

AustralianChamberOrchestra

50TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

ACO

ACO UNLEASHED

Directed by Helena Rathbone and Satu Vänskä

PRINCIPAL PARTNER AND
NATIONAL TOUR PARTNER



Wesfarmers Arts

ACO

GERSHWIN & SHOSTAKOVICH

1–18 August

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Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth,
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Richard Tognetti
directs Gershwin's
Rhapsody in Blue
and Shostakovich's
Piano Concerto No.1
with superstar pianist
Alexander Gavrylyuk.



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*Transaction fee of \$8.50 applies

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1975 - 2025



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.

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#ACO25Season



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Up Front

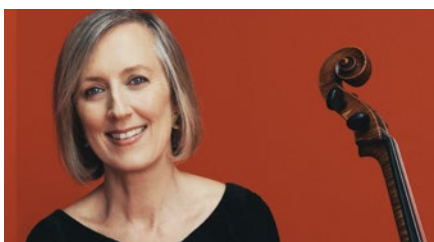
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WELCOME

Welcome to *ACO Unleashed* – a concert that embodies the bold and virtuosic spirit of the ACO's 50th Anniversary Season.

While we were disappointed that guest director, violinist and composer Patricia Kopatchinskaja withdrew from this tour due to injury, and wish her all the best with her recovery, we are delighted that Richard Tognetti has curated an exhilarating new program that celebrates the exceptional artistry within the ACO's own ranks. The ACO is acclaimed internationally as an orchestra of soloists, and this concert is a celebration that brings the extraordinary virtuosity of our own musicians to the fore.

Our newest member of the Orchestra, violinist Anna da Silva Chen, joins Principal Violins Helena Rathbone and Satu Vänkä to perform Bach's glorious Triple Violin Concerto, before Satu takes centre stage in Ravel's fiendish showpiece *Tzigane*. Also on the program is the Australian premiere of Finnish composer Jaakko Kuusisto's richly expressive Cello Concerto, performed by Principal Cello Timo-Veikko 'Tipi' Valve. This concerto, Kuusisto's final orchestral work before his untimely passing in 2022, has a special resonance with Tipi, who shared a longstanding friendship and musical connection with Jaakko from the very beginnings of his career.

In addition to celebrating the ACO's 50th anniversary this year, 2025 also marks a milestone anniversary of one of our own: cellist Melissa Barnard, who joined the ACO 30 years ago. Melissa sat down with writer Kate Holden for a piece published in this program, where she discusses her musical upbringing and how an ACO audition drew her from her career in the US back home to Australia.

I thank Wesfarmers Arts who, in addition to being Principal Partner of the ACO, are also the National Tour Partner for this program. Wesfarmers has been a deeply valued partner of the ACO for nearly three decades, providing essential support in allowing more audiences across Australia and around the world to experience this extraordinary Orchestra. We are deeply grateful to them for their ongoing support.

As I am sure many of you are aware, this is the time of the year when we have our annual fund-raising campaign pre-30 June tax time. For us, 40% of our total revenue is from box office, and an equivalent 40% comes from fundraising; core government investment forms only 7% of our revenue, with the remaining percentage comprising investments and commercial revenues from our home, ACO On The Pier.

Your tax deductible donation at this time will help us continue to bring our concerts, family and education activity to communities around Australia.

Please don't be embarrassed, no amount is too large (or too small) – we need it all: aco.com.au/donate.

Thank you for joining us, and I hope that you enjoy the performance.



Richard Evans AM
Managing Director

Australian Chamber
Orchestra.
Photo by Charlie Kinross



WELCOME FROM WESFARMERS ARTS

On behalf of Wesfarmers Arts, I am delighted to welcome you to this special performance by the ACO.

It is particularly exciting to share this message during our inaugural term as the ACO's Principal Partner. We feel privileged to serve as the National Tour Partner for this extraordinary concert series, which celebrates the Orchestra's 50th anniversary with *ACO Unleashed* — a bold and exhilarating showcase of the exceptional talent within the ACO.

For over 50 years, the ACO has taken audiences on transformative musical journeys, and this concert will be no exception. Featuring works by Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Ravel and Jaakko Kuusisto, and spotlighting the virtuosic artistry of ACO principals and rising stars alike, *ACO Unleashed* is a powerful tribute to the Orchestra's unwavering energy, imagination and musicianship.

Wesfarmers Arts has proudly supported the ACO for nearly three decades, first joining as 'Perth Series Sponsor' in 1998. We are thrilled to continue sharing these inspiring performances with audiences in Perth and across Western Australia, including the Orchestra's annual appearances at the Sound and Sense festival at Vasse Felix in Margaret River.

At Wesfarmers Arts, we are honoured to partner with the ACO and to help bring these exceptional musical experiences to life.

Enjoy the concert.



Rob Scott

Managing Director Wesfarmers Limited



Wesfarmers Arts



Australian Chamber Orchestra & Wesfarmers Arts
Bringing People & Music Together

NEWS

Upcoming concerts
and the latest
announcements.

Latest News

Take Us Beyond 50

It is the belief and generosity of our supporters which have allowed the ACO's trailblazing spirit to thrive, shaping the Orchestra you hear today. Help us step boldly together into our next half-century guided by the same creativity, daring and ambition that have defined the first 50 years we have shared.

Make a tax-deductible donation before 30 June at aco.com.au/donate

COMO The Treasury

We're delighted to continue our longstanding partnership with COMO The Treasury, a valued supporter of the ACO since 2016.

Housed within Perth's iconic 140-year-old State Buildings, this luxury hotel forms part of one of Western Australia's most important heritage precincts – a cornerstone of the city's cultural and social life.

ACO On Demand

The Four Seasons

Following its national cinema release, our latest acclaimed StudioCast film, *The Four Seasons*, will be available to purchase and stream on ACO On Demand.

Director Matisse Ruby says: *"If you've seen the ACO's Four Seasons with Joseph and James Tawadros live, you know it's an exhilarating, high-octane ride that breathes new life into Vivaldi's masterpiece. In creating this film, I wanted to honour that energy – drawing on the intimate nature of the classic rock concert films of the seventies. The result is a film that I hope feels both immersive and electrifying, putting the audience right in the heart of the performance while also capturing the magic of the ACO and Joseph's collaboration in a way that can only be experienced on screen."*

1.
Australian Chamber
Orchestra

2.
The Four Seasons
StudioCast



1



2

On Tour

Gershwin & Shostakovich

1-18 AUG

National Tour

Superstar pianist Alexander Gavrylyuk makes his long-awaited ACO debut in a concert directed by Richard Tognetti that celebrates the power of music, featuring Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No.1.

A Musical Awakening

4-21 SEP

National Tour

The music of Beethoven and Max Richter centres this exploration of music's ability to heal, nourish and awaken, directed by ACO Principal Cello Timo-Veikko Valve and featuring recorder virtuoso Genevieve Lacey.

3.

Gershwin &
Shostakovich

4.

ACO Up Close:
Shostakovich,
Silvestrov & Bach

5.

The Princess,
The Pea (and The
Brave Escapee)



3

ACO On The Pier

ACO Relaxed Performance: Gershwin & Shostakovich

20 AUG

ACO On The Pier

An accessible, 50-minute concert featuring music for piano and orchestra, featuring soloist Alexander Gavrylyuk.

ACO Up Close: Shostakovich, Silvestrov & Bach

23-25 AUG

ACO On The Pier
& Melbourne Recital Centre

ACO Principal Violin Satu Vänkä leads a deep exploration of the majesty and heartache of Shostakovich and Silvestrov chamber works, set alongside the depth, candour and ecstasy of the music of JS Bach.



4

ACO Families

The Princess, The Pea (and The Brave Escapee)

13-20 JUL

ACO On The Pier

There is the fairytale you know and love... but what isn't known is why our brave princess was out in the middle of a storm, in the middle of a night, at the end of an adventure. This is *that* story.

This stunning theatrical production comes alive with classical music performed live by ACO musicians. It's perfect for audiences of all ages who need a reminder that they can be brave, even if they feel scared of the unknown.



5

OUR STORY IS YOUR STORY

Our supporters have helped shape our first 50 years.

Help us step boldly into our next chapter with the same free thinking, creativity and ambition which have made us into the ACO of today.

Take us beyond 50.
Donate now.



ACO.COM.AU/DONATE

Australian
Chamber
Orchestra

50
Years



Pre-Concert
Talks

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

CANBERRA – LLEWELLYN HALL

Bernard Rofe

Sat 21 Jun 6.45pm

MELBOURNE – ARTS
CENTRE MELBOURNE

Kym Dillon

Sun 22 Jun 1.45pm

Mon 23 Jun 6.45pm

ADELAIDE TOWN HALL

Russell Torrance

Tue 24 Jun 6.45pm

PERTH – WINTHROP HALL

Will Yeoman

Wed 25 Jun 6.45pm

SYDNEY – CITY RECITAL HALL

Bernard Rofe

Sat 28 Jun 6.15pm

Tue 1 Jul 7.15pm

Wed 2 Jul 6.15pm

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

Bernard Rofe

Sun 29 Jun 1.15pm

BRISBANE – QPAC
CONCERT HALL

Matthew Hodge

Mon 30 Jun 6.15pm

PROGRAM

Helena Rathbone Director & Violin
Satu Vänskä Director & Violin
Anna da Silva Chen Violin
Timo-Veikko Valve Cello
Australian Chamber Orchestra

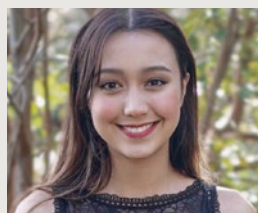
COMPOSER	TITLE	MIN
Johann Sebastian Bach	Concerto for Three Violins in D major, BWV1064R <i>I. [Allegro]</i> <i>II. Adagio</i> <i>III. Allegro</i>	15
Maurice Ravel (arr. Bernard Rofe)	Tzigane	10
Ludwig van Beethoven (arr. Richard Tognetti)	String Quartet in F minor, Op.95 “Serioso” <i>I. Allegro con brio</i> <i>II. Allegretto ma non troppo</i> <i>III. Allegro assai vivace ma serioso</i> <i>IV. Larghetto espressivo – Allegretto agitato</i>	21
Interval		20
Franz Schubert (arr. strings)	Quartettsatz in C minor, D.703	10
Jaakko Kuusisto	Cello Concerto, Op.38 (<i>Australian Premiere</i>) <i>I. Cadenza. Tempo moderato – Andante mosso – Vivace</i> <i>II. Andante</i> <i>III. Molto moderato – Allegro</i>	26

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. *ACO Unleashed* will be broadcast on Saturday 26 July, 1pm and available on demand for 30 days after.

MUSICIANS ON STAGE

Learn more about our musicians,
go behind the scenes and watch
ACO StudioCast films at:
acoondemand.com.au



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 the 1714 'ex-Isolde Menges' Giuseppe Guarneri filius Andrea violin on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. Her Chair is sponsored by Anthony & Sharon Lee Foundation.



Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba
Violin

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



Ike See
Violin & Celesta

Ike plays his own 2021 Zygmuntowicz violin. His Chair is sponsored by Ian Lansdown & Tricia Bell.



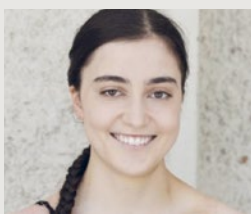
Helena Rathbone
Director & Principal Violin

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



Ilya Isakovich
Violin

Ilya plays a 1590 Brothers Amati violin on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. His Chair is sponsored by Meg Meldrum.



Louise Turnbull*
Violin

Louise plays a 1923 Italian violin by Antonio Da Costa on loan by Jannie Brown. She is a 2025 ACO Emerging Artist.



Satu Vänskä
Director & Principal Violin

Satu plays a 1728/29 Stradivarius violin on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. Her Chair is sponsored by David Thomas AM.



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.



Amy Brookman*
Violin

Amy plays on a 1692 Gioffredo Capp violin generously supported by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra Foundation. She appears courtesy of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.



Stefanie Farrands
Principal Viola

Stefanie plays her own 2016 viola made by Ragnar Hayn in Berlin. Her chair is sponsored by peckvonhartel architects.



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.



Amanda Verner[#]
Viola

Amanda plays her own viola, a 2023 copy of a Gasparo da Salò by Florian Leonhard Fine Violins. She appears courtesy of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.



Timo-Veikko Valve
Principal Cello

Tipi plays a 1616 Brothers Amati cello 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 Andrea cello with elements of the instrument crafted by his son, Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù, donated to the ACO by the late Peter Weiss AO. His Chair is sponsored by the Stewart Family, and Julie Steiner AM & Judyth Sachs.



Maxime Bibeau
Principal Bass

Max plays a late-16th century Gasparo da Salò bass on loan from UKARIA.



Brian Nixon[#]
Timpani & Percussion

Brian's Chair is sponsored by Jo & John Millyard and Jennifer & Denys Gillespie.



Daryl Pratt[#]
Percussion

[#] Guest Musicians

PROGRAM IN SHORT

Your five-minute read
before lights down.

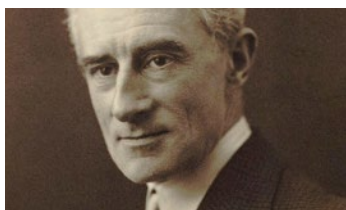
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Concerto for Three Violins in D major, BWV1064R

Johann Sebastian Bach began composing what we now call the Concerto for Three Violins in D major during his Leipzig years – an era marked by intellectual vigour and artistic ambition. As director of the Collegium Musicum, a society of musicians performing weekly concerts, Bach thrived in an environment where music was both public spectacle and private revelation.

The Triple Concerto, often thought to have originally existed in its violin form before slipping into obscurity, was later reconstructed from a three-harpsichord arrangement. Restored to its resplendent D major, the piece moves with remarkable agility, as its three soloists weave through a counterpoint so seamless that their lines seem less like individual voices and more like a single, cohesive force.

Here, Bach's trademark mathematical precision meets sheer expressive fervour, with violinists engaging in a dialogue that oscillates between elegance and exhilaration. The orchestra, never merely an accompanist, functions as an essential architectural frame, elevating the solo interplay to something almost metaphysical. It's Bach at his most fluid, his most conversational, his most undeniably timeless.



Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Tzigane

*Arranged for solo violin, percussion, celesta
and string orchestra by Bernard Rofe*

Maurice Ravel's *Tzigane* is a piece that thrives on tension: between control and abandon, between structure and improvisatory fire. Written in 1924 for the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Áranyi, it channels the spirit of Romani virtuosity with an air of calculated intensity.

The opening *Lento, quasi cadenza* sets the tone – a solo passage that unfolds with deliberate pacing, each phrase pulling against the silence. Then, as the orchestration builds, the violin finds its urgency, cascading through rapid runs, syncopated rhythms and harmonically charged slides. There's a rawness to

the gestures, but it's sculpted with Ravel's trademark precision and depth; a rhapsodic and beckoning cry to the unknown.

In writing *Tzigane*, Ravel wasn't simply invoking Hungarian folk traditions through transcription – he was filtering them through his own lens, balancing authenticity with compositional control. The result is a piece that dazzles without excess, holding back just enough to let the tension linger. *Tzigane* remains one of the great showcases of violin technique, demanding absolute control paired with intense carefree wildness.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
String Quartet in F minor, Op.95 “Serioso”
Arranged for string orchestra by Richard Tognetti

Ludwig van Beethoven's String Quartet in F minor, Op.95, known as the *Serioso*, is a work of compressed intensity; layered and intricately gestural beauty, passages of immediate brashness, classical poise and wild explosivity. Composed in 1810, in the shadow of Napoleon's second invasion of Vienna, it is Beethoven at his most defiant, restless, and unrelenting. He called it a quartet “for a small circle of connoisseurs” and insisted it was “never to be performed in public” – a warning, perhaps, that its stormy, fractured language was not meant for easy consumption, perhaps echoing the turmoil of the time.

The *Serioso* is Beethoven's shortest quartet, yet it carries the weight of something far larger. The *Allegro con brio* opens with a terse, urgent motif, its clipped phrases barely allowing space to breathe. The *Allegretto* offers a fleeting respite, a melody that seems to search for solace it never arrives at. Then comes the *Allegro assai vivace ma serioso*, a movement that lunges forward, its rhythms jagged, its harmonies unsettled. And finally, the *Larghetto espressivo*, which teases resolution before racing toward an unexpected, almost reckless conclusion.

It is Beethoven in miniature, yet it contains all his contradictions and greatness – rage and tenderness, despair and triumph, silence and explosion. A quartet that does not end so much as it escapes, never fully resolving, always yearning – still as relevant today as it was in 1810.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Quartettsatz in C minor, D.703
Arranged for string orchestra

Franz Schubert's Quartettsatz in C minor, D.703 is a work of restless energy, a piece that surges forward with urgency and never quite settles. Composed in 1820, it was meant to be the opening movement of a full string quartet, but Schubert never completed the full work, penning only 41 bars of the second movement.

The *Allegro assai* begins with a sharp, insistent motif, its clipped phrases driving the music forward with an almost feverish intensity. The violins engage in a tense dialogue, their lines weaving between agitation and fleeting moments of lyricism. Schubert's signature contrast between turbulence and serenity is fully realised here, with unexpected harmonic shifts adding to the sense of unease.

Though unfinished, Quartettsatz stands as a singular achievement, a glimpse into Schubert's evolving artistry. It remained unpublished during his lifetime, eventually finding its way to Johannes Brahms, who recognised its brilliance and ensured its publication in 1870. Today, it is regarded as the first of Schubert's mature quartets, a piece that, despite its incompleteness, feels fully formed – charged with an urgency that refuses to fade.


Jaakko Kuusisto (1974-2022)
Cello Concerto, Op.38
(Australian Premiere)

Jaakko Kuusisto was a Finnish violinist, composer and conductor; a rare artist and a vitally important voice gone too soon. An authority in performance and composition, his mastery in both realms was always underscored by his remarkable talent for expressive depth. His career encompassed solo performances, orchestral leadership, and a body of remarkable new compositions that ranged from chamber music to opera.

Among his final works, Kuusisto's Cello Concerto, Op.38 stands as a testament to his unique artistry. Expansive yet intimate, its haunting lyricism echoes the rich textures of his last opera, *Ice*. Woven within the score are subtle tributes, including a striking nod to the fight scene from *West Side Story* in its climactic movement. Performed in this program by ACO Principal Cello Timo-Veikko Valve, a close personal friend of the Kuusisto family and widely regarded as a foremost interpreter of Kuusisto's work, this performance, in its Australian premiere, is a fitting tribute to a composer whose voice remains unmistakable, even in absence.



ESSENCE



After violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja's last-minute withdrawal, the Australian Chamber Orchestra's essence – nimbleness, renewal and individual virtuosity – came to the fore.

&

VITALITY

Written by Bernard Zuel

When Richard Tognetti says, “we live dangerously as a collective of individuals”, he isn’t really puffing up the Australian Chamber Orchestra in its 50th year. He has the evidence right before him to prove it.

In the dying days of May, when Patricia Kopatchinskaja – the renowned Moldovan violinist who was to have guest-directed and performed in the ACO’s June tour *Death and the Maiden Revealed* – withdrew from the tour with an injury, the Orchestra had only days to devise, prepare and roll out a new program whose first notes would ring out in just three weeks.

Tognetti was already committed elsewhere so he couldn’t step in, and the centrepiece of the program, Schubert’s *Death and the Maiden*, had to be excised for later use. But the ACO’s solution to this urgent programming dilemma is remarkably in keeping with not just the spirit of the year-long anniversary celebration of this organisation but with its very essence: nimbleness, deep connection to the works, renewal and individual virtuosity within the collective.

Among the new selections are a Ravel showpiece featuring Principal Violin Satu Vänskä and a Finnish homecoming for Principal Cello Timo-Veikko “Tipi” Valve. Principal Violin Helena Rathbone joins Vänskä and newest ACO member Anna da Silva Chen as soloists for a Bach triple concerto and the Orchestra will also perform Tognetti’s string orchestra arrangement of Beethoven’s *Serioso* string quartet.

Within the practical in those selections is also the intimate. The Cello Concerto by the late Finnish composer Jaakko Kuusisto was completed shortly before he was diagnosed with an aggressive brain cancer in 2020. It was forwarded to Valve, who had already sought to commission a work from his countryman, though time and distance intervened.

“Jaakko was keen to write something for me; he was, after all, my ex-brother-in-law and our two families had always remained close,” Valve explains. “I have had the joy of collaborating with Pekka, Jaakko’s little brother, extensively over the years. Jaakko was also present, especially early on in my career, helping me navigate through some of the hurdles a young musician might face.”

Three years after Kuusisto’s death, it’s not surprising Valve says that playing these notes holds a special significance. “Jaakko’s voice is in every melody, every harmony,” he says. “And while we can’t have a conversation with him anymore, somehow, playing this piece comes close.”

Elsewhere in the program, where the personal is not as direct, something different animates the choices. “Ravel’s *Tzigane* is something that is in Satu’s repertoire and she knows it really well but hasn’t played it with the ACO,” says Tognetti. “So it’s actually



“When Richard Tognetti says, “we live dangerously as a collective of individuals”, he isn’t really puffing up the Australian Chamber Orchestra in its 50th year. He has the evidence right before him to prove it.”





a great opportunity to showcase, to spotlight, Satu's virtuosity. And it's rare that we have Helena and Satu on stage in directing roles at the same time, so this just shows the strength of the Orchestra."

In that rarity, how does he see Vänskä and Rathbone differing in their approach to directing and playing?

"It's probably best to ask them, ha!" he says, laughing. "They are very different players, but they are incredibly complementary to each other, and complimentary of one another. They come from different parts of Europe: Hellie comes from the highly respected British string tradition where there's a real focus on chamber music, while Satu studied at an elite soloists' class in Germany.

"But now they speak the language of the ACO, and have very much imbibed all the things that I've brought to bear on the group, including an acute awareness of the early music movement, contemporary music, electronic music and so forth."

The third soloist for the Bach is the newest member of the ensemble, da Silva Chen. Though as Tognetti explains, "new" is a relative term with a musician such as da Silva Chen, who participated in the ACO Academy program in her early teens, before she was selected as an ACO Emerging Artist.

This process of assimilating, of absorbing and being absorbed in, of becoming someone who has imbibed, as Tognetti puts it, the ACO's philosophy as

"Jaakko's voice is in every melody, every harmony," he says. "And while we can't have a conversation with him anymore, somehow, playing this piece comes close."

much as its style, is as vital now as it has been at any stage of the Orchestra's 50 years.

"We have to put them through their paces. We need to see if they are technically up to it, if they are psychologically suited," he says of the audition process. "Something that I want to do more of with our Emerging Artists is to throw them in the deep end with different types of contemporary music. So you've got to be aware of all of those things and embrace all of those challenges."

If anyone reading this is thinking of a late-life conversion to being a professional musician with the ACO, be aware of the rigours of selection. "I'm glad – I hope – I don't have to go through the process [of auditioning for an orchestra] again," says Tognetti. "You do an audition, and if you pass this, while you're still a long way from getting the job, you are in pole position. Then you have a trial and then, if you manage to get through that phase, you go on to what's called the probation, which means you are closer to getting the job. And then after that probation – and I've heard of them going on for up to five years around the world – then you are eventually given the job."

Once all those challenges have been embraced and standards met, is there a final ceremonial moment? Perhaps a presentation, as with the Australian cricket team, of a baggy black cap to confirm entry into the family?

"Absolutely, we have a big party," Tognetti says. "For example, we committed Anna to the institution of the ACO in Germany, in Stuttgart. There was a beer hall which should have a seat named after her." Then presumably everyone took the new member off to get the official ACO tattoo? "Tattoo is good," he says. "I like it, I like it!" (I apologise to all future ACO members, or for that matter any current members who will have to retrospectively ink up.)

For all the jocularly, this program – quickly assembled but deeply rooted in the Orchestra's life – is evidence that this demanding process guarantees there is complete trust in one other's ability to adapt and flourish with three weeks' notice. Astonishing really – after 50 years, one might think that things might become stale, perhaps formulaic.

But of course that hasn't happened. Each refreshing of the ACO is both a challenge and a rejuvenation. "Yes, exactly. Exactly!" says Tognetti. "And each new player brings a new type of energy."

Bernard Zuel is a Sydney-based arts writer, specialising in music, and a lecturer in journalism at Sydney University. He worked for *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* for 25 years and was the *SMH*'s senior music writer and critic. As well as a founding, and continuing, judge of the Australian Music Prize, co-host of the online music program, *The Right Note*, and host of a podcast on music pioneer, Harry Vanda, he is a frequent contributor on television and radio.



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Richard Tognetti.
Photo by Stephen Ward

Page 17
Timo-Veikko Valve.
Photo by Wolter Peeters

Page 18.
Anna da Silva Chen.
Photo by Live Photography

Page 19.
Helena Rathbone.
Photo by Daniel Boud

Satu Vänskä.
Photo by Charlie Kinross

A childhood surrounded by music led
Melissa Barnard to the cello and a
three-decade career with Australian
Chamber Orchestra.

A GOLDEN SPACE

Written by Kate Holden





This year, Melissa Barnard marks her 30th anniversary with the Australian Chamber Orchestra. But music was at the centre of her life long before her time with the ACO. Before she was born, Melissa's young father left his home in Australia, paying for his passage to Europe by working as a ship's doctor on his way to study opera in Vienna. There, he performed on stage to acclaim as a tenor with professional opera companies including Die Wiener Staatsoper and Oper Frankfurt, and later brought his talents back to Sydney.

Melissa's mother, who met her husband when she was singing in a choir, was an accomplished contemporary dancer. Their home in Sydney brimmed with music, dance, literature and art and Melissa was learning dance and playing piano from five. At eight, when she heard Camille Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*, she chose the warm sound of the Swan: the cello.

The cello has been a companion ever since. Once she found the instrument, she found herself drawn to Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, the challenges of Bach's cello suites and chamber works by Beethoven, Bartók and Shostakovich. By 14, she had decided cello would be her career.

“The wonderful thing about the ACO is the fact that it was created by the musicians. There was always a deep commitment to the art. Now it's a much more professional outfit, but we try to keep the music the focus of everything.”

21.
Melissa Barnard.
Photo by Stephen Ward

22.
Melissa Barnard.
Photo by Simon Lekias

Several years spent studying and performing as a chamber musician in the United States convinced Melissa that the country would remain her home. But then she heard of an opening in the ACO, newly renovated by its young artistic director Richard Tognetti, and was drawn to an ensemble that paired a chamber music ethos within the setting of a string orchestra.

“The wonderful thing about the ACO,” she observes, “is the fact that it was created by the musicians. There was always a deep commitment to the art. Now it’s a much more professional outfit, but we try to keep the music the focus of everything.” That commitment, the standard of the performers “and the freedom we have to be a little different” are what have kept her travelling around Australia and the world with the Orchestra for the 30 years since then.

And now, Melissa and her partner, US-born Sydney Symphony Orchestra double bass player Steve Larson, have busy careers as professional performers, while their daughter learns both the piano and the violin.

It’s a physically tiring job, she says. “I think we exist on a little bit of an adrenaline curve a lot of the time... but playing music is compelling and I like entering the different worlds of different composers. As performers we inhabit those pages for a time and then try to express onstage those very particular and detailed worlds.”

To play Bach in the right way for Bach, to embrace the flex and suppleness of modern performance styles, to express the bigger story of a composer’s art and communicate that to an audience: for Melissa, the ACO is the best place to enjoy those challenges. “I think of the Orchestra as a living organism,” she says. “Everyone in the ACO has some kind of personal quirk and special quality, but we have common cause when we play together. It’s liberating, to express and share something bigger than yourself.”

Among her favourite ACO experiences are the exceptional guest artists she has played with and working with them so closely, playing in many of the world’s great concert halls, and the frequent tours that made London and New York into familiar cities. Melissa particularly enjoys playing an active role in the ACO’s Learning & Engagement programs, including mentoring the ACO’s Emerging Artists and working alongside these musicians in ACO Collective. “It’s healthy to get off the ‘pedestal’ of the big stages,” she says. “Workshopping music in depth with students and young professionals is not only intensely focused but also artistically luxurious. To have this time to explore is essential.”

She tells me of the satisfactions that come with the variety of alternating between large orchestral

performance and intense, smaller chamber works. “We play quartets, solos, symphonies... the ACO is many things, but there is rarely a dull moment – and mostly, they are in airports,” she laughs. And how, playing with so many long-known colleagues, “I find that, just looking across at the person next to me, it draws you into what you’re doing, and out of yourself. The goal is not to be in ‘yourself’ – it has to be something better than that.” The ACO, for Melissa is summed up in three words: dedication, intensity, communication.

One of her favourite moments is when she can find a moment on the concert stage in the hours before a performance. “You feel this special, heightened quiet,” she says. She will play a few notes, breathe and ground herself, “in that golden space, hearing the sound of the cello spin out into the acoustic”.

Kate Holden regularly contributes to *The Saturday Paper* and other publications. She is the author of *In My Skin: A memoir* (2005), and *The Romantic: Italian nights and days* (2010). *The Winter Road: A Killing in Croppa Creek* (Black Inc, 2021) won the Walkley Book Award and the NSW Premier’s nonfiction award. A book of linked essays will be published in 2026.

Melissa Barnard.
Photo by Nic Walker



Helena Rathbone

Director & Violin



Helena Rathbone grew up in North London in a family of musicians. She started playing the violin at the age of five with the London Suzuki group, and from the age of nine attended the 'Pro Corda' music camps on the Suffolk coast during the holiday season each year. It was here that Helena developed her lifelong love of chamber music and performing in chamber orchestras.

Helena went on to study at the Royal College of Music Junior department with Dona Lee Croft, and subsequently at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with David Takeno. While in London she performed regularly with ensembles including the Academy of St Martin in the Fields before moving to Australia in 1994 to begin her first and only full-time job to date, as Principal Violin with the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Helena regularly performs as soloist and guest leader with the ACO. She is also actively involved in the Orchestra's Learning & Engagement program, as an Orchestra Representative and Mentor with the ACO Emerging Artist program as well as being Director and Leader of ACO Collective, the ACO's regional touring and education ensemble.

In addition to performing with the ACO, Helena has performed as Guest Concertmaster with international orchestras including the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. She has been a tutor and chamber orchestra director for the Australian Youth Orchestra at National Music Camps. She has also appeared at the Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Four Winds Bermagui, Christchurch Arts Festival, Sangat Chamber Music Festival (Mumbai) at the Peasmarsh Festival (Sussex), and IMS Prussia Cove.

When she isn't onstage with the ACO, Helena adores her very busy family life with her husband and two young sons.

Helena plays the 1732 'ex-Dollfus' Stradivarius violin, kindly on loan from an anonymous private benefactor.

Satu Vänskä

Director & Violin

Born to a Finnish family in Japan, violinist Satu Vänskä is Principal Violin with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, a position that she has held for the past twenty years. She regularly performs as lead violin and soloist with the ACO.

Satu has a passion for dynamic programming that explores the link between old and new music, alongside presenting boundary-blurring cross-genre collaborations, that resonate with today's classical music audiences.

In addition to performing with the ACO, Satu has performed as a soloist with Australia's major symphony orchestras including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Tasmania Symphony Orchestra and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, including in director/performer roles. As a recitalist, Satu regularly performs with venues and festivals including the Melbourne Recital Centre, UKARIA Cultural Centre, Canberra International Festival and Adelaide Festival. Further afield, Satu has performed with the Artik Philharmonic in Norway, with London's Aurora Orchestra (in the London season of *Weimar Cabaret* with the late



Barry Humphries), Sinfonia Lahti and at the Festival Maribor in Slovenia.

Satu is the founder, curator, front-woman, violinist and vocalist of the critically acclaimed ACO Underground, the ACO's electro-infused, experimental spin-off project. With ACO Underground, Satu has performed collaborations with artists including Midnight Oil's Jim Moginie and the Violent Femmes' Brian Ritchie in venues ranging from New York's Le Poisson Rouge to Sydney's Phoenix Central Park, and has appeared as part of the Vivid Festival. In 2022 she formed *Satu In The Beyond* with Richard Tognetti and producer Paul Beard. This is a band that has evolved from ACO Underground over the years with the aim to present audiences with originally written music.

Satu took her first violin lessons at the age of three in Japan, before her family relocated to Finland when she was ten, where she continued her studies with Pertti Sutinen at the Lahti Conservatorium and the Sibelius Academy. She later studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich as a pupil of Ana Chumachenko.

Satu performs on the 1728/29 Stradivarius violin on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund.

Anna da Silva Chen

Violin



Anna da Silva Chen has been a member of the Australian Chamber Orchestra since 2024.

As a soloist, Anna has performed with many of Australia's major orchestras including the Sydney, Adelaide, Queensland, Tasmanian and Canberra symphony orchestras, including performances of the Beethoven, Brahms, Elgar, Sibelius and Tchaikovsky violin concertos. In 2024, she performed the Australian premiere of Max Reger's 1908 Violin Concerto with Concerto Arcana. Internationally, she made her German debut in 2020 with the Göttingen Symphony Orchestra, toured Spain as a soloist with the SCM Wind Symphony Orchestra, performed several concerts and tutored chamber ensembles in the Netherlands' 2022 Orlando Festival, and led a performance of Ligeti's *Melodien* in Italy's Chigiana International Festival 2024.

By the age of 15, Anna had won Australia's Kendall National Violin Competition (1st and Audience Choice prizes), the National Youth Concerto Competition, Fine Music FM's Young Virtuoso Award, and was a semi-finalist in the Menuhin International Violin Competition. In recent years she was a laureate of the Vienna and Gisborne International Music Competitions

and one of 22 violinists selected to compete in the Carl Nielsen International Competition.

Deeply motivated as a chamber musician and curator, Anna embraces complex and neglected works across many historical periods. As founding member of the Alma Moodie Quartet, she shares the dedication to the music their namesake championed — the classics as well as rarely played pieces by Schoenberg, Reger, Ligeti and Zemlinsky. She has performed as guest violinist with the Australia Ensemble, Omega Ensemble, Australia Piano Quartet, Ensemble Q, and Selby & Friends, as soloist, guest director, and concertmaster of Ensemble Apex, and as a festival artist in the Canberra International, Tasmanian, Brycefield Estate, and Newcastle music festivals. She has been privileged to perform alongside Richard Tognetti, Kristian Winther, Shunsuke Sato, Shuann Cai, Daniel de Borah and Lee Dionne.

Anna was born in Sydney and raised in Wollongong, beginning violin lessons at the age of eight with Sarah Hindson. She studied with Dr Robin Wilson in the Sydney Conservatorium's Rising Stars program, as an undergraduate with Alice Waten, and lastly with Prof. Mihaela Martin in Cologne, Germany.

Timo-Veikko Valve

Cello

Timo-Veikko Valve, affectionately known by audiences far and wide as ‘Tipi’, grew up in Finland, surrounded by a family who are “musically orientated normal people”. Music lessons were a natural part of his upbringing, and at six years old, Tipi was encouraged to pick up the cello after a teacher at the local music school declared with considerable conviction that *“he looks just like a cellist!”*. To this day, Tipi remains somewhat puzzled about what that statement actually meant. Whatever the subtext, the teacher seems to have been correct.

Tipi was appointed Principal Cello of the Australian Chamber Orchestra in 2006, and his leadership soon became an integral part of the ACO. Recognised for his natural, creative, and generous musicianship, Tipi seeks to define the modern-day musician. Prior to his Australian adventure, Tipi studied at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki before continuing to the Edsberg Music Institute in Stockholm.



Tipi effortlessly transitions between modern and period instruments and describes the cello as a flexible and adaptive partner, both in its role in an ensemble and as a soloist, across all forms of music. He reflects this versatility and enjoys a diverse career as a musician, curator and director, directing from the cello as he plays and appearing as a soloist with many of the major orchestras across his two home countries, Finland, and Australia. Tipi is also a sought-after collaborator and frequently appears as a chamber musician. His active commitment to the music of our times through curating and commissioning has seen him delivering world-premiere performances of multiple concertos and other significant works written especially for him.

Tipi plays on a Brothers Amati cello from 1616, kindly on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund.

Australian Chamber Orchestra

“The Australian Chamber Orchestra is uniformly high-octane, arresting and never ordinary.”

— THE AUSTRALIAN

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 35 years, Artistic Director Richard Tognetti, in 2025 the Orchestra celebrates 50 years 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.

The ACO has its own streaming platform, ACO On Demand, which hosts the Orchestra’s award-winning cinematic concert films, *ACO StudioCasts*, alongside live concert streams. The Orchestra also has an active recording program, with Richard Tognetti and the Orchestra winning eight ARIA Awards. Recent releases include *Water/Night Music*, the first Australian-produced classical vinyl for two decades, *Tchaikovsky/Shostakovich* 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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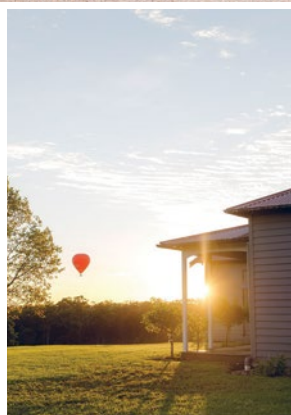


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ACO Subscriber Stories

Freya & Josh

Siblings Freya and Josh alternate attending ACO concerts with their mother, Dorota.

"I've had a two-seat subscription for two years, with one child coming with me each time. I started taking them quite early. Josh was five and Freya is five now. So they are growing up with classical music, and are learning what to expect."

Josh and Freya must be some of our youngest subscribers, encouraged to try the diverse range of repertoire, instruments and guest directors that their regular attendance at ACO concerts affords them.

"Some people are impressed when they see young kids, because it's unusual having such young children in the concert hall," their mother, Dorota, tells us. "But some can't believe I take them to classical music." The request for children to spend relatively long periods sitting still isn't music to every parent's ears.

But concert attendance is part of Dorota's inspiring vision for bringing her children up with a sense of commitment, even to experiences that aren't immediately easy. As well as classical concerts, the children experience the absolute, unbeatable highs along with the energy-sapping lows of weekly 5K runs through the family's dedication to Parkrun.

"Parkrun is a regular commitment that you shouldn't just wiggle out of," Dorota tells us. "In a way, the ACO Subscription is the same commitment. We sign up, and trust the Orchestra to give us all these different experiences. We go along and are often surprised, and often delighted, by something magical."

Like the running, the concerts aren't always easy. "With raising kids, there will be criticism no matter what you do. Some people will think I'm crazy taking them to ACO concerts, or for dragging them to 5K runs at Parkrun every Saturday morning, but we get these moments that, through challenges, turn out to be the happiest moments of their lives. It gives them pay-off for their hard work and commitment.



"It's teaching kids that we do things in life, and even if some days we don't feel like it, we still go," she smiles.

Apart from the music, Dorota's ACO outings are about the whole day, and the opportunity to dress up and spend one-on-one, quality time with her children.

"It's a bonding experience. I just want them to experience lots of different things and be able to choose for themselves later in life," she says. "It's about exposure."

The ACO is well-suited for an introduction to classical music because of the Orchestra's size. "We've got to know the musicians and the children enjoy matching the photos of the musicians in the program with the musicians on stage," Dorota says. Josh has a "big celebrity crush" on ACO Principal Viola Stef, and Freya loves to see the beautiful, old Golden Age instruments up close.

Dorota believes live music offers a unique chance for children to connect to something visceral in front of them while also switching off – something rare in our digitally-connected, busy lives – so they can let the music simply wash over them.

"The fact we sit in the front row makes it really special. We can see the performers in such amazing detail. We can see their facial expressions and their subtle reactions to unpredictable live moments and changes in the music. It's the whole experience – it's seeing it, and also feeling it."

Ages: 5 & 7

Subscribers for: 2 Years

Date of Mum's first ACO concert: 2009

Favourite ACO concert:

***The Four Seasons (2023),
Total Immersion (2023),
Abel Selaocoe (2025)***

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