. Reid grew up in a small city in Tennessee, one that she describes as a “science-centred place”. While her love of music was supported there – as a child she sang in the church choir, played in the school band and took piano lessons – when she arrived at university in New York City, she was suddenly surrounded by so many different kinds of music – concerts at Carnegie Hall, jazz clubs, experimental musicians in unusual spaces – that it was a revelation. She met many different traditions and practices all at the same formative time, and it “blew up the possibilities” of what music is and can be. It was, she says, “inspiration for days”, and it seems that this is working on her still.

It is a voice, Reid says, that connects all of her work together, across its extraordinary range. “A set of timbres,” she explains, “and different layers”, a “dimensionality” that she plays with within the different frames that each form offers. She says there are themes that recur across the various styles – but these she will not be drawn on.

I am certain that one of these is place. Reid is always aware, she says, of the space in which her work will be heard, always imagines being in the concert hall, feeling the physical dimensions of the music as it is played, the choreography and the performance, in order to find ways to “reach through and grab people”. Several of her more unusual projects are specifically place-based – most notably the long-running *SOUNDWALK*, in which Reid’s orchestral scores are geolocated to paths and sites across urban parks in the United States, Britain, Ireland and Japan. The path the listener takes dictates the music they will hear. One of the challenges of this project, Reid says, “was leaving space in the music for thinking”, to allow people to “experience the place with more sensitivity, more depth”.

The landscape at the heart of *West Coast Sky Eternal* is one that Reid loves – California with its views of water, its sweeping ocean cliffs, its long views over deserts and mountains. It is a place climatically similar to much of Australia, dotted too with eucalypts – “no one knows what they’re doing there” – and bougainvillea, and it is, Reid says, “really wonderful” that the piece will have a continued life in this new place.

What’s remarkable, Reid says, is that everyone experiences a piece of music differently. When listening to music, each person embarks on “their own psychological journey”, following their own thoughts, emotions and memories for which the music is only a trigger point. A composer cannot dictate a meaning, she says. What they offer instead “is an invitation to feel something”.

Fiona Wright is a writer, editor and critic from Sydney. Her first book, *Small Acts of Disappearance*, won the Nita B. Kibble Award and the Queensland Literary Award for Non Fiction. Her poetry collection *Domestic Interior* was shortlisted for the Prime Minister’s Literary Awards and her essay collection *The World Was Whole* was shortlisted for the 2020 NSW Premier’s Literary Award for non-fiction. Her most recent book is the novel *Kill Your Boomers* (2026).

West Coast Sky Eternal is a piece about a landscape, its sweeping beauty and the everyday struggle of the lives lived within it. It comes to rest, Reid says, somewhere where both of these contrasts can sit together, somewhere that isn’t simple, isn’t easy, but is all the more beautiful for it.

Page 22–23.
Ellen Reid.
Photo by Erin Baiano

Page 24.
Ellen Reid.
Photo by James Matthew Daniel

Pekka Kuusisto

Guest Director
& Violin



Violinist, conductor, and composer Pekka Kuusisto is internationally recognised for his visionary artistry and creative freedom establishing him as one of today's most compelling artists. He is Artistic Director of Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony, and Chief Conductor designate of Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra from April 2028. He joins the TMSO as Artist in Residence for a two-year term from April 2026, appearing both as conductor and violinist.

Kuusisto maintains an active international career, performing regularly with leading orchestras across Europe, North America, Asia, and Oceania. He is known for his dual role as conductor and violinist, often presenting innovative and diverse programmes. A committed interpreter of new music and gifted improviser, he regularly engages with people across the artistic spectrum and has premiered works by Anna Clyne, Ellen Reid, Thomas Adès, Bryce Dessner, and Nico Muhly among others.

Kuusisto performs on the Antonio Stradivarius violin, "ex-Sandars", Cremona 1695, generously loaned by the Anders Sveaas' Charitable Foundation, ASAF.

Photo by Bard Gundersen

Australian Chamber Orchestra

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The Australian Chamber Orchestra lives and breathes music, making waves around the world for its explosive performances that redefine orchestral music. With its fearless leader of over three decades, Artistic Director Richard Tognetti, the ACO is acclaimed internationally as an ensemble of invention, disruption and unforgettable music-making.

The ACO performs more than 100 concerts each year, with programs that embrace celebrated classics alongside new commissions and ground-

breaking collaborations, working with artists and musicians who share the Orchestra's ideology: from Emmanuel Pahud, Steven Isserlis, Polina Leschenko, Pekka Kuusisto, Nicolas Altstaedt and William Barton, to Jonny Greenwood, Neil Finn and Meow Meow; to visual artists and film makers such as Bill Henson, Shaun Tan, Jane Campion, and Jennifer Peedom, who co-create unique, hybrid productions for which the ACO has become renowned.

In addition to its national touring schedule, the ACO undertakes multiple international tours a year, regularly performing in cities including London, New York and Tokyo. Following the success of Richard Tognetti's season as the Barbican's first ever Artist-in-Residence at Milton Court Concert Hall, the Orchestra performed a three-year residency as International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court in partnership with London's Barbican Centre from the 2018/19 season.

The ACO has a series of award-winning cinematic concert films, *ACO StudioCasts*, as well as an active recording program across vinyl, CD and digital. Its recordings of Bach's violin works won two consecutive ARIA Awards. Recent releases include *Horizon*, *Beethoven & Brahms: Concertos for Violin and Orchestra*, featuring Richard Tognetti as soloist, *Water/Night Music*, the first Australian-produced classical vinyl for two decades, *Beethoven 1, 2, & 3 Eroica* and ARIA award-winning albums *River* and *Indies & Idols*.

In 2022 the ACO opened a new, world-class venue, ACO On The Pier, continuing the Orchestra's dedication to creating and presenting transformative experiences for all music lovers.

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Spotlight on BNP Paribas

Nicolas Parrot, CEO of BNP Paribas Australia and New Zealand, on the bank's long history in Australia and its passion for investing in the future of music.



In 2026, BNP Paribas marks two important milestones – a double celebration. It is 20 years since we first partnered with the Australian Chamber Orchestra in 2006; a beloved and unique cultural institution. This year we also celebrate 145 years since we first opened our doors in Australia in 1881.

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Since 2017, BNP Paribas has supported the ACO Academy, one of the ACO's flagship talent development programs. In July, we were mesmerised, enjoying the talents of 30 of Australia's most promising young string players at the ACO Academy concert. Handpicked from across the country, they came together for a week of intensive workshops led by ACO musicians, under the direction of ACO violinist Aiko Goto. Through rigorous rehearsals, ensemble work and performance coaching, these students were immersed in the ACO's unique musical language and inspired to reach new heights of artistic excellence.

Complementing our support of the Academy is our investment in greater access and equity through the ACO BNP Paribas Pathway Scholarship. This initiative supports school-aged musicians from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and provides tailored assistance for lessons, orchestra participation, instrument access and coaching with ACO musicians.

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Australian Chamber Orchestra
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Suite 3, 13A Hickson Road
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By Mail
PO Box R21
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A black and white close-up photograph of a violin, focusing on the strings and the bow. The image is artistic, with strong contrasts and a focus on the geometric lines of the instrument. A dark teal rectangular box is overlaid on the lower left portion of the image, containing white text.

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Thank you Tony Gill

The late Tony Gill was a wonderful friend of the ACO. His support over many years meant a great deal to us, and we are profoundly grateful that he chose to continue that generosity with a gift in his will.

Tony was born in Montreal and made Australia his home in 1978. Over the decades that followed, he built an extraordinary career at Macquarie Bank, becoming one of the country's leading figures in mortgage securitisation. After leaving Macquarie, he continued to share his expertise by serving on a number of boards and industry panels. He also gave his time and energy to several not-for-profit organisations, including the Butterfly Foundation, Pinchgut Opera and the ACO.

Tony first became involved with the ACO through friends, over 20 years ago. He was a keen

supporter of the arts and classical music, both philanthropically and by sharing it with his friends, colleagues and of course, family. He was always pushing for more people to be involved and loved to share the experience of concerts with others. Tony was himself a subscriber for many years.

Beyond his financial support, Tony contributed in meaningful ways through his time, his insight and his participation on several ACO committees.

Tony loved music in all its forms – from the great classics to contemporary works – and what moved him most was the emotion and the storytelling at the heart of it. His generous gift in his will ensures that this love of music, and his belief in its power, will continue to resonate for many years to come.

Vale, Tony Gill – and thank you.

If you are interested in finding out about supporting the ACO with a gift in your will, please contact Lillian Armitage on (02) 8274 3827 or at Lillian.Armitage@aco.com.au.

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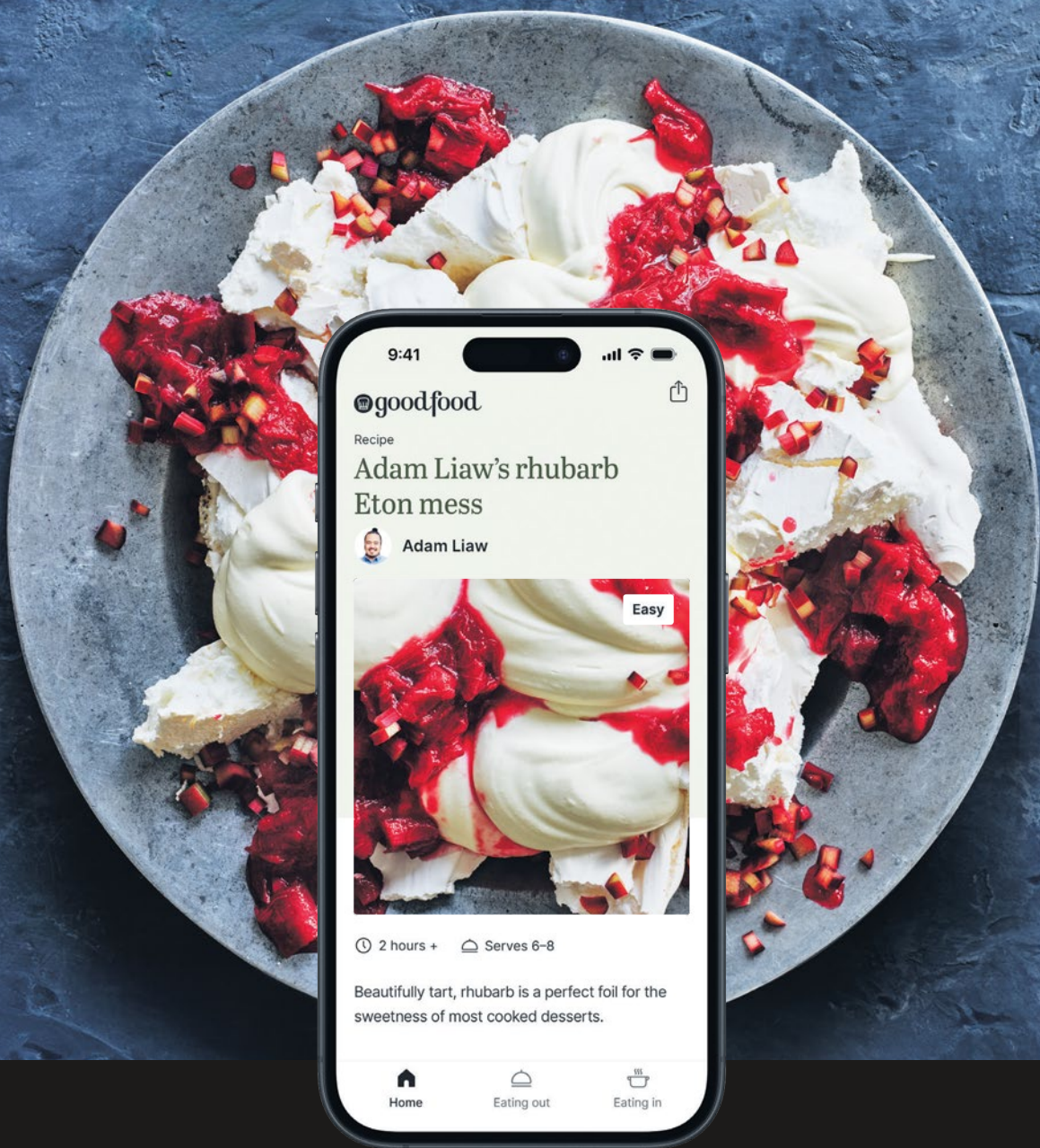
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