

Australian Chamber Orchestra

AACO

**THE DEVIL'S VIOLIN**

Directed by Ilya Gringolts

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



Wesfarmers Arts

## A WORLD OF MUSIC

From intimate recitals and renowned international guests through to joyful experiences for the whole family.



### ACO UP CLOSE: TOGNETTI AND GRINGOLTS

27 Mar

Two of the world's greatest violinists. One intimate, unforgettable concert. When Tognetti's passion meets Gringolts' curiosity, you know you have to be there.

### ACO UP CLOSE: LEONKORO QUARTET

5 May

Hear the dynamic foursome play one of the great touchstones of chamber music, Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, when passion and mastery collide in their Sydney debut.

### ACO FAMILY DAY: TCHAIKOVSKY AND BEYOND

14 Jun

Bring the whole family to enjoy a vibrant 30-minute concert featuring music by Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Saint-Saëns and more. After the concert children can try a real string instrument. Ages 2–8.

### ACO FAMILIES: PINOCCHIO

9–19 Jul

Experience the timeless tale of Pinocchio in a brand-new ACO Families production brought to life with live music and a touch of magic. Ages 3–8.

**ACO.COM.AU**

The Neilson, ACO On The Pier

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# INSIDE

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

Cover.  
Ilya Gringolts.  
Photo by  
Tomasz Trzebiatowski

**Share your experience**

**#ACO26Season**



@AustralianChamberOrchestra

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## Up Front

- 2 **Welcome**  
From the ACO's Managing Director Richard Evans
- 4 **News**  
Upcoming concerts and the latest announcements

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## The Concert

- 7 **Program**  
The music you're about to hear
- 8 **Musicians on Stage**  
Players on stage for this performance
- 10 **Program in Short**  
Your five-minute read before lights down
- 14 **Holding History**  
Kate Holden explores the relationship between musician and instrument



- 26 **About the Artists**

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## Behind the Scenes

- 29 **ACO Staff**
- 31 **Acknowledgements**

# WELCOME

Welcome to *The Devil's Violin*.

We are delighted to welcome back the brilliant virtuoso violinist Ilya Gringolts to direct this tour.

Ilya first performed with the ACO in 2018 and developed an instant rapport with the musicians, returning in 2023 and now in 2026 for what marks his third national tour with the Orchestra. We are thrilled to have Ilya direct the ACO in a program centred around one of the most electrifying and fiendishly challenging pieces of violin music ever written, Giuseppe Tartini's *Devil's Trill*. Joining Ilya centre stage is the ACO's own Principal Violin Satu Vänskä for Antonio Vivaldi's Concerto for Two Violins in C major, in a fiery showcase of virtuosity and brilliance.

On this tour we are also delighted to welcome a new member of the ACO – a 416-year-old viola made by the great Italian luthier Giovanni Paolo Maggini. This spectacular viola has been acquired by the ACO Instrument Fund following a year-long international search, and is played by our Principal Viola Stefanie Farrands. I thank the Instrument Fund investors for their generosity in facilitating this incredibly rare and special Maggini viola for Stef to perform on, where it will be experienced by audiences of all ages around Australia and abroad.

The Maggini joins the other extraordinary instruments in the ACO's instrument collection – one of the finest collections in existence – which also includes two Stradivarius violins, a 450-year-old Da Salò double bass and Richard Tognetti's precious Guarneri del Gesù violin, amongst others.

Writer Kate Holden spoke with Ilya Gringolts and five of the ACO musicians – Satu, Liisa, Stef, Tipi and Max – about the deep connection that musicians form with their instruments and what makes the string instruments of the Italian 'Golden Age' so special. I encourage you to read it, from page 14.

Thank you so much for joining us for what promises to be an extraordinary concert.



**Richard Evans AM**  
Managing Director

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



**Wesfarmers Arts**



**Australian Chamber Orchestra & Wesfarmers Arts**  
Bringing People & Music Together

# NEWS

Upcoming concerts  
and the latest  
announcements.

## Latest News

### 1610 Maggini Viola

We are thrilled to announce the latest instrument added to the ACO's Golden Age instrument collection: a 1610 Giovanni Paolo Maggini viola, acquired by the ACO Instrument Fund.

Following an extensive international search, this extraordinary instrument is played by ACO Principal Viola Stefanie Farrands, who describes being the custodian of this viola as an honour, saying:

“The sound of this instrument is my dream. It has a mysterious darkness, warmth and depth that opens a world of possibilities. It is as though I have been handed a painter’s palette with an infinite array of shades. Being the custodian of this instrument is an honour I will cherish for the rest of my life.”



1

## On Tour

### Schubert's Fantasy & Octet

**14-30 MAY**  
National Tour

Richard Tognetti's affinity for Schubert is evident in every note he plays. Here, he directs an ACO ensemble, featuring a handpicked selection of Australia's top wind players, in two exquisite works that showcase Schubert as a master of chamber music: the Octet and the Fantasy in C major.

### Isles of Light

**13-23 JUN**  
National Tour

British violin and viola virtuoso Lawrence Power makes his ACO debut directing music hailing from the British Isles, from Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* to the genre-defying exuberance of Kate Bush.



2

1. ACO Principal Viola Stefanie Farrands
2. Lawrence Power
3. Leonkoro Quartet
4. ACO Foundations: Beginner Strings Intensive
5. Pinocchio

**ACO On The Pier**  
**ACO Up Close:**  
**Tognetti and Gringolts**

**27 MAR**

Two of the world's greatest violinists; one intimate, unforgettable concert. A surprise program where two artists, Ilya Gringolts and Richard Tognetti, will push the violin to its limits, to the awe and delight of the lucky people who will be there to witness it.

**ACO Up Close:**  
**Leonkoro Quartet**

**5 MAY**

The Leonkoro Quartet play with courage, candour and heart. The ACO is thrilled to present the young stars for their Sydney debut, introducing a new generation of musicians with the renegade spirit and commitment to excellence the ACO has long championed. Hear the dynamic foursome play one of the great touchstones of chamber music – their youth and intensity a perfect match for Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*.



3

**ACO Families**  
**ACO Family Days**

**14 & 15 MAR**

Bring the whole family to ACO On The Pier to experience a classical music concert, engage in hands-on creative play and music-making activities, and try a musical instrument! Recommended for children aged 2–8 years old and their families.

**ACO Foundations:**  
**Beginner Strings Intensive**

**13-17 APR**  
**(AUTUMN SCHOOL HOLIDAYS)**

This brand-new school holidays program for primary-school-aged students is a five-day string workshop for complete beginners to learn the violin or cello with ACO educators.

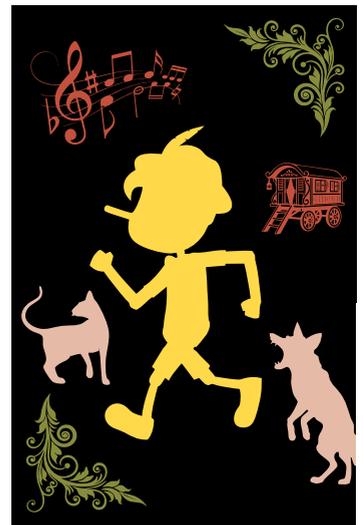


4

**Pinocchio**

**9-19 JUL**

Let your imagination come alive in our brand-new ACO Families production *Pinocchio*. With an original score played live on stage by ACO Families musicians, this reimagined tale is filled to the brim with joy, wonder and just a touch of real magic.



5

# ACO

# SCHUBERT'S FANTASY & OCTET

## 14–30 May

Directed by Richard Tognetti

**Newcastle, Canberra, Sydney,  
Adelaide, Wollongong, Melbourne.**

Discover the lyrical beauty and emotional  
depth of the greatest of musical poets.



**ACO.COM.AU**

Tickets from \$49\* | \$35\* for U35s

\*Transaction fee of \$8.50 applies

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## Pre-Concert Talks

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

### WOLLONGONG TOWN HALL

**Bernard Rofe**

Thu 12 Mar 6.45pm

### MELBOURNE RECITAL CENTRE

**Andrew Aronowicz**

Sat 14 Mar 6.45pm

Mon 16 Mar 6.45pm

### MELBOURNE - ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE

**Andrew Aronowicz**

Sun 15 Mar 1.45pm

### ADELAIDE TOWN HALL

**Russell Torrance**

Tue 17 Mar 6.45pm

### PERTH - WINTHROP HALL

**William Yeoman**

Wed 18 Mar 6.45pm

### SYDNEY - CITY RECITAL HALL

**Genevieve Lang**

Sat 21 Mar 6.15pm

Tue 24 Mar 7.15pm

Wed 25 Mar 6.15pm

### SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

**Genevieve Lang**

Sun 22 Mar 1.15pm

### BRISBANE - QPAC CONCERT HALL

**Matthew Hodge**

Mon 23 Mar 6.15pm

### CANBERRA - LLEWELLYN HALL

**Bernard Rofe**

Sat 28 Mar 6.45pm

# PROGRAM

**Ilya Gringolts** Director & Violin  
**Satu Vänskä** Violin  
**Australian Chamber Orchestra**

COMPOSER	TITLE	
<b>Johann Paul von Westhoff</b>	Violin Sonata No.3 in D minor: III. Imitazione delle Campane	2
<b>Antonio Vivaldi</b>	Violin Concerto in D minor, RV237 <i>I. Allegro</i> <i>II. Adagio</i> <i>III. Allegro</i>	9
<b>Sofia Gubaidulina</b> (arr. strings)	String Quartet No.2	9
<b>Giuseppe Tartini</b> (arr. Bernard Rofe)	Violin Sonata in G minor "Devil's Trill" <i>I. Larghetto Affettuoso</i> <i>II. Tempo Giusto. della Scuola Tartinista</i> <i>III. Sogni Dell autore. Andante</i>	15
<b>Interval</b>		<b>20</b>
<b>Mieczysław Weinberg</b>	Aria, Op.9	4
<b>Antonio Vivaldi</b>	Concerto for Two Violins in C major, RV507 <i>I. Allegro</i> <i>II. Largo</i> <i>III. Allegro</i>	12
<b>Paul Stanhope</b>	Giving Ground*	10
<b>Francesco Geminiani</b>	Concerto Grosso No.12 in D minor "Follia" <i>Adagio - Allegro - Adagio - Vivace - Allegro</i> <i>- Andante - Allegro - Adagio - Allegro -</i> <i>Adagio - Allegro</i>	11

\* Commissioned by the Australian Chamber Orchestra

The concert will last approximately one hour and 30 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. *The Devil's Violin* will be broadcast on Friday 17 April, 1pm AEDT and available on demand for 30 days after.

# MUSICIANS ON STAGE



**Ilya Gringolts**  
**Director & Violin**

Ilya plays a 1743 Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù violin.



**Satu Vänskä**  
**Principal Violin**

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



**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.



**Ilya Isakovich**  
**Violin**

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



**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.



**Ike See**  
**Violin**

Ike plays his own 2021 Zygmuntowicz violin.



**Stefanie Farrands**  
**Principal Viola**

Stefanie plays a 1610 Maggini viola on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. Her Chair is sponsored by peckvonhartel architects.



**Thomas Chawner<sup>#</sup>**  
**Viola**

Thomas plays a contemporary viola made in the US in 2014 by Ryan Soltis. He appears courtesy of the Orava Quartet.



**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.



**Maxime Bibeau**  
**Principal Bass**

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



**Masumi Yamamoto#**  
**Harpichord**

Masumi plays an Italian Harpsichord after Grimaldi by Carey Beebe, Sydney 1990. Supplied & prepared by Carey Beebe Harpsichords.

In Perth, Masumi plays a French Double Harpsichord by Michael Johnson 1987. Courtesy of Perth Concert Hall. Prepared by Carey Beebe.



**Simon Martyn-Ellis#**  
**Theorbo**

Simon plays a theorbo made by Klaus Jacobsen in London in 2006 and a Baroque guitar made by Marcus Wesche in Bremen in 2011.

# Guest Musician

# PROGRAM IN SHORT

Your five-minute read  
before lights down.

Written by Russell Torrance

**Johann Paul von Westhoff** (1656–1705)

**Violin Sonata No.3 in D minor:**

**III. Imitazione delle Campane**

Johann Paul von Westhoff was extremely well regarded during his lifetime at the turn of the 18th century. He was one of the leaders of the burgeoning Dresden violin school, and also toured as a soloist all over Europe – the fact that he was an expert on modern languages would have helped greatly! There is a story of Westhoff playing one of his sonatas for none other than Louis XIV, and the Sun King greatly admiring the young German. As a composer, he was very influential on younger German musicians, and his six violin partitas inspired those of JS Bach.

This short movement from one of his 1694 sonatas is groundbreaking. Today, we take it for granted that music can depict or describe the world outside the concert hall, but when this music was first heard, the idea was daring and novel. The rhythmic pulse of the solo violin's relentless arpeggios suggests the pealing of bells from a church tower.



**Antonio Vivaldi** (1678–1741)

**Violin Concerto in D minor, RV237**

Antonio Vivaldi's world was the wonderful musical environment of Northern Italy at the turn of the 18th century – the wonders of Venice with its heritage and traditions, as well as the opulent surroundings of the court at Mantua. But this was by no means an echo chamber and Vivaldi was keen to look to other musical cultures.

The fantastic young German violin virtuoso Johann Georg Pisendel was brought to Venice around 1716 with his employer, the Crown Prince of Saxony. Pisendel used the opportunity to network, soon becoming friends with Vivaldi and something of an informal student of the Italian master.

As you would expect, Pisendel learnt a great deal from Vivaldi, taking copies of his works back to Dresden and spreading the influence of Italian music among German composers, including JS Bach. Vivaldi even presented Pisendel with a series of concertos written for him, including the music you will hear at this concert, and they show that this influence went both ways.

What is startling is that, in the opening movement, Vivaldi directly copies the Westhoff piece that began this evening's concert. It is clear that Pisendel would have played this to Vivaldi and the Italian would have been impressed enough by the German music to 'lift' it for his own work. This was a common practice in the 18th century and would have been far less objectionable than if a composer today borrowed from someone else. In any case, Westhoff did not mind – he had been dead for at least ten years!



### **Sofia Gubaidulina (1931-2025)**

#### **String Quartet No.2**

*Arranged for string orchestra*

Sofia Gubaidulina was a Soviet composer born in what is now Tatarstan. The brilliance and individuality of her music was only heard in the West from the 1980s, but she had been steadily contributing to the musical culture of the USSR for 20 years.

Like many Soviet composers, she bore the brunt of interference and criticism from the authorities. Her experiments with different tunings were described as 'irresponsible' and other modernistic traits chillingly dubbed 'mistaken!' Nevertheless, she pursued this path and won the admiration of figures such as Dmitri Shostakovich. Aside from her modernism, she also managed to secretly maintain deep religious threads in her work, in the face of state atheism.

Gubaidulina's String Quartet No.2 was written in 1987 for a festival in Finland, and performance by the Sibelius Quartet. Gubaidulina says she wanted in this quartet to explore a 'musical problem' she had been thinking about for years – how to knit together the qualities and differences of musical instruments and so create expressive acoustic effects. The three parts of this work are 'Reaching Out and Tethering', 'Reaching Up and Renewing' and 'Affirmation'.



### **Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770)**

#### **Violin Sonata in G minor "Devil's Trill"**

*Arranged by Bernard Rofe*

There is nothing like a good story, and a good story tends to stick irrespective of how doubtful it might be! This sonata was probably written by Giuseppe Tartini in the 1710s and not published until 1798, 18 years after the composer's death. It is likely that, in the interim, like all good tales, the story that went with this music got embellished and added to. Nonetheless, here is that story, as told by the composer himself (source: Lalande: Voyage d'un François en Italie):

*One night, in the year 1713 I dreamed I had made a pact with the Devil for my soul. Everything went as I wanted: my new servant anticipated my every desire. Among other things, I gave him my violin to see if he could play. How great was my astonishment on hearing a sonata so wonderful and so beautiful, played with such great art and intelligence, as I had never even conceived in my strongest flights of fantasy.*

Of course Tartini tried to write down what he had heard, but the result was a pale reflection of the dream:

*...the difference between it and that which so moved me is so great that I would have destroyed my instrument and have said goodbye to music forever if it had been possible for me to live without the enjoyment it affords me.*

Nevertheless, Tartini managed to construct a suitably memorable sonata with this experience as its climax. We hear a gentle lullaby, suggesting the composer getting ready for sleep (and presumably eating some cheese?), followed by a vigorous movement which may be the beginning of the fateful dream. Then, finally, the dizzying, infernal virtuosity of Beelzebub having a go on Tartini's violin. Regardless of the story – and whether you believe it – this music by Tartini is rightfully famous for its wit, energy and genius.



## **Mieczysław Weinberg (1919–1996)**

### **Aria, Op.9**

So much of the music of the middle of the 20th century is born out of the horrors of the times. Displacement, upheaval and terror never seem to be far from the composers who lived then.

Mieczysław Weinberg was Polish by birth and his parents ran the Yiddish Theatre in Warsaw. When the Nazis annexed Poland in 1939, he managed to flee to the Soviet Union. Most of his family did not, and suffered the same fate as so many of the peoples of Central Europe.

We meet Weinberg now in 1942, just at the time he is being discovered by the likes of Dmitri Shostakovich. The young composer was working as a coach in the opera house at Tashkent in Uzbekistan, 4000km east of Warsaw. But Weinberg's thoughts would never have been far from home and those he left behind.

This gentle aria for string quartet gives a clue to the inner turmoil he must have endured – the music shifts between light and darkness, hope and fear.

## **Vivaldi**

### **Concerto for Two Violins in C major, RV507**

Earlier in this concert you will have heard a work Vivaldi seems to have composed for an esteemed visitor, the young violin virtuoso Johann Georg Pisendel. This double violin concerto, although probably not written for Pisendel, is certainly one that the German eagerly copied out, so that he could take it home to Dresden with him.

The work is one of the many that Vivaldi wrote as part of his duties as a teacher at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, an institution devoted to the care and education of girls and young women from poor backgrounds.

A double concerto such as this gives an insight as to how teaching happened at the Pietà. Figures such as Vivaldi had the role of distant overseers, the idea being to minimise the contact between male teachers and female students. The actual day-to-day teaching would have been peer to peer, a more accomplished student guiding one less proficient. So with this

music, perhaps we witness these two students under Vivaldi's supervision, performing together in the solo parts, learning and supporting one another as they go.



## **Paul Stanhope (1969–)**

### **Giving Ground**

The composer writes:

This piece was commissioned as a companion piece to Geminiani's *La Follia*. The title 'Giving Ground' has multiple meanings – the first referring to the fact that it uses the same 'ground bass' as the Geminiani; it also refers to the fact that one musical texture slowly 'gives ground' to the next incoming wave in the way the piece gradually transforms its material.

Like its predecessor, *Giving Ground* employs the use of a *concertante* group of soloists pitted against the *ripieno* (the rest of the band) as is the convention in the Baroque concerto grosso form. These two groups are used in various combinations, some of them similar to the Geminiani, others a little less conventional such as the trio of low instruments at the very start and later very high duos and trios of violins. Although based on ancient building blocks, the piece explores some more contemporary devices such as shivering *ricochet* figures, the use of *col legno* or using the wood of the bow, harmonic *glissandi* as well as adding some more free-time 'textural' elements to the surface. Unlike Geminiani, this piece uses modulation to gradually ratchet up tension from beginning in the lowest register of the strings, gradually moving up the gears to a section, full of high string harmonics. At this point, the coil is so tightly wound that it releases into a series of downward chordal patterns, using a chordal and melodic fragment from *La Follia*, spiralling down in register until it reaches a section which refers once more to the 'shivers' of the opening.



**Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762)**  
**Concerto Grosso No.12 in D minor**  
**“Follia”**

Like Vivaldi's Violin Concerto in D, this is another example of that tendency for one composer to pay homage to another by appropriation.

Francesco Geminiani was a student in Rome of the great Arcangelo Corelli but we join his story years later, when he was working as a composer in London in the 1720s. Geminiani composed a set of 12 grand concerti grossi, all of them actually arrangements of

Corelli's Op.5 violin sonatas. As was the case with Westhoff, Corelli had been dead for some years so would have had little impetus to complain!

This is the last concerto in Geminiani's set, corresponding to the last sonata in Corelli's set. In turn, Corelli had based this on pre-existing music – the famous *Follia*, a stately dance theme which has its origins in 15th-century Spain and Portugal.

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

Page 13.  
“Tartini's Dream” by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845). Illustration of the legend behind Giuseppe Tartini's “Devil's Trill”.



*The Devil's Violin*, directed by renowned violinist Ilya Gringolts, allows the Australian Chamber Orchestra to showcase its collection of stunning Golden Age instruments.

Written by Kate Holden



# HOLDING



# HISTORY



An ancient tree, an old painting, a monument: whenever we encounter one we poignantly imagine what it has seen in its time. So what do we feel for a musical instrument that has not only witnessed but become history?

The 1998 film *The Red Violin* depicted a fictional instrument on its passage from baroque Cremona, heart of masterpiece luthiery, through 18th-century Vienna, 19th-century Oxford, Cultural Revolution China, and into 1990s Canada. That instrument plays in many hands and moods through fortunes and perils, and yet its magic is that it stays the same: serene in its production of musical beauty, in the endurance of its fragile wooden shape, in its precious significance and inspiration for its musician custodians. For some in the real world who hold such implausible survivors, they are superlatively made tools of the greatest period with which to explore; for others, a mystically seasoned, almost enspirited partner in creating music.

In *The Devil's Violin*, the ACO highlights some of its collection of Golden Age instruments, the marvel that is a shaped box of wood that can, at a whisper of vibrated air, transport us to another world and time.

For Ilya Gringolts, who will be directing the Orchestra and performing Giuseppe Tartini's famous showcase piece, *Devil's Trill*, and Vivaldi's Concerto for Two Violins in C major, wielding an antique is a familiar privilege of his career. He has had use of three

**“In *The Devil's Violin*, the ACO highlights some of its collection of Golden Age instruments, the marvel that is a shaped box of wood that can, at a whisper of vibrated air, transport us to another world and time.”**

Page 14–15.  
Ilya Gringolts performing  
with the ACO  
Photo by Julian Kingma

Page 16.  
Ilya Gringolts  
Photo by Julian Kingma

Stradivarius pieces and recently returned to a rare Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù. The violin dates from 1743 and is an exemplar of Guarneri's provocative experimentation with details such as the f-holes and rib heights.

Its distinction seems suitable for Gringolts, known for immaculate performance and constant, restless extension of his craft. For him, a frequent devotee of gut strings and a lover of both canonical baroque and blazing contemporary composition, the use of a Golden Age instrument is less about prestige than accessing its wonderful range and qualities. Though known for his careful research and preparation, he is not pursuing historical authenticity as much as a quality – flexing, textured and active – that keeps him safe from complacency.

He'll be putting gut strings on his del Gesù instrument for this program, he says over video link from his home in Zurich, for both the older and newer works. "For me, the joy of playing gut has nothing to do with authenticity or trying to evoke the old sound, because it's impossible," he tells me. Technologies and techniques have changed, he says, and that's fine. But the antique ways, the precariousness of using gut or the raw, robust sound of a Guarneri give Gringolts the nervy energy with which he can make an unforgettable performance.

"That's exactly what I like. The slight scratchiness, the immediate response, something visceral there: wild, you know? It's sort of moody. I need to work with that. It's vulnerable, like a person can be." Paganini – whose *Caprices* Gringolts has recorded – played a Guarneri, as does the ACO's Richard Tognetti. The instruments have the ballast of time and fame but they can lift an exceptional artist into stratospherics of possibility.

Guarneris, Gringolts explains, are known for their dark sound, the thrum of the lower register in an essentially soprano instrument. "It's got this very powerful baritone, almost bass," he says, "a richness, almost a cello quality" he's hoping to intensify by trying gut on it for the first time, while bringing out a finer vulnerability in the upper strings. "A Guarneri is the kind of instrument you can really trust, an instrument that is very robustly built," he says. "I mean, some of his instruments look as if he just made them with the common saw or something. They're not refined, the way that Strads are. He was known for that. It's very rough violin making. Very muscular. You can hear that in the sound."

While a Golden Age instrument can be light to hold, they're weighty to play, even for a performer of Gringolts's experience. "It's a great luxury and a great responsibility, of course," he says thoughtfully.

**"That's exactly what I like. The slight scratchiness, the immediate response, something visceral there: wild, you know?"**

"It's also a great challenge" – and one can hear his enthusiasm engage at the thought – "because these instruments are very layered. Just discovering those possibilities and deciding what to do with them and how to use them to the music's advantage, that's the challenge. But of course, the returns are huge."

An antique instrument, unlike a newly made one, often survives only in its body, so – unlike ready-assembled new ones – modern adjustments and experiments can be made with bridge positions and other parts. This is, perhaps, analogous to Gringolts's range across the classical canon and his zeal for new works.

"To be honest, I stopped making a distinction between old and new music for myself a long time ago," he says. "It's just music, music that I choose to play. I mean, all the old music was once new." His happy place is playing baroque on baroque instruments, but he's also fascinated by the ways music serves audiences in the modern era.

Music in the 1720s, he proposes, was "mostly a beautiful escape" from a largely miserable life, its forms offering harmony, reconciliation and reliable patterning. Now, although we like to complain, "lives are comfortable and we're looking for something that will actually provoke us", he says. Unlike 300 years ago, we have millions of ideas zapping past us, multiple and diffuse. He's stimulated by the variety. "Yes, I enjoy that. It moves me. You need to get down and dirty but then be purified. And I go back and forth in between those extremes."



**“You want those human variabilities, and those inconsistencies and imperfections. That’s what makes it kind of exciting. If everyone sounded the same, what would be the point?”**

Page 18.  
ACO Violin Liisa Pallandi  
Photo by Charlie Kinross

Page 19.  
ACO Principal Viola Stefanie Farrands  
Photo by Charlie Kinross

Page 20.  
ACO Principal Violin Satu Vänskä  
Photo by Nic Walker

Gringolts pursues whatever will give him the capacity to soar, and the scrape of the real. The beautiful thing he holds lightly in his left hand: “It is an instrument. It’s a tool. It’s a tool for you to use for a higher purpose, right?” But he can’t help wondering, “what was it doing in 1824?”

Liisa Pallandi of the ACO plays a 1759 Guaragnini violin that also saw 1824, and she is still awed by its history. Not only by its venerable age but also by the years when, then on loan from the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, it was played first by Richard Tognetti and then, for a long time, by Principal Violin Helena Rathbone.

It is a work from Giovanni Battista Guaragnini’s later years in Parma, the master inheriting the traditions of Stradivari’s Cremona but pushing towards innovation. Rathbone called it “the Chocolate Monster” for its rich, sugared tones, and Pallandi is entranced by “its dark inner-voice-world”. She recounts how, on taking guardianship of the instrument, she texted Rathbone: “Good luck ever getting me off the G-string!” For a long time, she admits, it still felt like Rathbone’s instrument, but she’s come to recognise the evolving combinations that make a unique relationship.

“It’s not just because it’s old or just because it’s well made,” she says. “It’s also the pairing of instrument to person or where they are in their life and what they want from their sound. You want those human variabilities, and those inconsistencies and imperfections. That’s what makes it kind of exciting. If everyone sounded the same, what would be the point?”

She compares it with a modern Finnish violin she owns: it prefers a light, fast bowing, while the Guaragnini loves a “gutsy, juicy digging in”, a slow, deep style. “You have to find the way the instrument wants to be played,” she explains. She still loves her first violin, made for her great-aunt. “I had this connection, and I thought it was great and still have such an appreciation for that instrument. But then you just level up and level up and...” With the Guaragnini in hand she found herself making dimensions of colour and sound she hadn’t known were possible.

Is it the age or the mastery of its making that bestows this liberation? “I’ve been really lucky,” she says. “I’ve played a few old instruments at different times and I haven’t fallen in love with all of them the way I love this one.” Resilient and sturdy, the violin, now in its third century, “can hold up to a lot of contemporary things”, she says. She can’t say whether it’s the number of people who’ve played it or “the amount of vibrations that have gone through it”, “but it just feels four-dimensional”. It can go everywhere in repertoire, she says, and “learn and be happy anywhere”.

Principal Viola Stefanie Farrands is perhaps even more enraptured by her 1610 viola, made in Brescia more than a hundred years before Pallandi’s instrument by Giovanni Paolo Maggini, a pupil of Gasparo da Salò. Farrands warns that her passion for the instrument, purchased by the ACO Instrument Fund only recently, is still so intense she may cry.

**“I can’t really express how unique the singular connection between one player and an instrument is. It feels like an extension of your own self, in a way. When it’s in my arms, I’m not sure where my fingers end and where it starts.”**





“For a long time, the Orchestra was on a search for a viola,” she says. “It was years and years of a long, gruelling search. This one we found in New York – it was sitting among an array of many other violas. It was number five. And the second I picked it up – this is after several hours of critiquing and trialling and experimenting and opening your ears to the character of every single instrument – number five resonated on my collarbone. And I was just overwhelmed with emotion.”

The subsequent months of trying it incognito on various stages and with different strings, players and scenarios only confirmed her adoration. She had never expected such a transcendent experience. The Fund sold a Guarneri violin to pay for the Maggini.

“I can’t really express how unique the singular connection between one player and an instrument is. It feels like an extension of your own self, in a way. When it’s in my arms, I’m not sure where my fingers end and where it starts. But at the same time, it gifts you with so many different possibilities and a sound palette that is beyond your dreams as a player, beyond anything you could conjure up yourself. So it opens your entire mind up into a world of possibilities.”

The viola has an old soul, she says, and its complexity – “every shade and every nuance” – comes with age. “It’s lived through so many world wars and parts of history. I can’t even conceptualise where it’s been and whose hands it’s been in, which is magical for me to imagine.” A viola, she explains, is a mysterious creature, not always understood by audiences. It’s physically taxing to play. This one “takes all of you, every iota of your being”. “But it shows you things as well. That’s something that these Golden Age instruments have: they create, they give ideas, and you give it ideas too.”

It’s a rich, mysterious beauty. “That’s what I love about the feel: the complexity and the dark sonority that it has, a red wine sound,” Farrands says. It just makes me weak at the knees.” The changes, the flaws and scars of its history, she loves it all. Only a short time into the ACO’s experience of the instrument, already she is certain of one thing: “There is nothing that will ever sound like this does.”

The 1728/29 Stradivari violin played by Principal Violin Satu Vänskä, another precious antique and the very first instrument bought by the nascent ACO Instrument Fund with an incredible donation by Peter Weiss in 2011, is currently giving her present-day consolation. “With all the troubles in the world, it’s good to be a musician, isn’t it?” she says, taking time out on a rehearsal day. “Having something that’s

**“With all the troubles in the world, it’s good to be a musician, isn’t it?” Satu says, taking time out on a rehearsal day. “Having something that’s so enduring, to have that in your everyday life, is a reminder that things persist and things are real. This is a real violin from 1728. It’s not fake news, you know?”**

so enduring, to have that in your everyday life, is a reminder that things persist and things are real. This is a real violin from 1728. It’s not fake news, you know?”

She finds it comforting to reflect on the decades of effort she’s made and the reward of playing something “so beautiful”: “This is a good combination of things to remind that there’s something worth aspiring to in this world.” The violin is a hybrid of two Stradivaris, a not uncommon phenomenon. The scratches and flaws, too, are testament to persistence: “every single part is precious.”

**“I’m using all these human relationship references because that’s what it is,” he says. “It’s not a work laptop. It’s a living thing. It has a personality.”**

Having for a time played a different Strad, the “Belgiorno”, Vänskä is convinced of the special properties of Golden Age instruments. All of them come from northern Italy, particularly Cremona. It may have been the cluster effect of competing talents, perhaps volcanic ash in the forests or the pre-industrial habit of floating timber down rivers, but “no one really knows why the instruments of that time are so good”. Producing a distinctive bright sound “with a velvety top end, very clear”, Strads are famously powerful, made at a moment when violinists were becoming more virtuosic and venues larger.

This one, Vänskä jokes, is like the iPhone 18 model. She’s not looking to upgrade but has become philosophical about her custody: not knowing much about the backstory, she’s relieved she needn’t tense at the thought of a celebrity predecessor. “To have that at the back of your mind would be a lot of pressure,” she says. “You can’t get too attached to them – it’s not yours, it’s for you just to use. But it’s a great privilege.”

In contrast, Principal Cello Timo-Veikko Valve knows exactly who preceded him with the 1616 Brothers Amati instrument he’s played for the past nine years: the 20th-century British performer Amaryllis Fleming who bought it at an auction in the 1960s and had it restored and refitted with a specially designed Flemish head to fit five strings. When it was

carefully restored for four strings, including replacing the scroll, before being purchased by the ACO Instrument Fund, Valve was “in a happy relationship” with his then instrument, and not, in his words, “looking for a new partner”.

Now he can’t imagine how the Orchestra would sound without it. “I’m using all these human relationship references because that’s what it is,” he says. “It’s not a work laptop. It’s a living thing. It has a personality. It’s very finicky at times, it gets cross. But,” he says cheerfully, “love at first sight happened, and everyone was blown away.”

Fleming, who promoted baroque and early music, was somewhat overshadowed by the famous Jacqueline du Pré and made few recordings, but Valve has tracked them down on vinyl. “There’s one particular Schubert sonata that she plays on an album on our Amati,” he says. “It’s been an interesting journey to be playing that recently, and then going back to her recording and reliving the music through the way that she played it. Having the ability to, in a way, have a conversation with her. I feel that she’s very strongly present in the cello somehow.”

Valve cherishes the scratches that he recognises from photographs of Fleming with the cello, and the sense of physical continuity. Every day, he says, he plays it and “every day, every day I’m shaking hands with this person, a tangible connection through that instrument”.

The largest and oldest of all the ACO’s instrument collection onstage lends its strength to its player, Maxime Bibeau. The Da Salò double bass, made around 1585, is one of only half-a-dozen surviving from the workshop of its renowned maker. It’s extra-wide and the musician feels the dense weight of it, but he’s boosted by its power and its immense generosity. “Playing the bass is like a pas de deux, because we use the weight of the instrument and my weight to work together,” he says. “It moves a lot of air. It moves the ground, and everything else around it.”

The instrument has proven its resilience, having survived the World War II bombing of its host venue, the Abbey of Neustift in South Tyrol, where it had apparently been kept for nearly four centuries. Cracks had been plastered inside with Latin liturgy parchment and repairs done by the abbey’s carpenter. It was full of soot and its distressed state made it unrecognisable. But it may be one of the very first double basses, developed by the experimentalist Da Salò as violones were evolving. While the instrument has beautiful and distinctive decorations, including exquisite purfling, its most amazing quality is more subtle: analysis has shown that the front of the body is made from a tree that began growing in the 13th century.





“It’ll give back whatever you give it. It’s like an amazing singer. It can sing really quietly but doesn’t get thin or abrasive, it just stays really beautiful and deep.”

Despite its great maturity, Bibeau feels the instrument is still spry, playing the grave baroque beauties it was made for or nimbly taking on 21st-century experiments. “It can take a lot of energy,” he says. “It’ll give back whatever you give it. It’s like an amazing singer. It can sing really quietly but doesn’t get thin or abrasive, it just stays really beautiful and deep.”

Originally loaned to the ACO by an anonymous patron and now owned and loaned by the UKARIA Cultural Centre in South Australia, even after 12 years with the Da Salò, Bibeau knows he is one of many custodians. “You can’t claim to own it,” he says. “I mean, it’s too big! You’ve got to work with it.” So when he recently left it for several weeks during a holiday, he picked it up again with curiosity. “And I was just like, *oh*. I forgot, I forgot what it *does*.”

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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.

Page 23.  
ACO Principal Cello Timo-Veikko Valve  
Photo by Charlie Kinross

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ACO Principal Bass Maxime Bibeau  
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# Ilya Gringolts

Director & Violin

“One can hardly play the violin more expressively, more uncompromisingly than Gringolts.”

– SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG



Ilya Gringolts wins over audiences with his highly virtuosic playing and sophisticated interpretations and is always seeking out new musical challenges.

As a sought-after soloist, Ilya devotes himself to the great orchestral repertoire as well as to contemporary and rare works; he is also passionate about historical performance practices. His concert programmes include virtuosic early repertoire by Leclair and Locatelli as well as Paganini's solo and orchestral works or Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto on gut strings. Many composers have written new works for him, most recently Chaya Czernowin, Lotta Wennäkoski, Mirela Ivičević, Beat Furrer, and Bernhard Lang.

Following recent collaborations with orchestras such as the Oslo Philharmonic, Hungarian National Symphony Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, São Paulo Symphony Orchestra or Orchestra Filarmonica della Scala, the 2025/26 season includes appearances with the Luxembourg Philharmonic, WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra. Ilya is Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto's 2025/26 artist in residence. Furthermore, he regularly collaborates with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Camerata Bern, and Ensemble Resonanz, directing the ensembles from his instrument.

His extensive discography for Deutsche Grammophon, BIS, and Hyperion, among others, includes critically acclaimed recordings of violin concertos by Locatelli, Paganini's 24 Caprices for solo violin and the complete violin works of Stravinsky. His recording of Bach's six sonatas for harpsichord and violin (together with Francesco Corti) was awarded a Diapason d'Or upon its release in 2025.

As first violinist of the Gringolts Quartet, he has enjoyed great success at the Salzburg Festival, Lucerne Festival, Edinburgh Festival, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Philharmonie Luxembourg, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, and Teatro La Fenice in Venice. An esteemed chamber musician, Ilya regularly collaborates with artists such as Nicolas Altstaedt, Alexander Lonquich, Peter Laul, Christian Poltéra, and Lawrence Power.

After studying violin and composition with Tatiana Liberova and Zhanneta Metallidi in St. Petersburg, Ilya attended the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied with Itzhak Perlman. He won the International Violin Competition Premio Paganini (1998) and remains the youngest winner in the competition's history. In addition to his professorship at the Zurich University of the Arts, Ilya was appointed to the renowned Accademia Chigiana in Siena in 2021. He is also artistic advisor of the Mizmorim Festival in Switzerland.

# Satu Vänskä

Violin

Born to a Finnish family in Japan, violinist Satu Vänskä has developed an international profile through her role as Principal Violin with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, a position that she has held for the past 20 years. In that time Satu has both directed and performed as soloist with the ACO, an ensemble regarded as one of the greatest chamber orchestras in the world, hailed for its striking virtuosity and innovative programming.

Satu's development of solo violin projects is reflective of her desire to continually evolve as a musician and to courageously embrace new musical challenges. She 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.

As a soloist in Australia, Satu enjoys performing with the country's leading orchestras including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (Beethoven Violin Concerto with Umberto Clerici), the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and West Australian Symphony Orchestra (in a play/direct role). As a recitalist Satu performs at venues and festivals including the Melbourne Recital Centre, UKARIA Cultural Centre, Canberra International Festival and Adelaide Festival. Further afield, Satu performs 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 original 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.

# 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 over three decades, Artistic Director Richard Tognetti, the ACO is acclaimed internationally as an ensemble of invention, disruption and unforgettable music-making.

The ACO performs more than 100 concerts each year, with programs that embrace celebrated classics alongside new commissions and groundbreaking collaborations, working with artists and

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

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

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

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

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The ACO thanks the late Dame Margaret Scott AC DBE for establishing the Dame Margaret Scott AC DBE Fund for International Guests and Composition.

The ACO thanks the Commonwealth Bank of Australia for its generous support of the Orchestra's collection of golden age instruments.

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The Chairman's Council is a limited membership association which supports the ACO's international touring program and enjoys private events in the company of Richard Tognetti and the Orchestra. For more information please contact Lillian Armitage, Head of Major Gifts & Bequests, on (02) 8274 3827.

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The Instrument Fund offers investors the opportunity to participate in the ownership of a bank of historic stringed instruments. The Fund's assets are the 1728/29 Stradivarius violin, the 1714 'ex Isolde Menges' Joseph Guarnerius filius Andreae violin, the 1616 'ex-Fleming' Brothers Amati Cello and the 1590 Brothers Amati Violin. For more information, please contact Yeewhan Yeoh, Manager, ACO Instrument Fund at instrument.fund@aco.com.au.

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