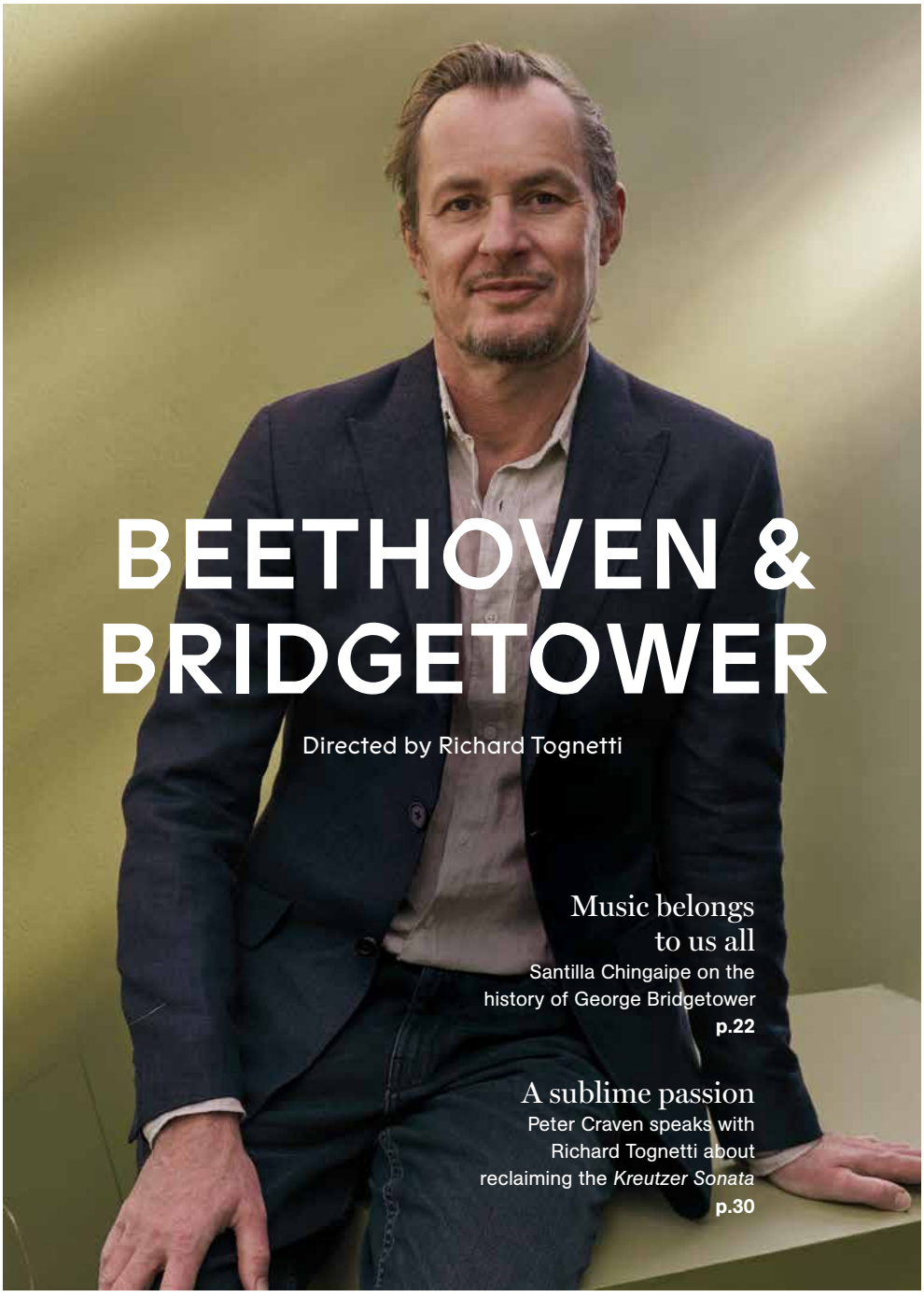
Australian Chamber Orchestra

RICHARD TOGNETTI – ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



BEETHOVEN & BRIDGETOWER

Directed by Richard Tognetti

Music belongs to us all

Santilla Chingaipe on the history of George Bridgetower

p.22

A sublime passion

Peter Craven speaks with Richard Tognetti about reclaiming the *Kreutzer Sonata*

p.30

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RAPTURE & REVOLUTION
A transcendent musical experience that takes you beyond the concert hall and deep into the heart of the ACO. This concert film features Richard Tognetti and the Orchestra performing Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending* and Beethoven's *Cavatina & Grosse Fuge.*
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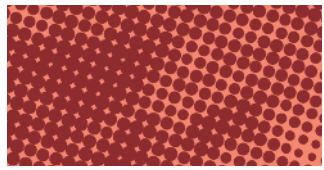
Inside you'll find features and interviews that shine a spotlight on our players and the music you are about to hear. Enjoy the read.

INSIDE:



Cover image: Richard Tognetti. Photo: Stephen Ward.

WELCOME

Welcome to *Beethoven & Bridgetower*.

In this concert series, the ACO delves into the fascinating story of violinist George Bridgetower, the original dedicatee of Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*. Beethoven withdrew this dedication due to a disagreement with Bridgetower, all but erasing him from history. We seek to reclaim this great masterpiece for Bridgetower and to restore his legacy, correcting two centuries of musical injustice.

Our program comprises Beethoven's passionate and sweeping violin sonata, performed by Richard Tognetti, and Janáček's String Quartet No.1 *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Both works have also been arranged by Richard and, for the first time, we have collaborated with Belvoir's Eamon Flack to help dramatise this extraordinary story with text by Anna Goldsworthy, incorporating poems and excerpts from *Sonata Mulattica*, a collection of poems by the much-awarded American poet and essayist Rita Dove about the life of George Bridgetower.

Later this year you can also experience the beauty of this concert series from another perspective through our new digital concert film series, ACO StudioCasts. Last month we premiered *Rapture & Revolution*, filmed at Sydney Town Hall. I hope you join us on our new and exciting digital concert film journey. I can personally vouch for their filmic quality and arresting direction unlike any other as we move into a new era of home concert experiences – you can find them at acostudiocasts.com.

I thank Telstra, our National Tour Partner, for bringing these concerts to the concert platform. Telstra shares the ACO's passion for connecting communities with the arts and we are grateful for their longstanding and ongoing support.

After this concert series, we're excited to return to national touring in May with *Schubert's Quintet*, returning to the Arts Centre Melbourne, Melbourne Recital Centre as well as Canberra's Llewellyn Hall. I look forward to seeing you in the concert hall and introducing you to our exciting digital season, ACO StudioCasts.

Richard Evans
Managing Director
Join the conversation #ACO21

News

ACO Emerging Artist Program

LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

Applications for our ACO Emerging Artist Program are now open, inviting exceptional young string players to apply to join us in 2022.

Collaboration with Yumi Stynes

ACO STUDIOCASTS

We've partnered with popular Australian media presenter, podcaster and author, Yumi Stynes for a premium content series with interviews and featurettes to accompany our new digital concert experience, ACO StudioCasts.

Farewell to Nicole Divall

After 16 years with the ACO, we bid a fond farewell to violist Nicole Divall, who has played her last concert series with us. See page 20 where we celebrate Nikki's time with the Orchestra.

Coming up

MARCH

ACO StudioCast: Bach and the Beyond

31 MARCH (PREMIERE)

Then available on demand.

This evocative and impassioned concert film pitches Bach's timeless search for redemption alongside compositions by Richard Tognetti, including a special performance of Bach's *The Musical Offering*, featuring flautist Emmanuel Pahud.

MAY

Schubert's Quintet

6 – 17 MAY

Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, Wollongong

Join a star-studded ACO ensemble led by Richard Tognetti in two monumental gems of the chamber repertoire: Schubert's beloved String Quintet in C major – a magnificent feast of joy and melody – and Beethoven's grand String Quintet in C minor. Awe and wonder meet majesty and intimacy. *Schubert's Quintet* premieres in the ACO StudioCasts season on 15 September.

ACO StudioCast: Love & Transfiguration

19 MAY (PREMIERE)

Then available on demand.

This heart-lifting cinematic concert film takes you on a journey toward the light, with the Orchestra performing exquisitely beautiful works by Schoenberg and Bach alongside a special performance of Pēteris Vasks' *Vox amoris*, written for Richard Tognetti in 2009.

JUNE

Baroque Revelry

19 – 30 JUNE

Melbourne, Sydney

Richard Tognetti directs an orchestra of ACO soloists in a multi-sensory journey through the vibrant world of the Baroque. The madness of Geminiani's *La folia* meets eccentric works by CPE Bach and Biber, alongside music by trailblazers Barbara Strozzi and Francesca Caccini, and of course Tartini's famous *Devil's Trill*. *Baroque Revelry* closes our inaugural ACO StudioCasts season premiering on 1 December.

PROGRAM

Richard Tognetti Director and Violin
Australian Chamber Orchestra

Anna Goldsworthy with Rita Dove Script
Eamon Flack Staging Director
Angela Nica Sullen Narrator

		mins
JANÁČEK (arr. Tognetti)	String Quartet No.1 “The Kreutzer Sonata” *I. Adagio – Con moto* *II. Con moto* *III. Con moto – Vivo – Andante* *IV. Con moto – (Adagio) – Più mosso*	20
INTERVAL		20
BEETHOVEN (arr. Tognetti)	Violin Sonata in A major, Op.47 “Bridgetower” *I. Adagio sostenuto – Presto* *II. Andante con Variazioni* *III. Presto*	37

These performances are dedicated to another great virtuoso violinist, our dear friend and colleague Ivry Gitlis (25 Aug 1922 – 24 Dec 2020).

We thank our colleagues at Belvoir St Theatre for this collaboration and for providing the services of their Artistic Director, Eamon Flack.

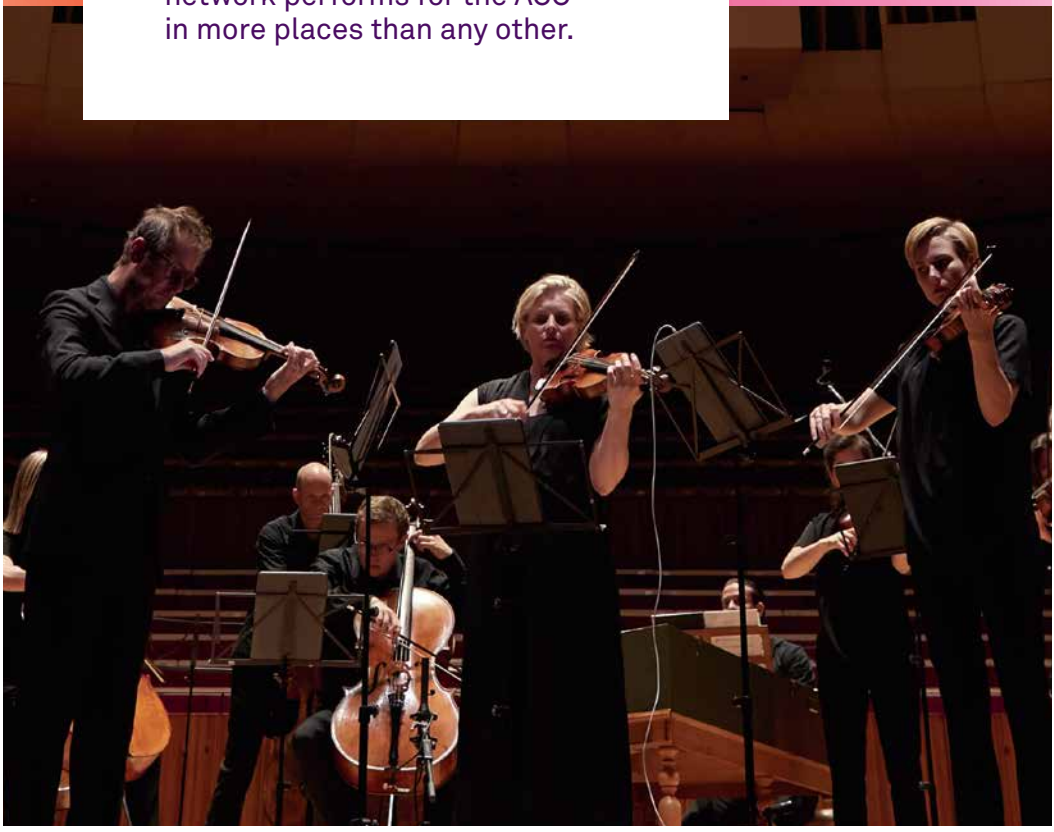
BELVOIR

The concert will last approximately one hour and 40 minutes, including narration and 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.
Beethoven & Bridgetower will be recorded from City Recital Hall on 24 March and broadcast on ABC Classic on 2 May at 1pm.

One great performance deserves another.

Australia's largest mobile network performs for the ACO in more places than any other.



NATIONAL TOUR PARTNER WELCOME

There's the famous, whose names have been spoken of for centuries, and those who have been wiped from the pages of history.

As Australia's leading telecommunications company, we're all about ensuring human connections and creating lasting memories.

That's why we're delighted to be the National Tour Partner for *Beethoven and Bridgetower*, and are thrilled that you will also be able to watch this work at home as part of ACO StudioCasts later in the year.

Two musical geniuses, changemakers of their day, created a legendary sonata, presented here by the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

For almost 20 years, Telstra and the ACO have collaborated to bring the joy of music to Australians around the country.

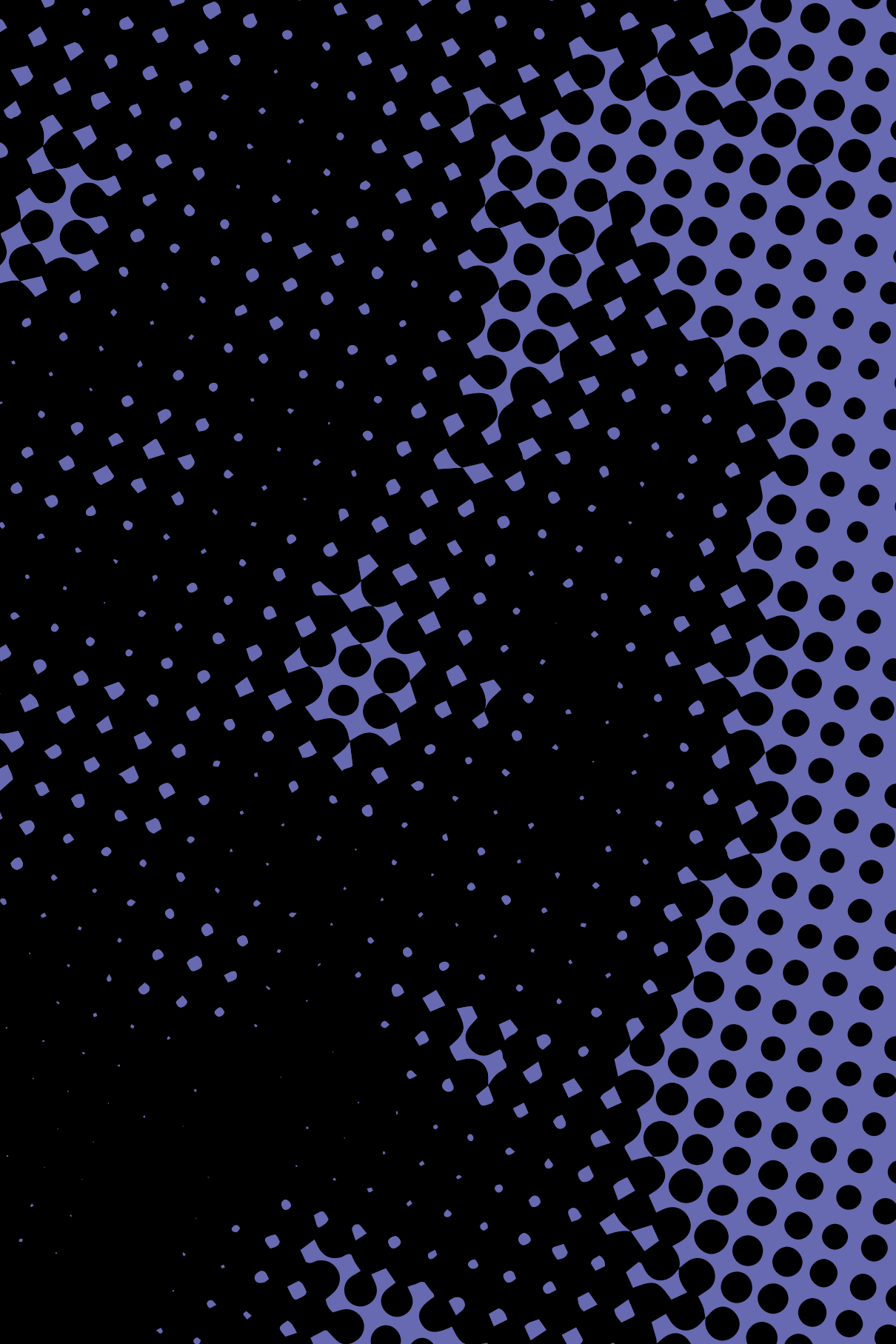
This year, our partnership delivers the passion and majesty of this work to you.

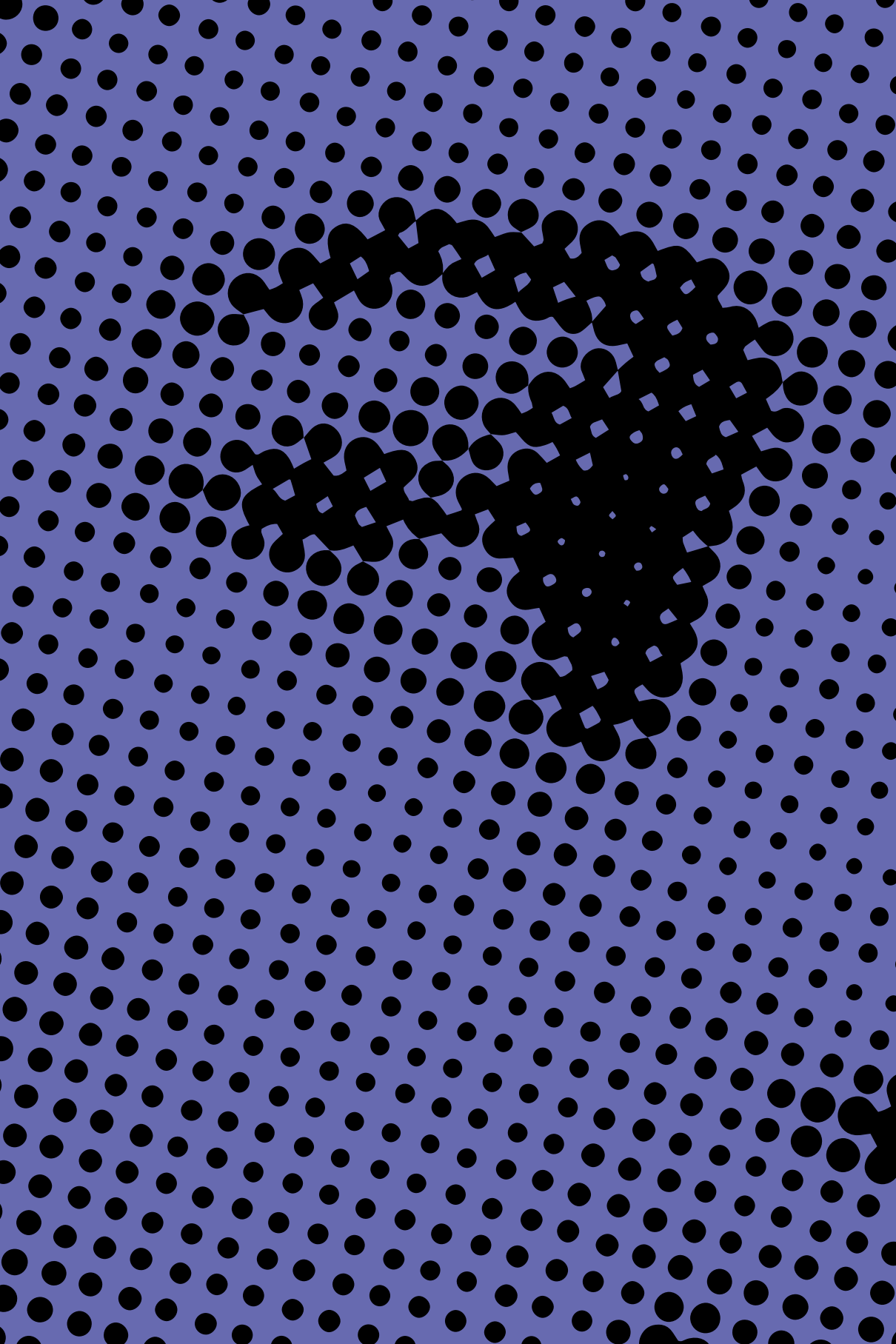
Telstra is proud to sponsor the ACO and celebrates the Orchestra's commitment to a digital future.

So enjoy this fantastic production, and on behalf of everyone at Telstra, we're proud to play our part.

Andy Penn
Chief Executive Officer
Telstra

National Tour Partner





An introduction from Anna Goldsworthy

From its hurried beginnings, with Ludwig van Beethoven scrawling out notes on the morning of its premiere, and its dedicatee, black virtuoso violinist George Bridgetower, extemporising violin passages on stage, Beethoven's Sonata No.9 for violin and piano has enjoyed a rich and varied afterlife. Beethoven and Bridgetower allegedly fell out over a woman, leading to the work's re-dedication to the violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer, who famously never played it. Nevertheless, Kreutzer's is the name that history remembers, immortalised in a work that is a virtuosic mainstay of the repertoire. It is also a work that has been unusually progenerative, spawning further "Kreutzer Sonatas" in a number of genres.

Anna Goldsworthy

The spectre of the love triangle hovers over all of these, as does the theme of disappearance. Leo Tolstoy famously made Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* the centrepiece of his lurid, conflicted manifesto against sexuality, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, inspired by a performance given at his home by his son Sergei. Tolstoy's novella charts the onset of a husband's obsessive jealousy, culminating in the murder of his wife, and prompted Tolstoy's younger son, Lev Lvovich, to publish his own story in response (a "stupid and untalented" effort, according to Tolstoy). More significantly, Sofiya Tolstaya composed her own counter-novella, *Whose Fault? Apropos of "The Kreutzer Sonata"*, from the perspective of the maligned wife, with margin notes addressing the relevant passages in Tolstoy's novella. "So long as we are alive, nothing that Mother writes will be published" wrote her daughter, Tatyana – resonant words in a program that speaks of effacement.

Several decades later, Leoš Janáček's response to the novella, the String Quartet No. 1 "The Kreutzer Sonata", reveals a perspective more closely aligned to Tolstaya's than to Tolstoy's. Deeply embedded in his own love triangle, as he corresponded fulsomely with his young muse, Katya Stosslova, Janáček was no enemy of the flesh, and perhaps had a particular sympathy for young wives. Tellingly, the clearest musical allusion to Beethoven's sonata is not to the opening of the first movement, nor to its virile first subject, but to its second subject, considered by 19th-century scholars as the more 'feminine' moment in sonata form. Janáček unpicks this theme in the third movement of his quartet, recasting it in the minor. 'I was imagining a poor woman, tormented and run down,' he wrote to Stosslova, 'just like the one the Russian writer Tolstoy describes in his *Kreutzer Sonata*.'

These three works inspired a number of other arrangements and rearrangements, including the ones you will hear tonight. They also provoked a cacophony of critical chatter. 'One would have to be in the grip of a kind of aesthetic and artistic terrorism,' pronounced the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of Beethoven's work, 'not to find in this work clear renewed proof of the fact that for some time now this composer has been indulging in whims.' Emile Zola lamented that Tolstoy's novella was 'a nightmare, born of a diseased imagination,' while George Bernard Shaw observed that 'no wonder the Countess [Tolstaya] was often near the end of her patience.'

In this archaeological dig of a program, we seek to strip away more than two centuries of cultural encrustation in search of that seminal moment: that meeting between two men, one black and one white, each enchanted by the other's powers. In her poetry collection of 2009, *Sonata Mulattica*, Rita Dove imagines a different version of history, in which "this bright-skinned papa's boy / could have sailed his fifteen-minute fame / straight into the record books," resulting in "rafts of black kids scratching out scales / on their matchbox violins". As Dove reinstates the centrality of Bridgetower to this story, she addresses that deeper, troubling effacement in musical history – as in so many of our histories – of black lives and voices.

Rita, Eamon and I conceived of this program as a collision of texts – primarily Beethoven, Tolstoy, Janáček, Dove – creating a historical polyphony from which a solo line emerges. The music showed us a way. Janáček's idiom is so digressive and chatty, and so mosaical in structure, that it can contain all manner of storytelling. In Richard Tognetti's reimagining, Beethoven's violin sonata becomes a violin concerto, so that the transition from the group to the individual forms part of this concert's process. But it is Beethoven's second movement, the *Andante con Variazioni*, that offers the truest model. All human lives are variations on a theme, but some themes reverberate particularly strongly in this program: friendship, love and jealousy; the power of music; posterity; disappearance.

This project draws upon the following sources:

Dove, R. (2009). *Sonata Mulattica*. Norton.

Katz, M.R. (Ed.). (2014). *The Kreutzer Sonata Variations*. Yale University Press.

Kerst, F. and Krehbiel, H. E. (Eds.). (1905). *Beethoven: The Man and the Artist, As Revealed in His Own Words.* B.W. Huebsch.

Tyrrell, J. (2016). *Intimate Letters: Leos Janáček to Kamila Stösslová*. Princeton University Press.

12

PROGRAM IN SHORT

Your five-minute read
before lights down.

Leoš Janáček

(1854–1928)

String Quartet No.1 “The Kreutzer Sonata”

arranged by Richard Tognetti

Beethoven’s aforementioned sonata would become an obsession, not only to audiences and performers, but to an entire generation of romantics. For Leo Tolstoy, the passions of the sonata became the inspiration for his 1889 novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, in which music and sex become dangerously entwined.

In the novella, Tolstoy describes a man’s journey into madness as he grapples with “the mad beast of jealousy” after his wife takes a liking to a violinist with whom she performs Beethoven’s eponymous sonata. The husband’s derangement comes to a head when he returns home to find the two together, and he kills his wife with a dagger.

Inspired by the dramatic events of the novella, Janáček chose to bring them to life in music, not with a full orchestra – which would have been the obvious and theatrical choice given his background in opera – but the intimate forces of a string quartet. It was completed in only eight days between 30 October and 7 November 1923.

The music itself does not follow the narrative of the novella so much as paint the atmosphere of its scenes and the psychological state of its characters. For the wife, for example, Janáček recalled that he “had in mind a poor woman, tormented, battered, beaten to death”. Each movement is characterised by what is described as Janáček’s “calculated discontinuity” – where the flow of the music comes not from traditional classical structure, but instead by juxtaposing moods, tempi and grabs of melody.

In the first movement, Janáček juxtaposes a passionate rising motif with a Russian-tinged dance melody, before introducing a smooth *Con moto* and a striking *Vivo*.

The second movement introduces a polka-like tune that becomes increasingly agitated and deranged as the protagonist of the story spirals further into jealous rage. The juxtaposition of moods reaches its extreme in the third movement, as the opening canons are continually interrupted by violent *sul ponticello* interjections. Janáček writes that violin solo that opens the finale should be played "as if in tears", before the music races to a desolate conclusion, evoking the train ride on which Pozdnyshev confesses his tragic tale.

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770–1827)

Violin Sonata in A major, Op.47 "Bridgetower"

arranged by Richard Tognetti

On 5 April 1803 Beethoven held a benefit concert in Vienna which included the premieres of his Second Symphony and Third Piano Concerto. He had desperately hoped to position himself as a leading artistic figure of his time, but was yet to produce any of the major orchestral or chamber works for which he is best known today. Something had to give.

In the weeks that followed the benefit concert, Beethoven was introduced to an exciting 24-year-old virtuoso violinist and composer named George Polgreen Bridgetower. A man of West Indian descent who billed himself as "son of the African Prince", Bridgetower was creating a sensation in Vienna and had gained connections to the city's musical elite. The two men immediately became friends.

Naturally, Beethoven and Bridgetower decided they should hold a concert together. Set for 22 May 1803, the concert would premiere a new sonata in A major which Beethoven had written for the two of them. The event was delayed by two days, probably because Beethoven had not yet finished the sonata. Beethoven barely completed the music by the new performance date and Bridgetower had to read his part over Beethoven's shoulder with the ink barely dry.

The concert was a triumph, fuelled by the two men's fervour and camaraderie. The audience insisted the slow movement be encored twice. Famously, Bridgetower improvised a flourish in response to the piano's arpeggio cadenza in the

first movement. Under normal circumstances this would have deeply angered Beethoven, but in this instance he jumped up from his piano and exclaimed, “Once more, my dear boy!”

Beyond this unusual mid-performance outburst of joy, Bridgetower’s hot-blooded, larger-than-life personality had brought out something new in Beethoven. The new sonata was of gigantic proportions for a piece of chamber music – Beethoven himself notes it was written in a style “like that of a concerto”. In it, Beethoven leaves behind his models of Haydn and Mozart, writing something with dramatic might for a new century, well before his iconic *Eroica Symphony*.

The drama of the two mens’ personalities is on full show in the famous first movement. There’s little doubt the two men spent many cheerful hours “jamming” together, creating variations on popular tunes of the day. The middle movement, a theme and variations, is a testament to that tradition of musical invention and camaraderie. The final movement is a scorching hot tarantella – a vigorous Italian dance designed to cure the hysterical condition of tarantism, induced by spider venom. Was Beethoven trying to tame his boisterous new friend?

Ultimately, the two mens fiery personalities got the better of them, and they parted over “some silly quarrel about a girl”. Beethoven re-dedicated the sonata to the violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer, but what Beethoven didn’t know is that Kreutzer had no use for the work and even remarked that the sonata was “outrageously unintelligible”. Bridgetower, on the other hand, was never heard from again. He returned to England to perform in various orchestras and died in poverty and obscurity.

Richard Tognetti and the ACO wish to correct the sonata’s dedication to Kreutzer, an injustice which has lasted more than two centuries. Therefore, for these concerts it is re-titled as the “Bridgetower Sonata” in recognition of the man who inspired and first performed it.

Beethoven wrote that the sonata is in a style “like that of a concerto”. Richard Tognetti has taken things a step further, orchestrating the work as a literal concerto for violin and string orchestra. His arrangement is dedicated to the great violinist Ivry Gitlis, who performed it as soloist with the ACO in 2000 and 2001.

MUSICIANS

The musicians on stage for this performance.

Discover more

Learn more about our musicians, watch us Live in the Studio, go behind-the scenes and listen to playlists at:

aco.com.au

Richard Tognetti
Director and Violin

Richard plays the 1743 'Carrodus' Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù violin kindly on loan from an anonymous Australian private benefactor. His Chair is sponsored by Wendy Edwards, Peter & Ruth McMullin, Louise Myer & Martyn Myer AO, Andrew & Andrea Roberts.

Helena Rathbone
Principal Violin

Helena plays a 1759 Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin kindly on loan from the Commonwealth Bank Group. Her Chair is sponsored by Margaret Gibbs & Rodney Cameron.

Satu Vänskä
Principal Violin

Satu plays the 1726 'Belgiorno' Stradivarius violin kindly on loan from Guido Belgiorno-Nettis AM & Belgiorno-Nettis. Her Chair is sponsored by David Thomas AM.

Aiko Goto
Violin

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

Mark Ingwersen
Violin

Mark plays a 1728/29 Stradivarius violin kindly on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. His Chair is sponsored by Prof Judyth Sachs & Julie Steiner AM.

Ilya Isakovich
Violin

Ilya plays his own 1600 Marcin Groblicz violin made in Poland. His Chair is sponsored by Meg Meldrum.

Liisa Pallandi
Violin

Liisa currently plays Helena Rathbone's violin which is a c.1760 Giovanni Battista Gabrielli. Her Chair is sponsored by The Melbourne Medical Syndicate.

Maja Savnik
Violin

Maja plays the 1714 'ex-Isolde Menges' Giuseppe Guarneri filius Andreæ violin kindly on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. Her Chair is sponsored by Alenka Tindale.

Ike See
Violin

Ike plays a 1590 Brothers Amati violin kindly on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. His Chair is sponsored by Ian Lansdown & Tricia Bell.

Stefanie Farrands
Principal Viola

Stefanie plays a 2016 viola made by Ragnar Hayn in Berlin. Her Chair is sponsored by peckvonhartel architects.

Elizabeth Woolnough
Viola

Elizabeth plays her own 1968 Parisian viola by Pierre M. Audinot. Her Chair is sponsored by Philip Bacon AM.

Timo-Veikko Valve
Principal Cello

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

Melissa Barnard
Cello

Melissa plays a cello by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume made in 1846. Her Chair is sponsored by Dr & Mrs J Wenderoth.

Julian Thompson
Cello

Julian plays a 1729 Giuseppe Guarneri filius Andreæ cello with elements of the instrument crafted by his son, Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù, kindly donated to the ACO by Peter Weiss AO. His Chair is sponsored by The Grist & Stewart Families.

Maxime Bibeau
Principal Bass

Max plays a late-sixteenth-century Gasparo da Salò bass kindly on loan from a private Australian benefactor. His Chair is sponsored by Darin Cooper Foundation.

Véronique Serret
Violin

Lisa Sung
Viola

FAREWELL
NICOLE DIVALL

We bid a fond farewell to ACO violist Nicole Divall.

Warmth, talent, good humour, dedication and kindness: this is the legacy Nicole Divall leaves as we bid her farewell after 16 years with the ACO. Nikki's 16 years with us have included numerous accomplishments, including national, regional and international tours, ACO recordings, and mentorship of Emerging Artists and ACO Academy musicians. Her immense talent and generous spirit will be dearly missed by all of us at the ACO and by audiences alike.

A much-loved friend and colleague, we wish Nikki the absolute best as she embarks on new and exciting adventures overseas.

Nicole Divall and Richard Tognetti backstage at her final performance at City Recital Hall. Photo by Nic Walker.

We're going to miss Nikki's warmth, vibrancy and supermum status.

I recall her stepping in to play Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* at the last moment and we all felt very fortunate to have such ability and sound in our section.

We wish you luck, Nikki, and you'll be sorely missed.

Richard Tognetti, ACO Artistic Director

For me there's not been a time in the ACO without my dear friend and colleague Nikki. She joined a little before I did, and over the last 15 years or so we've shared an enormous amount. From the the magic of that golden performance to the crack of dawn bus departure after the briefest of sleeps, and all of the absurdity that touring life throws your way in between, Nikki's always been swift with a ready smile and a mischievous eye twinkle, somehow letting you in on the secret that we're all in this mad dance together. We will miss her terribly.

Julian Thompson, ACO cellist

Nikki's dedication and warmth towards her colleagues is an inspiration. She plays with conviction and approaches every situation with good humour and grace. She's always been there for me and I know she's always been someone you can count on during the tough times.

I've adored having her in our Amazonian viola section for the brief time we've had together. I'll miss her warmth and bubbly personality both on and off stage.

She will leave a hole in our hearts and we'll miss her enormously!

Stefanie Farrands, Principal Viola

MUSIC
BELON
TO USA

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ALL

Journalist and filmmaker Santilla Chingaipe on the history of Beethoven and George Bridgetower.

"...but without the encouragement from my teachers or the expectation of a career in classical music, I always assumed it was not for people like me."

I never encountered much classical music when I was growing up. My parents had a CD compilation of violin love songs that included Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, which was played a fair bit in our household. By the time I entered high school – a public school highly regarded for its music program – I'd dabbled with playing a few instruments, but without the encouragement from my teachers or the expectation of a career in classical music, I always assumed it was not for people like me. As a Black person of African descent, I'd never seen anyone who looked like me playing classical music.

I grew fascinated about this world that seemed to exclude me. When Swedish poet Thomas Tranströmer won the Nobel prize for literature in 2011, I was drawn to his poems. One that stood out was "Allegro" which opens with:

After a black day, I play Haydn,

and feel a little warmth in my hands.

For years, I'd return to this poem after a difficult day. His description of the music piqued my curiosity:

The keys are ready.

Kind hammers fall.

The sound is spirited, green, and full of silence.

The sound says that freedom exists

and someone pays no taxes to Caesar.

Who was this Haydn? I wanted to experience the sound of freedom for myself. It would take a few more years – I was in my mid-20s – to muster up the courage to attend my first proper classical music performance. I found the arts precinct to be intimidating and only visited when the performances featured people of colour. As I made my way into the Melbourne Recital Centre to listen to a performance of Haydn's music, I was acutely aware I was the only Black person there. Thankfully, when the performance began the discomfort drifted away and I was lost in the music.

These days I'm an enthusiast and can't imagine my life without classical music. But although this music belongs to everyone, the classical music industry still feels exclusive – from the venues, to the programming to the performers on stage. Very little acknowledgement is made of the contribution non-white composers and musicians have made to the genre.

One musician who left an indelible mark but isn't widely known is George Polgreen Bridgetower – a mixed-race violinist and composer, who was born to a white mother and Black father in Poland in 1778.

The name Bridgetower comes from his father, who was born in or near Bridgetown, Barbados. His father was likely born a slave, as slavery was still legal in British territories until it was abolished in 1834. Nevertheless, he found his way to Europe and it was there that he worked as a servant to Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, a Hungarian aristocrat whose musical court was directed by Joseph Haydn.

"His father was likely born a slave, as slavery was still legal in British territories until it was abolished in 1834."

As a boy, he lived in Esterházy's palace, and reportedly was taught by Haydn, who was also one of Beethoven's teachers. His connection to Beethoven would become significant in later years, but as a boy he became a violin prodigy. He gave his first public performance at the age of seven and went on to play professionally in England with the Royal Philharmonic Society Orchestra, advertised as "The son of the African Prince".

By the time Bridgetower was 24 he'd made his way to Vienna, Austria, where he met 32-year-old Beethoven and struck up a friendship after discovering that they had similar life experiences. It was a bromance in the truest sense – they were kindred spirits in both music and in life.

But the "bromance" was short-lived. In 1803, the pair decided to stage a concert which would include the premiere of an unfinished sonata by Beethoven, which he dedicated to Bridgetower. The concert was reportedly well received, but was followed by an argument between the pair, who never spoke again. Beethoven swiftly withdrew his dedication and later published the complete sonata in 1805 and dedicated it to the French violinist, Rodolphe Kreutzer. It has since been known as the *Kreutzer Sonata*, even though Kreutzer had nothing to do with it. According to experts, this was a shame, as there's more Bridgetower in the music than anyone really credits: his big-body excitable personality is written all over the music.

"By the time Bridgetower was 24 he'd made his way to Vienna, Austria, where he met 32-year-old Beethoven and struck up a friendship..."

"Thinking about the tragic end of the life of a talented musician makes me wonder if we'd know about him if he were born white."

Double bassist Chi-chi Nwanoku OBE is the Founder and Artistic & Executive Director of *Chineke!*, the first professional orchestra in Europe to be made up of majority Black, Asian and ethnically diverse musicians. Speaking from her home in London via video call, she disputes the alleged falling out between Beethoven and Bridgetower.

"Beethoven was always rededicating his music as a way of keeping money coming in; a kind of recycling, by schmoozing wealthy benefactors and famous people who could open doors for him and help to fund and furnish his future … by giving them a dedication because it was likely they didn't know the work had already been previously dedicated" she says. Nwanoku says that, according to the version of events by Beethoven-Haus in Germany, Beethoven had been planning to move to Paris and sent the sonata ahead to Kreutzer, the leading solo violinist in Paris at the time. "He sent Sonata No.9 (the Bridgetower Sonata) suggesting he'd written it especially for Kreutzer, as a way of paving his way and getting in with the right people before moving to Paris. He ended up did not moving there."

Whatever the truth, injustice would continue for Bridgetower: he lived out the rest of his days in poverty. Thinking about the tragic end of the life of a talented musician makes me wonder if we'd know about him if he were born white. Chi-chi Nwanoku had a career as a principal double bassist for various international orchestras for 35 years. "I never,

"...there is a long history of Black musicians in Europe 'performing and composing and concertising'."

ever came across anyone else of colour, or my kind of African origin," she says. And according to Nwanoku, things haven't improved. "In the classical music industry, we have a real problem with diversity. Year after year, we see the same people becoming professional musicians from the same backgrounds and cultures."

The fact that this musical genius is so little known highlights how structural racism perpetuates itself. I'm reminded of the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade – of which racism is by-product of this system that fuelled economic growth in Europe and the Americas. For racism to be successful, fictionalised narratives were created about Black people and racial hierarchies were established to keep Black people out of institutions and positions of power. And while slavery and the slave trade itself were later abolished, the racist narratives and stereotypes continue today.

Despite being denied opportunities, some Black people made it into these institutions and, like Bridgetower, went on to have great success. In an interview with the Smithsonian magazine, University of Michigan historian and musicologist Dr Kira Thurman says there is a long history of Black musicians in Europe "performing and composing and concertising". "They were doing amazing things. But oftentimes their stories are not told, or they have sort of been left to the wayside, because they don't fit our narrative of classical music and talent."

Above.
George Bridgetower by Henry Edridge, 1790

This is perhaps why many people – including Black classical musicians like Chi-chi Nwanoku – weren't initially aware of Bridgetower. She tells me that she discovered Bridgetower late in her career, and believes her relationship with classical music would have been very different had she learned about him when she was young. "I experienced 35 years of being othered, even though I was playing with top orchestras in a principal position. Plus I had to be exceptional to be allowed to do this," she says.

Renaming the *Kreutzer Sonata* for its rightful dedicatee– as the ACO is doing in this concert – seems like the right decision. This reparative justice of sorts means that more people will begin to discover the work of George Polgreen Bridgetower. Chi-chi Nwanoku, who's championed the re-dedication of the sonata around the world, says she hopes it encourages audiences to learn more about the violinist. "They will have another way to look at this sonata. It would stimulate a curiosity; it will raise their opinion of what Black people are capable of, because the great Beethoven wrote a sonata for this man."

Following my video call with Chi-chi Nwanoku, she sends me a performance of the "Bridgetower" Sonata, performed by two Chineke! musicians. It's a sight to behold – violinist, Randall Goosby and pianist, Zhu Wang. As they perform this timeless piece, I can't help but imagine the 1803 concert – starring a Black classical musician. Centuries later, that same piece of music being performed by a Black violinist gives me chills and reminds me that classical music belongs to everybody.

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Peter Craven speaks with
Richard Tognetti about
reclaiming the *Kreutzer Sonata*

"*The Kreutzer Sonata* is the work in which Tolstoy comes closest to the darkness and narrative fever pitch of his great contemporary Fyodor Dostoyevsky."

Beethoven's 1803 *Kreutzer Sonata* – originally written for violin and piano – is one of those extraordinary pieces of music that is not only great in itself but which also inspires new original works. Its power is evident in the different mythologies that have been constructed around the *Kreutzer* as well as the formal artistic intensity of the responses it has elicited.

Who would have imagined that this sublime work by this extraordinary and prodigious composer should have inspired Leo Tolstoy – the author of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, and another artist of majestic talents and achievements – to respond in the form of a novella?

The Kreutzer Sonata is the work in which Tolstoy comes closest to the darkness and narrative fever pitch of his great contemporary Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In the confessional first person form, Tolstoy tells the story of Pozdnyshev, a man who kills his wife after he becomes convinced that she is having an affair with a violinist. Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* is a response to the sonata by a man who was his equal in artistry.

The point is not that Pozdnyshev is tragic like Raskolnikov or Macbeth, but that he remains tragic. At the centre of his creepiness is his abhorrence of sexuality and his berserk reaction to his wife playing Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* in duet.

"They think that I killed my wife on the 5th of October. It was long before that that I immolated her, just as they all kill now," says Pozdnyshev. "Understand well that in our society there

is an idea shared by all that woman procures man pleasure (and vice versa, probably, but I know nothing of that, I only know my own case). *Wein, Weiber und Gesang*. So say the poets in their verses: Wine, women, and song!"

Pozdnyshev certainly doesn't lack feeling for Wein, Weiber und Gesang. It's hard not to think it's the Beethoven's comprehensive vision of life, the way *The Kreutzer Sonata* encompasses profound introspection and the liveliness of dance that appalls this very unattractive hater of life and art.

This is complicated and confounded by the fact that the Tolstoy who created this grotesque, disturbed and tragic figure shared his character's world view. His original ending to his *Kreutzer Sonata* finishes with a dismissal of all sexual feeling even at the heart of the sacrament of marriage.

"Yes, a man should understand that the real meaning of the words in the Gospel – Matthew v. 28 – where it says that everyone that looketh on a woman to lust after her commits adultery, relates to woman, his fellow human being, not merely to casual women and strangers, but above all to his own wife."

In Tolstoy's *Confession* of 1882 is a bizarre exaltation of the ideal of chastity, doubly bizarre for the celebrator of the love of Pierre Bezukhov and Natasha Rostov in *War and Peace* and the understanding of the depths of sexual passion and love that animates and desolates Anna Karenina.

The Australian Chamber Orchestra is attempting to do the fullest possible justice to the cultural context Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* created. In 2010 the ACO presented *Kreutzer vs Kreutzer* – a play for voices written by Laura Wade – with the English actor Samuel West (son of Timothy West and Prunella Scales) that dramatised Tolstoy's story with a dialectical response. It suggested that the vertiginous desecration of love that the robust and paradoxical Christian Chesterton saw in Tolstoy's story was a sublimity that – if not quite contained in Beethoven's sonata -- was undoubtedly one of the mythologies it gave rise to. Earlier in 1923, Leoš Janáček's String Quartet No. 1, "The Kreutzer Sonata" re-asserted the radiance at the heart of love to be found in Beethoven's sonata.

It's possible to get the ghosts of Tolstoy's story in the colouration of Janáček's string quartet, but the music is essentially a

re-imagining of the value of love and music. It's essentially an "I refute him thus" piece of music. Janáček's disgust at Tolstoy's interpretation is the spur to his own lyricism, just as Beethoven receives homage in lightning quotations.

There is a world of animation and animal intensity in Janáček's "String Quartet No.1". His *Kreutzer Sonata* is a delicious rebuttal of Tolstoy's story that anthologises snippets of Beethoven's original in order to speak of sex and love as a continuum and a unity. It is the great Slavonic response to the supreme Russian denialist.

This leads us to the heart of the paradox in the very name of the work. It is named after Rodolphe Kreutzer, the most celebrated violinist of Beethoven's day, who never played the sonata and famously described it to the young Berlioz as "outrageously unintelligible". The original violinist and dedicatee for the premiere of the *Kreutzer Sonata* was a brilliant mixed-race musician called George Bridgetower.

It makes sense as a gesture of solidarity with the wrongs of history but also in terms of the actual mercurialism and lunacy of what transpired for the Australian Chamber Orchestra to retitle the *Kreutzer Sonata* as the *Bridgetower Sonata*.

Bridgetower's father was born in Bridgetown in Barbados, a centre of slavery. His ambitious father took his son, a prodigious musical talent, to the court of the Austrian Empire. The father worked as a servant but rose in the ranks and furthered the career of his prodigy of a son at the Esterhazy Palace. Bridgetower was giving violin performances across Europe from the age of eight and he claimed to have been taught by Haydn, who also lent a hand in the formation of Beethoven.

Both Beethoven and Bridgetower had abusive fathers; Bridgetower's was a violent drunk. They seem to have formed a deep platonic friendship, with music as the sustaining idiom through which it was expressed. It made obvious sense that they should create music together.

It's a possible parable for a time that has to come to terms with the Black Lives Matter movement.

On 22 May 1803 they gave the first performance of the *Violin Sonata in A major*, which was then dedicated to Bridgetower.

He was said to be reading his part over Beethoven's shoulder with the ink scarcely dry. There is even a legend that he improvised a section and the titan called out in his glee and satisfaction, "Do it again, dear boy, do it again!" Beethoven's notes on the manuscript are in the jokey debunking style of intimate comradeship: "Mullatic sonata written for the mulatto Brischdauer, a complete madman and mullatic composer".

Shortly afterwards, they quarrelled over a woman. Did Bridgetower disparage Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved"? We don't know. We simply know that they never spoke again. Bridgetower's name was almost lost to history, and this early masterpiece bears the name of Kreutzer, who never played it and never liked it.

"...they quarrelled over a woman. Did Bridgetower disparage Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved"?"

We know that Bridgetower played with the recently developed Tourte violin bow – developed by French bow-maker François Xavier Tourte, considered the "Stradivari of the bow" – which was associated with great vibrancy and verve. It had the sound that in an impressionistic sense, even though it was, like Mozart's music, the product of the latter phase of the *ancien regime* and was suited to the cult of *libertà* – a variety of violin playing that heard the call of revolution. Nor is it hard to see that Beethoven wrote music for Bridgetower that he knew would be released by his dynamism and mercurial quality, the mad play and alternation of contrasting moods, that Bridgetower's natural extroversion of technique – the breadth of his palette – encouraged. The tragedy encompassing the introspection of the first movement, the darkness in the second, alternates with a flippancy that sees its contradiction, and then the sizzle of the last movement, the tarantella-like burn and bravura of the finale. You may not need the interpreter to realise this world of moods, but who could doubt that it may serve as a licence and an inspiration?

Anna Goldsworthy's words, narrated by Angela Nica Sullen, on the newly recuperated *Bridgetower Sonata* includes sections from *Sonata Mullatica*, a poem sequence by Rita Dove inspired by Bridgetower. Dove is also the ACO's advisor on this corner of musical history.

"It's one of the most difficult things to play so I've stretched into my colleague's fingers and that affects things in terms of style, which has a fantastical aspect.""

When I mention the creative responses to Beethoven's sonata to Richard Tognetti – the violinist-conductor whose name is synonymous with the Australian Chamber Orchestra – he says, '"It's like a hip hop diatribe, isn't it?"

I ask him how he's rearranged the piano section for strings. "Well, the *Kreutzer* – which he wrote when he was pretty young – is just an outburst and especially the first movement makes it a massive, massive work. And he'd written it in the style of a concerto so it got me thinking, Why not give it a go? I had my dear friend, the virtuoso violinist Ivry Gitlis, in mind when I wrote it. The piano section has a colossal arc. It's one of the most difficult things to play so I've stretched into my colleague's fingers and that affects things in terms of style, which has a fantastical aspect."

The critic Charles Rosen said of the sonata, "Beethoven never again presented such a hybrid as one work. The finale seems inadequate … The beautiful slow movement belongs to a totally different style [and] the first movement [is] unequalled in formal clarity, grandeur and dramatic force by anything that Beethoven had yet written." What does Tognetti think of this perceived inadequacy?

He says that you have to allow for the idea of the parody work in the manner of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*. "I suppose what Rosen means by 'inadequate' involves a misunderstanding of the last movement of classical works. 1803 is not long after the death of Mozart, and to have this skipping music is not unusual. It's the tarantella."

I admit that it's scintillating.

"It's as if, after the colossal drama of the first movement and the extraordinary moving nature of the second movement, he goes, 'Okay, it's over now, and we'll go dance'." Tognetti says. "Dramatically, it doesn't feel out of place. I think you sort of need it."

Does he think of it as a “meaning of life” piece?

“Absolutely,” he says. “It’s got everything in it. He seems to have thrown the world in there: you’re on the ground, you’re in the streets, you’re feeling the earth. But then there’s the second movement, which has some of the most celestial music ever written.”

I tell him I’ve read someone say there’s a voice in it that simply is and a voice – in the non-violin part – that queries what existence may be. Richard Tognetti is open and accommodating with this idea, even if he’s not prepared to sign up to it.

“Whatever you want to say about it will ring true about some part of it,” he says. “It’s got a tremendous depth of tragedy, up there with *Coriolanus*.”

The discussion moves to Tolstoy’s story and Janáček‘s attempt to rebut it musically. Richard Tognetti says he finds everything in Janáček to be “a celebration of human sexuality”, but then he remind me that in the *Bridgetower* there’s a suggestion of the very sombre note struck by the *Heiligenstadt Testament* that Beethoven wrote to his brothers in 1802.

“He’s just realising, ‘Holy moly, I’m losing my hearing, which is the worst thing that can happen to a musician.” Tognetti believes that this is the first time you hear that note of incipient tragedy, the sense of enduring sorrow and catastrophe, and he clearly thinks a depth emerges from that darkness and abyss.

Tognetti is very keen to reclaim the sonata for Bridgetower, without wanting to overplay his hand. He exclaims at the injustice of the fact that Rodolphe Kreutzer has Kreutzer’s name all over it. “And it’s all over the Tolstoy and the Janáček and he didn’t even play the fucking thing!”

So what of Bridgetower?

“Bridgetower was an extraordinary musician,” he says. “And Bridgetower sight-read it and Beethoven loved that. Beethoven loved him. It’s an amazing story and it takes us to places that show the struggle against slavery. And the playing was incomparable. I can’t even begin to tell you what a feat that was, and to imagine doing that with Beethoven looking over your shoulder. I could never say he was a co-author, not at all, but he’s a conspirator in the first performance.”

Tognetti thinks it's worth turning over the stones of history to find out what's under them. He says quietly but with sober wonder, "And it turns out Bridgetower had a terrible demise."

We talk about how improvisation can enter compositions – for example, how Marlon Brando's improvisations extended the visions of the film directors Bertolucci and Coppola. "It's probably on that sort of level, or even a lesser level," says Tognetti. "Yeah, it's sort of improvisatory. I do think it inspired Beethoven to write a couple of things down.

"Beethoven must have been dumbfounded at finally finding this guy who brought such light, who he could force to sight-read prima vista and he could actually do it. It's nuts. No matter what we achieve in homage when we perform it again, we won't be able to do justice to that."

He says he first encountered the Bridgetower story 15 years ago, when he was having dinner with the playwright Edward Albee, "He was dazzled by the story. I think great violinists matter, and Bridgetower happened to be black which makes the story richer."

Does he think Bridgetower pushed Beethoven into the dramatic extroversion of a musical language he had never exhibited before?

"Yes," he says, "Because Beethoven probably needed it, and it unlocked an inner theme. I think the fire in Bridgetower may be what attracted him. It seems he was very fiery."

The conversation shifts, as it does these days, to Covid-19 and its effects on artistic life. "At one point we thought we were going to lose our house," says Tognetti. "We had to downsize and let some staff go. In the UK, 64 per cent of musicians are having to re-tool. We won't get that back." He applauds the way Australia embraced Keynesianism to combat the virus. He adds, not quite ironically, "We had to become a socialist nation to make this work." He muses about what his 18 year old son will lose by not being able to travel.

Tognetti embodies a particular kind of ease in the face of human vanity, and he's good at saying what he thinks. He's a cultivated, alert artist and commander of artists and he convinces you that the injustice done to a long ago Black musician who inspired Beethoven's love, and then his art, and finally his wrath, is exactly the emphasis the ACO needs to reanimate this sonata of such staggering notoriety and greatness.

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PHOTO. LUKAS BECK

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ANNA GOLDSWORTHY

Anna Goldsworthy is an award-winning pianist and writer. Her most recent CD is the ARIA-award-winning *Thirteen Ways to Look at Birds*, with Paul Kelly, James Ledger, Alice Keath and Seraphim Trio. Anna's literary publications include the best-selling memoir *Piano Lessons* and the novel *Melting Moments*, alongside works for the stage, such as the cabaret show *Cole* for Michael Griffiths, for which he won a Helpmann Award, and the libretto for Victorian Opera's award-winning production of *The Magic Pudding*. Anna is Director of the John Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice at the University of Adelaide, and an Associate Professor at the Elder Conservatorium of Music. She is also the 2021 Artist and Writer in Residence at the Melbourne Recital Centre, and Artistic Director of the Coriole Music Festival.

EAMON FLACK

Artistic Director - Belvoir

Eamon is Belvoir's Artistic Director. He was born in Singapore and grew up in Singapore, Darwin, Brisbane and Cootamundra. He scraped through 6th Grade AMEB Violin as a teenager, and later trained as an actor at WAAPA. He has since worked as a director, writer, actor and dramaturg around Australia and internationally, from Milikapiti on the Tiwi Islands to London. For Belvoir, Eamon's directing credits include *Counting and Cracking* (with Associate Director S. Shakthidharan), *Angels in America*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Packer and Sons*, *Ghosts*, *Ivanov*, *Babyteeth*, *Life of Galileo*, *As You Like It*, *The Rover*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Blind Giant is Dancing* and *The End*. He was Associate Writer with S. Shakthidharan on *Counting and Cracking*. He co-adapted Ruby Langford Ginibi's memoir *Don't Take Your Love to Town* with Leah Purcell, and co-devised *Beautiful One Day* with artists from ILBIJERRI, version 1.0 and Palm Island. His adaptations include Chekhov's *Ivanov*, Gorky's *Summerfolk*, Sophocles' *Antigone* and Ibsen's *Ghosts*. *Ivanov* won four Sydney Theatre Awards including Best Mainstage Production and Best Direction. *The Glass Menagerie* and *Angels in America* both won Best Play at the Helpmann Awards. *Counting and Cracking* won Best Play, Best Direction and Best New Work at the Helpmann Awards, the Nick Enright Prize for Playwriting at the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, and the Victorian Literary Prize and the Victorian Premier's Award for Drama.

ANGELA NICA SULLEN

Angela Nica Sullen is an Italian, African American, woman from the United States. She grew up in California and on Noongar country in Western Australia. Angela is an actor, vocal coach, writer, mc and stand-up comedian.

Now based on Gadigal land, she studied at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, completing Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting) and Master in Fine Arts (Voice). She has performed in *Nothing To Lose* (2015), *Blackbirds* (2016), STC's *Mosquitos* (2019), *Brown Skin Girl* (2019), *Faust* (2019).

Angela's screens credits include *I AM WOMAN* (2020) and *BUMP* (2021).

Angela is currently a voice teacher at the National Institute of Dramatic Art and is also working on *Seen*, a new television series inspired by *Brown Skin Girl*, a play she collaborated with creative collective Black birds.


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