

AustralianChamberOrchestra

1975-2025

ACO

**CELEBRATING THE
AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA**

Directed by Richard Tognetti

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



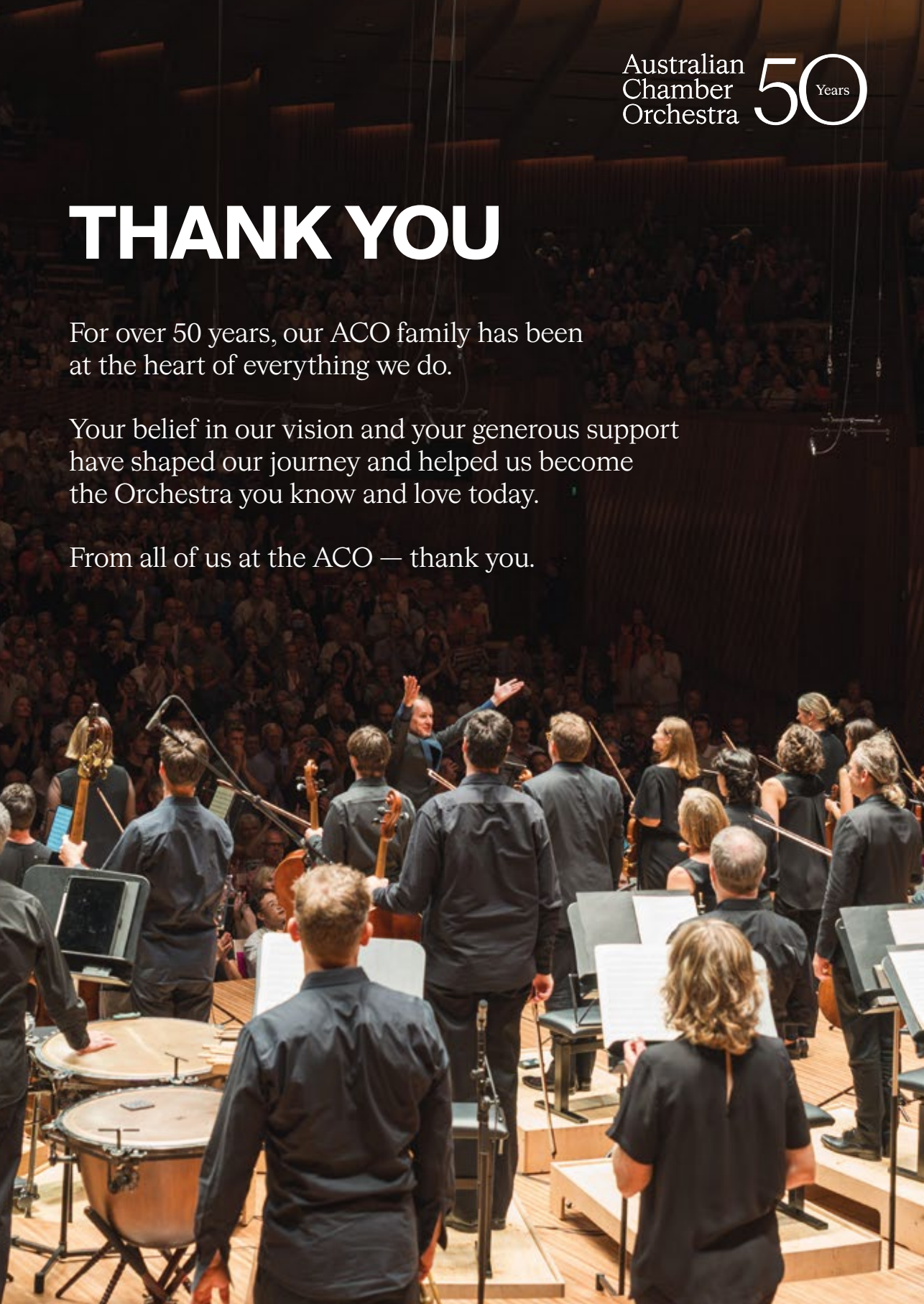
Wesfarmers Arts

THANK YOU

For over 50 years, our ACO family has been at the heart of everything we do.

Your belief in our vision and your generous support have shaped our journey and helped us become the Orchestra you know and love today.

From all of us at the ACO — thank you.



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.

Share your experience

#ACO25Season



@AustralianChamberOrchestra

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WELCOME

Fifty years ago, to the day, the Australian Chamber Orchestra walked out onto the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall stage for the very first time.

Founded by cellist and educator John Painter, the ACO was formed by a collection of musicians determined to take control of their musical destinies.

And so it came to be.

Fifteen years after that first concert, a young, surfing violinist was invited to take the reins. In the years since, under the direction of Richard Tognetti, the ACO has earned a reputation as one of the world's most virtuosic and dynamic ensembles. It has created bespoke films, forged cross-artform collaborations with photographers, dancers and rock musicians, and performed on iconic stages around the globe – from London to New York – as well as right here at home, including the very stage where it all began: our own Sydney Opera House.

It is an incredible honour to work with the musicians, staff and Board of the ACO – one I never take for granted. To witness the energy, passion and ambition that fuel every performance is an extraordinary privilege, and an inspiration that drives our entire organisation.

I acknowledge our Principal Partner Wesfarmers Arts, our corporate partners, foundations, donors and loyal audiences, without whom our creative enterprise would not have developed the scale and reach it has today.

I particularly thank our longstanding broadcast partner, the ABC, which brings our work to global audiences almost every hour of every day. Their commitment to our music making and recording has been central to our success. Tonight's celebration, generously hosted by broadcasters Megan Burslem and Jeremy Fernandez, is being recorded for a special ABC television broadcast on Friday 12 December at 7.30pm.

Thank you for joining us for this remarkable moment in the ACO's history.

Here's to the next 50 years.



Richard Evans AM
Managing Director

OPEN LETTER OF THANKS TO JOHN PAINTER AM

Dear Mr Painter,

You've left us.

The day before you died, I told friends I wanted to write you an open letter of thanks. Now it has become a farewell.

You were the voice of modern music education in this country.

You showed us that music was larger than rules, institutions, or fashion.

You were oblivious to passing trends, not out of arrogance, but because you simply had no time for distraction. You showed us that the heart of music is what matters. You worked us hard, but never by fear or threat. Your strength was of a different order: a kind that lifted people.

You gave us a strain of ancient, Antisthenian cynicism: to value what is true above what is fashionable, to see through hollow convention, to choose the human over the superficial. You made me believe that studying an instrument is one of the most worthwhile things a person can ever do.

And yes, you are the ACO's founding father. You handed the keys to us with humility. Part of you still lives on in ANAM too, another institution you helped save and shape.

And I promise: we will not let your values be destroyed. We will fight for music and for education, in the trenches if we must, with treble clefs, violins and drums blazing. The future of students, and the future of this country's music, is too important to abandon.

With gratitude and resolve,



Richard Tognetti AO
Artistic Director



John Painter AM
Photo by Bob Cooper.
Australian National University

PROGRAM

This concert is dedicated to the memory of the ACO’s founder, John Painter AM (1932–2025).

Richard Tognetti Director and Violin
Iestyn Davies Countertenor
James Tawadros Riq’ and Bendir
Joseph Tawadros Oud
Satu Vänskä Voice
Sydney Dance Company
Students from St Marys North Public School Violin and Cello
Sydney Children’s Choir
Australian Chamber Orchestra

COMPOSER	TITLE	MIN
Antonio Vivaldi	Summer from The Four Seasons, RV315: II. Adagio, III. Presto <i>Richard Tognetti, Violin; Joseph Tawadros, Oud; James Tawadros, Riq’ and Bendir</i>	5
Joseph Tawadros (orch. Richard Tognetti)	Constantinople <i>Joseph Tawadros, Oud; James Tawadros, Riq’ and Bendir</i>	5
Ludwig van Beethoven (arr. Richard Tognetti)	Violin Sonata in A major, Op.48 “Bridgetower (ex-Kreutzer)”: III. Finale <i>Richard Tognetti, Violin</i>	9
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Traditional (after Aaron Copland)	Simple Gifts <i>Students from St Marys North Public School, Violin & Cello</i>	4
Arvo Pärt	My Heart’s in the Highlands <i>Iestyn Davies, Countertenor; Sydney Dance Company</i>	8
Wojciech Kilar	Orawa – from <i>The Reef</i>	8
Richard Tognetti	Flying – from <i>Mountain</i> <i>Satu Vänskä, Voice</i>	4
Radiohead	Harry Patch (In Memory Of) – from <i>River</i> <i>Satu Vänskä, Voice</i>	6
Neil Finn/ Richard Tognetti	Real and Right and True <i>Sydney Children’s Choir</i>	6

This concert will be broadcast on ABC TV on Friday 12 December, 7.30pm and available on demand on ABC iview.

The concert will last approximately 90 minutes with no interval.
The Australian Chamber Orchestra reserves the right to alter scheduled artists and programs as necessary.
ACO concerts are regularly broadcast on ABC Classic. This concert will be broadcast on Saturday 20 December, 1pm and available on demand for 30 days after.



The original ACO players in Elizabeth Bay House, 1978. From left to right: Deborah Scholem (née Berlin), Robert Ingram, Julie Batty, Nancy Clements, Jane Hazelwood, Alice Waten, Martin Lass, John Gray, Winifred Durie, Irina Morozova, Lois Simpson, John Painter. Centre: Janet Davies (Harpsichord).



ON STAGE

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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



Richard Tognetti

Director and Violin

Richard plays a 1741–44
Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù
violin on loan from the ACO.
His Chair is sponsored by Gaby
Kennard, Peter McMullin AM
& Ruth McMullin, Andrew &
Andrea Roberts, and Rosy
Seaton & Seumas Dawes.

SPECIAL GUESTS



Iestyn Davies

Countertenor



James Tawadros

Riq' and Bendir

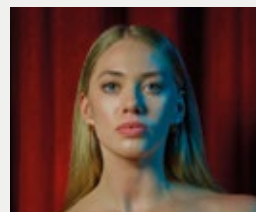
James performs on a custom-
made 2015 riq' made in Cairo
and 2010 bendir which he
has handcrafted himself.



Joseph Tawadros

Oud

Joseph plays a 2011 Joseph
Tawadros (JT) Signature Series
7-Course oud built by Veysel
and Cengiz Sarikus of Istanbul.



Lucy Angel

Dancer



Liam Green

Dancer



**St Marys North
Public School**

Violin and Cello



Sydney Children's Choir

Choir



Helena Rathbone

Principal Violin

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



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.



Aiko Goto

Violin

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



Ilya Isakovich

Violin

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



Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba

Violin

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



Ike See

Violin

Ike plays his own 2021 Samuel Zygmuntowicz violin.



Mark Ingwersen[#]

Violin

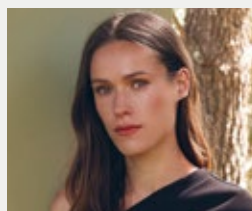
Mark plays a 1989 violin by David Gussett.



Stefanie Farrands

Principal Viola

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



Elizabeth Woolnough

Viola

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



Jenny Khafagi[#]

Viola

Jenny plays her own viola made in 1885 by William Tarr. Jenny appears courtesy of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

[#] Guest Musicians



Timo-Veikko Valve

Principal Cello

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



Melissa Barnard

Cello

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



Julian Thompson

Cello

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



Maxime Bibeau

Principal Bass

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



Brian Nixon#

Timpani and Percussion

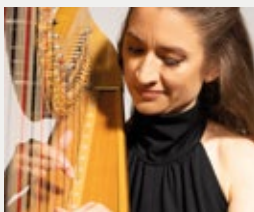
Brian's Chair is sponsored by Jennifer & Denys Gillespie, and Jo & John Millyard.



Chad Kelly#

Keyboards

Chad plays a Continuo organ by Henk Klop, Garderen, Nederland, 2004 and an Italian Harpsichord after Grimaldi by Carey Beebe, Sydney, 1990. Supplied & prepared by Carey Beebe Harpsichords.



Genevieve Lang#

Harp

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Joe Cox

Lighting Design

Bob Scott

Sound Design

Felix Abrahams

Audio Systems Engineer

Kevan Atkins

Video Design

Charlie Westhoff

Video and Technology Assistant

Guest Musicians



Wesfarmers Arts



Australian Chamber Orchestra & Wesfarmers Arts
Bringing People & Music Together

PROGRAM IN SHORT

Your five-minute read
before lights down.

Written by Bernard Rofe.



Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)

**Summer from *The Four Seasons*, RV315:
II. Adagio, III. Presto**

The Four Seasons come from Vivaldi's 1725 set of concertos entitled *The Contest of Harmony and Invention*. They are the most performed pieces of classical music today, celebrated for their recognisable melodies, their virtuosity and innovation, and for being vividly programmatic. In the second concerto, *Summer*, everything languishes in the extreme heat of the sun. The turtle-dove and goldfinch sing out, but are engulfed by the turbulent north wind, which draws storms ever closer until thunder interrupts the buzz of insects in the second movement. In the finale, the storm breaks.

A favourite of ACO audiences, Richard Tognetti and the Orchestra have made this oft-performed work their own. The inclusion of Joseph Tawadros's exquisitely crystalline oud line and the zing of James Tawadros's riq' lifts these concertos out of the Western concert hall, and places them back into the Venice that Vivaldi himself would have inhabited, with an abundance of sounds and flavours from the East around every street corner.



Joseph Tawadros (1983–)

Constantinople

Orchestrated by Richard Tognetti

The composer writes:

I have always found that the music of the Baroque shares many similarities with Arabic music: chordal progressions, its diatonic nature, its use of ornamentation and phrasing. This can be clearly seen in Vivaldi's music, and this concept has formed the basis for our collaborative performances of *The Four Seasons* alongside my own music with the ACO. I believe the strongest link in this collaboration is the energy, passion, and shared vision of this music. It's not about placing it in any genre, culture or time, but how it moves us as humans and can be shared together regardless of our background.

Being the frustrated rocker that I am, *Constantinople* is my attempt at writing a heavy metal tune for the oud. Written with a heavy metal rock guitarist in mind, I was lucky enough to record it with American jazz/rock legend Mike Stern in New York. I will take his role here and James on percussion will be playing riq' but playing as if he had a full drum kit. The second section is in 7/8 with call and response passages before moving into a Bach-esque fugal section.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Violin Sonata in A major, Op.48

“Bridgetower (ex-Kreutzer)”: III. Finale

*Arranged for violin and string
orchestra by Richard Tognetti*

In April 1803, Beethoven was introduced to an exciting 24-year-old virtuoso violinist and composer named George Polgreen Bridgetower. Naturally, the two men 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 concert was a triumph, fuelled by the two men's fervour and camaraderie. For the Finale, Beethoven composed a scorching hot tarantella – a vigorous Italian dance designed to cure the hysterical condition of tarantism, induced by spider venom.

Ultimately, the two men's fiery personalities got the better of them, and they parted ways. 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 and died in poverty and obscurity. The title that the ACO uses for this work seeks to correct this historical injustice.

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.



Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805–1847)

String Quartet in E-flat major:

IV. Allegro molto vivace

Arranged for string orchestra

Despite the limitations placed upon her musical life, Fanny Mendelssohn (later Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel) produced a canon of well over 400 pieces, including such remarkable works as the Piano Quartet from 1823 and a Piano Trio dating from the last full year of her all-too-brief life. Most of her compositions remained unpublished during her lifetime, and some that were published were done so under her brother's name, probably to help with promotion. This led to an embarrassing moment at Buckingham Palace where Felix Mendelssohn had to confess he was not the composer of a song Queen Victoria purported to be her favourite of his compositions.

In Mendelssohn Hensel's only String Quartet, composed in 1834, she writes with a formal freedom that even her brother was not in a position to emulate. The ebullient Finale seems to want to break free from the stylistic stuffiness of the salon, a display of energy

and melody equal to any of her contemporaries. The quartet was only performed once, and her brother did not approve of its "undisciplined" approach to form. Today, her approach could be reappraised as both forward thinking and highly inventive, containing musical writing that is rawer and more impassioned than anything her male counterparts could think possible.



Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Divertimento: III. Allegro assai

The Swiss conductor Paul Sacher was responsible for commissioning a number of important 20th-century string orchestra pieces for his Basel Chamber Orchestra, including works by Honegger, Hindemith and Stravinsky. He also commissioned some of Bartók's greatest pieces, including *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (1936), the *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion* (1937) and the *Divertimento* (1939).

Divertimenti were popular in the 18th century, with notable examples coming from Mozart and Haydn. In the early 20th century, the form made a comeback as part of the Neoclassical trend that even the folk music devotee Bartók was not immune to. "Divertimento" comes from the Italian "divertire" which means "to amuse". Perhaps Bartók had hoped for some light-hearted respite from the gloom of pre-war Europe.

The *Divertimento*'s outer movements certainly bustle with Bartók's usual sunny, folk-inspired optimism, but always lead to darker territory. This optimism is absent from the twists and turns of the brooding middle movement, which seems to foreshadow impending terrors: Bartók completed his *Divertimento* in 15 days, only one month before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Bartók's *Divertimento* was part of the program for the ACO's inaugural concert on 21 November 1975, and remains a favourite of both our musicians and audiences today.

Traditional

Simple Gifts

Arranged after Aaron Copland

Underpinned by the core belief that all children deserve access to a quality music education, ACO Foundations is an award-winning in-school program which uses music learning to improve the developmental and educational outcomes of children in low socio-economic status schools.

ACO Foundations students from St Marys North Public School in Western Sydney will join the ACO onstage to perform an arrangement of Aaron Copland's *Simple Gifts*. Also known as *Lord of the Dance*, *Simple Gifts* is a widely known and much-loved melody that has been a staple of string classrooms and concert halls alike, most famously in Aaron Copland's Pulitzer Prize-winning ballet, *Appalachian Spring*.



Arvo Pärt (1935–)

My Heart's in the Highlands

Arranged for string orchestra

In 2024, the ACO embarked on its latest collaboration with Sydney Dance Company and its Artistic Director Rafael Bonachela, welcoming British countertenor Iestyn Davies for his Australian debut. *Silence & Rapture* took audiences on a journey through some of the most profound themes of human existence, realised through Bonachela's choreography and set to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and Arvo Pärt.

The performance's central chapter, *Tragedy and Passion: Garden of Gethsemane*, concludes with the works of Pärt. The composer utilised Robert Burns's poem *My Heart's in the Highlands* to reference a time when Estonians were not allowed to learn English. It is a lament for freedom of identity by a soul separated from where it wants to be; the singer, crushed and restricted, sings only one pitch per stanza. In this context, Pärt elevates a simple longing for country into a profound threnody.

Performed by arrangement with Universal Edition AG, Vienna.
www.universaledition.com

Excerpts from

The Reef (2012), Mountain (2017) and River (2021)

Under Richard Tognetti's leadership, the ACO has redefined the possibilities of what a chamber orchestra can be. One of Tognetti's most profound influences has been his championing of cross-artform collaborations, especially those that include film. In addition to performing on the soundtracks to the Academy Award-nominated films *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (2003) and *Memoir of a Snail* (2024), the Orchestra has embarked on no fewer than five concert film collaborations created especially for live performance to screen, including *Musica Surfica* (2008), *The Reef* (2012), *The Crowd & I* (2013 & 2022), *Mountain* (2017) and *River* (2021).

This concert will present selections from three of these acclaimed films, beginning with one of the most thrilling passages from the 2012 surf odyssey *The Reef*, set to the music of Polish Composer Wojciech Kilar. *Orawa*, composed in 1988, is named for the region in the southern Tatra highlands that is home to the traditional Góral fiddlers. Kilar combines minimalism and folk elements to evoke a band of folk fiddlers who reach a stirring rhythmic frenzy in the broad expanse of the highlands, here juxtaposed with energised surfing scenes filmed off the West Australian coast.

In 2017, the ACO premiered *Mountain*, a cinematic odyssey directed by Jennifer Peedom with stunning cinematography by Renan Ozturk. The musical performance leads the listener through a plethora of musical styles and genres from the Baroque to the contemporary, and on a journey through some of the world's most unrelenting environments. In this excerpt we hear the dreamlike calm of Tognetti's *Flying* while a wingsuiter leaps from a cliff face on screen, set to the ethereal vocals of Satu Vänskä accompanied by gentle keyboard octaves.

The success of *Mountain* was followed in 2021 by *River*, whose soundtrack won went on to win both ARIA & AACTA awards. The film explores humankind's often troubling relationship with the world's river systems, but also the ability of those systems to sustain communities, and to bring new life against all odds. Following heartbreaking scenes of a dam choking submerged ecosystems, the dam's demolition allows water to flow once again, nourishing everything it touches, set musically to Radiohead's tribute to Britain's last surviving World War I veteran, *Harry Patch (In Memory Of)*, a moment of overwhelming emotion.

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Indies & Idols concert in City Recital Hall, 2019.

Photo by Christie Brewster



FIFTY YEARS OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

“The ACO turns 50 in 2025; Tognetti has been its leader for 35 years. The young firebrand has gradually become its senior figure. But some things haven’t changed: the intensity, the fearlessness, the curiosity. This remains rule-bending at its most revelatory.”

THE GUARDIAN UK, 2025

“In the 35 years under Tognetti’s direction it has graced every major festival and venue in the world. But it’s not just the superbly drilled precision and lyric grace of the orchestra that has placed it among the top handful of chamber orchestras. It’s the way that the players cast a bright new light on everything they perform.”

THE TELEGRAPH UK, 2025

“I have been listening to the ACO for all of its history, and the vitality of its current incarnation does honour to the vision and audacity of Robert Pikler, John Painter and others who contributed to its founding 50 years ago.”

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 2025



The ACO is founded by cellist and educator John Painter.

First concert, performed in the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

1975

First performance in London at Wigmore Hall.

1982

Richard Tognetti is appointed as the ACO’s Artistic Director.

1990

1976

First international tour, to Indonesia.

1989

Richard Tognetti launches the Huntington Estate Music Festival.

Right: Richard Tognetti directing the ACO in *Brahms & Beethoven* in the Sydney Opera House, February 2025. Photo by Stephen Blake

Fold-out: Cover of the printed program for the ACO’s first concert on 21 November 1975.



Richard Tognetti is loaned the 1759 Guadagnini violin, the first instrument in the ACO's Golden Age instrument collection.

1996

A^cO₂ (now ACO Collective) is launched, with its first regional tour.

2007

First performance for then HRH Prince Charles at St James's Palace.

ACO Instrument Fund is launched and acquires its first Golden Age instrument, a Stradivarius violin.

2011

The pioneering interactive video installation ACO Virtual is launched.

2013

ACO Foundations launches at St Marys North Public School.

First season as Ensemble in Residence at London's Barbican Centre.

2018

The first ACO StudioCasts film is released.

2021

ACO Foundations is launched in Melbourne.

Over 5,000 mainstage performances around the world since 1975 (and counting!).

2025

1993

First performance at Carnegie Hall in New York.

First ARIA award for Best Classical Album.

2005

ACO Emerging Artist Program is launched.

2008

First film project *Musica Surfica* premieres.

2012

ACO Academy is launched, an annual education intensive for school-aged string players.

ACO Underground launches.

The ACO's surf film *The Reef* is premiered.

Jonny Greenwood becomes the ACO's composer-in-residence.

2017

The ACO's *Mountain* film collaboration premieres at the Sydney Opera House as part of the Sydney Film Festival.

2019

The first ACO Families production, *There's a Sea in My Bedroom*, is premiered.

2022

The ACO moves to our permanent home at ACO On The Pier, Walsh Bay Arts Precinct, Sydney.



CONCERT HALL

International touring has always been part of the ACO's DNA. The Orchestra regularly performs in major cities including New York, London and Tokyo, and has held residencies at the Barbican Centre in London and the Maribor Festival in Slovenia.

One of my favourite ACO memories is playing in 1995 in the UK in Bath and the Wigmore Hall with Lorraine Hunt singing Handel arias. Lorraine was spellbinding, the Wigmore has a special magic and it was the first time my family had heard me play in the ACO.

HELENA RATHBONE
ACO PRINCIPAL VIOLIN

My first ACO tour is also my favourite: the Maribor Festival in Slovenia in 2012. It was equal parts mayhem and magic!

LIISA PALLANDI
ACO VIOLIN

My favourite ACO memory is playing at the Gstaad Festival in 2016. Summer in the Swiss Alps filled with plenty of music and hiking!

IKE SEE
ACO VIOLIN

Berlin 2022: Our first international concert, post-pandemic. No words could describe the feeling I had walking off the stage that night after our final note.

STEFANIE FARRANDS
ACO PRINCIPAL VIOLA

Concerts overseas are always special; it is a real privilege to share ideas and the stage around the world with fantastic musicians.

ACO VIOLA
ELIZABETH WOOLNOUGH

My favourite memory is performing with the ACO in Finland, my other home. Being able to share the spirit of ACO with my friends and family over on that side of the globe was incredibly special.

TIMO-VEIKKO VALVE
ACO PRINCIPAL CELLO

One of my favourite and most influential ACO memories is my very first one. All those years ago, I went to hear the Orchestra at Carnegie Hall on the eve of my audition. The group's kindred spirits and energy was just so inspiring and, literally, life-changing as I went on to be successful the following day!

MAXIME BIBEAU
ACO PRINCIPAL DOUBLE BASS



In celebration of 50 years of the ACO, we asked the ACO musicians to share one of their favourite memories from their time in the Orchestra.

SMALL ORCHESTRA, BIG IMPACT



Reflecting on five decades of the
Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Written by Helen Pitt



“Welcome to whatever it was...” was the headline of *The Sydney Morning Herald* review of the Australian Chamber Orchestra’s debut performance on 21 November 1975 at the Sydney Opera House.

No one much knew what to expect when the 20 string players – 12 of them women – and 12 wind players took to the stage that Friday night at 8.15pm, to play in the country’s first truly national orchestra.

It was a tumultuous time. Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, who had brought arts policy to the fore in his reform agenda, had been sacked by Governor-General Sir John Kerr just 10 days before the concert. Indonesia had invaded East Timor the previous month, and five Australian journalists had been killed on 16 October.

Tension was in the air as the hush fell on the audience who’d paid between \$2.50 and \$5 apiece for their magenta-coloured seats in the recently opened Concert Hall.

Adelaide-born cellist John Painter, the founder of the ensemble, was unperturbed.

He wanted to create a small orchestra that could perform chamber music with the energy and precision of a string quartet, and the power and

colour of a full orchestra, he told Mary Vallentine, one of the ACO’s early administrators. Like its British model, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, it would perform without a conductor.

Viola player Irina Morozova remembers the sense of expectation and excitement as she walked out onto the Concert Hall stage alongside her ACO colleagues and brought her bow to the strings to play.

“It was a good concert. I remember being sad I wasn’t going to be able to remain a part of the Orchestra because of other commitments,” she recalls.

The opening work, Haydn’s *Divertimento* Op. 2 No.1 in A major, was an “unmixed delight” according to the *Herald*’s classical music critic Roger Covell, who was less enthusiastic about the following Bartók *Divertimento*. But his review honoured the Hungarian-born violinist and strings teacher Robert Pikler, who had previously run his own chamber orchestra and took part in what was billed as the ACO’s “inaugural gala.”

“What we heard on Friday night was fundamentally the Robert Pikler chamber orchestra sound, a sound we have heard in



varying guises,” Covell wrote. “It was warm of timbre, rich in colour, graceful in phrasing and musical to its last melting honey drop of tone.”

Whatever it was then, and whatever it would become over the next five decades, the Australian Chamber Orchestra launched that night in November.

Morozova later rejoined as the ACO’s Principal Viola and fondly remembers how the Orchestra was “run on the smell of an oily rag in the early days. We rehearsed in each other’s homes or in a church hall in Annandale, which I had the key for. We had to do everything ourselves.”

But the players were so committed to their craft they didn’t care. Fuelled by a desire to take charge of their artistic freedom, they relished in the opportunity to present performances on their own terms. The original ACO concept was to bring together a mix of experienced musicians from across the country with the best graduating young string players, who could start their careers in a small supportive environment, as an alternative to becoming amassed in one of the six state-based symphony orchestras, which at that point were still administered by the ABC. “We wanted to create a group that in the fullness of time could represent Australia internationally with distinction,” Painter told Vallentine in an oral history.

By 1976 Vallentine helped organise the ACO’s first international tour at the invitation of the Indonesian government, in a friendship gesture to ease diplomatic relations with Australia after the 1975 deaths of the five reporters in East Timor.

Journalist David Marr, now ABC Radio National’s *Late Night Live* presenter, accompanied the Orchestra on its 10-day, four concert series to Java, which was sponsored by Dunhill cigarettes. (Remember, this was the era of Paul Hogan’s “Anyhow have a Winfield” cigarette ads backed by a symphony orchestra.)

“The 13 players argue out interpretations among themselves – each player equal – which is a slow process but produces playing that’s intensely stylish, scholarly and powerful,” Marr said of the early ACO. He was enlisted to take care of the double bass, which the Javanese porters called “Ganesh” (elephant) or “Big lady”.

“The threat of the breaking rains followed the Orchestra everywhere. The big problem was the double bass, carted around on the backs of trucks, driven urgently through the streets of cities and tiny villages to beat the rains, scattering pedestrians and Vespas to get to the hall or get back from the hall before it was soaked and ruined. And the double bass was the attention grabber; some of the ACO concerts were in towns that had never seen a classical orchestra before,” Marr wrote in his diary of the trip.

The Orchestra was “run on the smell of an oily rag in the early days. We rehearsed in each other’s homes or in a church hall in Annandale, which I had the key for. We had to do everything ourselves.”

“There were no lights for the Jogjakarta concert just a brown haze over the stage... the only refreshments for interval were hot bottles of red cherry Fanta, and someone had to fetch ice and iced drinks and towels to swab down the performers it was so hot.”

Since that first foreign foray, the ACO has cemented its global reputation, embarking on 74 international tours to the world’s greatest concert halls on every continent except Africa and Antarctica. Tours of regional Australia, and other capital cities helped it gain accolades at home much more quickly than Painter expected.

“I believe it was ignorance on the part of the critics or a generous recognition and encouragement of musicians who were prepared to step out and make a statement,” he told Vallentine, who remembers the elation when Painter applied for and succeeded in getting the ACO’s first \$10,000 in funding from the then Australia Council.

The trajectory of the ACO took off with the entry of a young surfer and student violinist from Wollongong called Richard Tognetti.

“I remember Mrs Tognetti coming with a 16-year-old boy to work as a casual violinist, and saying, ‘Look after my son won’t you’,” Vallentine remembers.

Just after his 21st birthday, the violin virtuoso stepped in temporarily to lead the Orchestra when

The trajectory of the ACO took off with the entry of a young surfer and student violinist from Wollongong called Richard Tognetti.

it was on tour in the Northern Territory. “He was young and inexperienced... but we knew he had what it took to succeed,” remembers Morozova. “And we didn’t want to be part of a plain old chamber orchestra that only played Mozart and Beethoven. We wanted to be more diversified and fresh.”

By 1989, at the age of 24, Tognetti, who had been taught by ACO founding member Alice Waten and Slovenian classical violinist and pedagogue Igor Ozim in Switzerland, was leading it and became Artistic Director the following year; a role he’s now had for 35 years.

“The audiences have grown because of the element of surprise and the element of trust they have in Richard... every concert has a different personality backed by high performance standards. When we began it wasn’t in anyone’s minds we’d have a permanent home at Walsh Bay, when you begin an orchestra rehearsing in the second violinist’s lounge room, you don’t imagine you’ll end up even having a rehearsal room,” says Vallentine.

From humble beginnings rehearsing in suburban homes, to dingy offices in Kings Cross and a windowless bunker three floors below ground at Circular Quay, the ACO now has its own state-of-the-art headquarters, ACO On The Pier, at Walsh Bay’s Pier 2/3, with a Sydney





Harbour address to rival the location of that first performance in Sydney's Opera House.

The Orchestra has performed with the world's greatest violin virtuosos, Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac Stern and Ivry Gitlis, with whom in 2000, they notably played Beethoven's Violin Sonata No.9 in A major, Op.47. The intriguing backstory of that sonata, first dedicated to George Bridgetower, was the inspiration for the ACO's acclaimed 2021 concert, *Beethoven & Bridgetower*, a collaboration with Belvoir St Theatre's artistic director Eamon Flack, writer Anna Goldsworthy and former U.S. poet laureate Rita Dove.

It's this spirit of collaboration that has in many ways set this small orchestra apart from others around the globe. Over the past three decades, Richard and the ACO have collaborated with the likes of Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood (who was composer in residence for three months in 2012) and oud virtuoso, composer and eight-time ARIA-award winner Joseph Tawadros, who blended his middle eastern sounds with the ACO's strings to create their innovative take on Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. The ACO has teamed with electronic music duo The Presets, created a Weimar Cabaret with Barry Humphries and cabaret performer Meow Meow and presented a cross-artform production with Neil Finn and Michael Leunig. Tognetti, always peering over the fence to see how

It's this spirit of collaboration that has in many ways set this small Orchestra apart from others around the globe.

Page 20–21.
ACO StudioCast film *Tabula Rasa*.

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The original players of the ACO, 1976.

Page 24.
Richard Tognetti and the Orchestra during a recording session at ABC Ultimo, 1991.

Page 29.
The ACO performs *The Four Seasons* in City Recital Hall with Joseph and James Tawadros, 2023.
Photo by Nic Walker



Tognetti emphasises it has “been a fight” to survive. Fortunately he’s used to fighting.

classical music can push boundaries and blur genres, has created surf films including *The Reef* and *Music Surfica* and collaborated with filmmaker Jennifer Peedom on two films: *Mountain* (the highest-grossing Australian documentary of all time), and the ARIA and ACTA award-winning film *River* – both of which the ACO has toured nationally and internationally.

From the beginning the ACO has been unashamedly Australian, performing music by composers such as Launceston-born Peter Sculthorpe, Kalkadunga composer and didgeridoo player William Barton, and worked across genres with institutions such as the Australian Ballet and the Sydney Dance Company, and visual artists such as Bill Henson and Shaun Tan.

It has assembled one of the finest collections of Golden Age string instruments of any orchestra in the world. There are now nine Golden Age instruments performed by the ACO’s musicians, including two Stradivarius violins and Tognetti’s 1741–44 del Gesù. There’s also a 450-year-old da Salò double bass, described as an Elizabethan era “sub-woofer” once played by an Augustinian monk, now played by Principal Bass Maxime Bibeau.

Lest it sound like it’s been a dream run to make it to this year’s half-century celebrations, Tognetti reminds us that when he became Artistic Director in 1990, the ACO was almost broke; an emergency Australia Council grant enabled it to rent permanent premises. His youthful audacity

stood him in good stead when it came time for acquiring the ACO's first Golden Age instrument; he waltzed into Commonwealth Bank CEO David Murray's office – the Commonwealth Bank was, at the time, a Major Partner of the ACO – and asked outright if the bank would purchase an instrument, a 1759 Guadagnini violin, for him to perform on. Fortunately Murray said yes, and the instrument remains played by the ACO to this day.

Tognetti emphasises it has “been a fight” to survive. Fortunately he's used to fighting. He left home for the Sydney Conservatorium aged 11 and was billeted to various homes throughout Sydney, as well as living in boarding homes, and at one point had to go home for a few months to Wollongong High.

“A kid said, so you play the violin? And I said yes, and he punched me really hard in the belly. There's a wonderful paradox to growing up in that environment. It made me tough and also really grounded me in the sense that you've got to fight for every ticket. I realised that you had to fight for your place in any kind of cultural fabric in Wollongong, physically and mentally. And be good. So that stuck with me. You can take the boy out of the Gong, but you can't take the Gong out of the boy.”

Tognetti has brought that fight to everything from funding, repertoire and even helping save the Wollongong Town Hall from demolition in 2008. After he gave an impromptu performance

to demonstrate the civic centre's acoustics, the audience voted, giving Tognetti 10 and the city's administrators nil. The hall was saved, and now the ACO performs there three concerts per season.

Tognetti continued the fight, taking on then Federal Arts Minister and former Midnight Oil frontman Peter Garrett who attempted to close the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) by cutting its funding in 2008. The decision was reversed. Now Tognetti's maintaining the rage against the Australian National University's plans to absorb its school of music (once led by John Painter) into another department, labelling it “cultural vandalism.”

“As artists we have always had to fight for what it means to be an artist in turbulent times and non-turbulent times,” says ACO Principal Viola Stefanie Farrands, who joined the ACO in 2019 after participating in the Orchestra's Emerging Artist musician-training program early in her career in 2008.

“The ACO has never walked on eggshells. It's always daring and demanding of its artists and its audiences for us both to explore the boundaries with determination and drive. Both the Orchestra and audience have a particular energy. We always feed off that energy the audience brings. It's like being in a school of fish sometimes, we don't know which direction it's going to move in,” she says.

Farrands describes the ACO's sound as “dark chocolate, honey and rich. Richard's brilliance



“The ACO is a small organisation that’s had a gigantic impact on Australian culture, regional areas, and the disadvantaged schools environment.”



crystallises our act like a hot knife through butter. He has the ability to dance on top of the rest of us and our foundation of sound... he’s taught us our music, our instruments and our sound can have distinct personalities.”

ACO violinist Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba, who also joined via a year in the Emerging Artist program in 2014, agrees: “The beauty of a small chamber orchestra is that everyone has a voice. Over the years I’ve learnt to amplify mine. I’m so lucky I feel I’ve had room to grow and express myself on stage with the ACO.”

For Tognetti – a boy who was introduced to the violin via the Suzuki Method in his public primary school class in Wollongong – he’s most proud of the ACO’s commitment to music education, particularly for those who may not otherwise have had access to a musical instrument.

While the ACO’s Learning & Engagement program includes its Emerging Artist and ACO Academy mentoring and training programs for talented high school and tertiary string players, it has also developed an award-winning program that introduces music within the primary school classroom. Since 2018, at St Mary’s North Public School, located in one of the most disadvantaged socio-economic areas of Sydney, the ACO Foundations program has seen all students from years 1 to 3 begin each school day with 15 minutes of music practice, with the violins and cellos provided by the ACO. Over the past seven years, academics at the University of Sydney have tracked the significant improvements in the pupils’ cognitive and academic abilities as a direct result from participation in the program, and as a result, it won an outstanding initiative award from the NSW Education Department. This year it has expanded to Melbourne’s Belle Vue Park Primary School in partnership with the University of Melbourne, who have provided funding and research support.

“Teaching children to play a musical instrument changes their lives,” says ACO Managing Director Richard Evans. “This program has changed our lives too – one day our players are at Carnegie Hall, the next they are at St Mary’s North... The ACO is a small organisation that’s had a gigantic impact on Australian culture, regional areas, and the disadvantaged schools environment.”

The ACO now consists of 17 members, half of them from outside Australia. Last year it also had its largest ever audience, which Evans calls the ACO’s “fan clubs” who are on a first name basis with the performers. Founding fathers Pikler, who died in 1984, and Painter, who died just two months shy of the 50th anniversary of the Orchestra’s first concert, would have been proud.



Tognetti made Painter a promise in an open letter: “We will fight for music and for education, in the trenches if we must, with treble clefs, violins and drums blazing.”

This 50th birthday year began with a bang, with rave reviews of the ACO’s London tour in March, describing the ACO musicians as “shape shifting”, “dazzlingly reinventive” and “weavers of magic from gut and horsehair.”

“Thirty years ago, when Tognetti was touring with the orchestra, a snooty audience member in Oxford said to him, ‘I didn’t know you had orchestras in Australia’. Nobody sneers at the ACO now,” a reviewer in London’s *The Telegraph* wrote.

Closer to home, in a review earlier this year of the Orchestra’s *Brahms & Beethoven* concert, current *Herald* classical music reviewer, Peter McCallum, paid tribute to its origins.

“With some gaps, I have been listening to the ACO for all of its history,” he wrote. “The vitality of its current incarnation does honour to the vision and audacity of Robert Pikler, John Painter and others who contributed to its founding 50 years ago.”

Whatever it was then, whatever it becomes in the next 50 years, bravo, ACO.

Former *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Helen Pitt is the author of the Walkley Award winning book *The House, the extraordinary story of the Sydney Opera House and the people who made it*. Her second book on *Luna Park* is out in March, 2026.

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Page 26.
The ACO performs *River* in City Recital Hall, 2024. Photo by Nic Walker

Page 27.
ACO Principal Viola Stefanie Farrands. Photo by Stephen Blake

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ACO Violin Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba. Photo by Charlie Kinross

Page 29.
The ACO performs alongside ACO Foundations students from St Marys North Public School at ACO On The Pier, 2022. Photo by Nic Walker



In 2012, the ACO premiered Richard Tognetti's groundbreaking cinematic production *The Reef*. The ACO has since toured *The Reef* around Australia and internationally to cities including Los Angeles and London.

A diver is shown from the waist down, floating upside down in clear, turquoise water. The diver is wearing black swim trunks and black fins. They are holding a GoPro camera in their right hand, which is pointed towards the viewer. The background shows the surface of the water with sunlight filtering through, creating a shimmering effect.

Creating *The Reef* was an extraordinary, uniquely Australian experience. From creating music and filming in Ningaloo Reef to performing the production on stage at the Sydney Opera House in July 2012, the entire process was six weeks. It was unique, bespoke. And the audience at the Opera House was amazing.

RICHARD TOGNETTI
ACO ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & LEAD VIOLIN

My favourite ACO memory is *The Reef* project and tour in WA in 2012.

SATU VÄNSKÄ
ACO PRINCIPAL VIOLIN

The first tour of *The Reef* was incredible. Travelling from Darwin to Perth felt magical!

THIBAUD PAVLOVIC-HOBBA
ACO VIOLIN

The premiere of *The Reef* in the sold-out Sydney Opera House Concert Hall. So much energy! Rowdy.

JULIAN THOMPSON
ACO CELLO

Richard Tognetti

Artistic Director
and Lead Violin



Richard Tognetti is Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra. He has established an international reputation for his compelling performances and artistic individualism.

Richard began his studies in his home town of Wollongong with William Primrose, then with Alice Waten at the Sydney Conservatorium, and Igor Ozim at the Bern Conservatory, where he was awarded the Tschumi Prize as the top graduate soloist in 1989. Later that year he led several performances with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and that November was appointed as the Orchestra's lead violin and, subsequently, Artistic Director.

Richard performs on period, modern and electric instruments and his numerous arrangements, compositions and transcriptions have expanded the chamber orchestra repertoire and been performed throughout the world. As director or soloist, Richard has appeared with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Academy of Ancient Music, Slovene Philharmonic Orchestra, Handel & Haydn Society (Boston), Hong Kong Philharmonic, Camerata Salzburg, Tapiola Sinfonietta, Irish Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Nordic Chamber Orchestra and all the major Australian symphony orchestras. Richard performed the Australian premieres of Ligeti's Violin Concerto and Lutoslawski's Partita. In November 2016, he became the Barbican Centre's first Artist-in-Residence at Milton Court Concert Hall in London.

Richard created the Huntington Festival in Mudgee, New South Wales and was Artistic Director of the Festival Maribor in Slovenia from 2008 to 2015.

Richard's arrangements, compositions and transcriptions have expanded the chamber orchestra repertoire and been performed throughout the world. He curated and co-composed the scores for the ACO's documentary films *Musica Surfica*, *The Glide*, *The Reef* and *The Crowd & I*, and co-composed the scores for Peter Weir's *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* and Tom Carroll's film *Storm Surfers*. Richard collaborated with director Jennifer Peedom and *Stranger Than Fiction* to create the award-winning films *Mountain*, which went on to become the highest-grossing homegrown documentary in Australian cinemas, and *River*, which won Best Soundtrack at the ARIA, AACTA and APRA awards.

His recordings have received accolades around the world, and he is the recipient of seven ARIA awards, including three consecutive wins for his recordings of Bach's violin works.

Richard was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2010. He holds honorary doctorates from three Australian universities and was made a National Living Treasure in 1998. In 2017 he was awarded the JC Williamson Award for longstanding service to the live performance industry. He performs on a 1741–44 Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù violin, lent to him by the ACO.

Iestyn Davies

Countertenor



After reading Archaeology and Anthropology at St John's College, Cambridge, Iestyn Davies studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London.

An esteemed Handelian, he has delighted audiences globally with his vocal agility and supreme musicianship in roles such as Bertarido, Orlando, Rinaldo, Ottone Agrippina and David Saul. Committed also to contemporary music, his intelligent and considered interpretations have led to fruitful collaborations with Thomas Adès, George Benjamin and Nico Muhly.

On the opera stage, he has appeared at the Metropolitan Opera, New York; the Lyric Opera of Chicago; Teatro alla Scala Milan; the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; English National Opera; Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Welsh National Opera; Teatro Real Madrid; Salzburg Festival; and in Munich, Vienna and Zurich. Recent appearances include Didymus *Theodora* and Arsace *Partenope* in Madrid, David *Saul* at Glyndebourne, Ottone *Agrippina* in Hamburg and Munich, Bertarido *Rodelinda* for the Metropolitan Opera, and Ottone *L'incoronazione di Poppea* in Versailles.

Concert engagements have included performances at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan with Dudamel; the Concertgebouw and Tonhalle with Koopman; and at the Barbican, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Lincoln Centre, Carnegie Hall, and at the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall with orchestras that include the New York Philharmonic, London

Philharmonic, English Concert, Britten Sinfonia, Concerto Köln, Concerto Copenhagen, Ensemble Matheus, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Academy of Ancient Music and Scottish Chamber Orchestra. In recent seasons, he sang Handel arias with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Robin Ticciati, sang Bertarido in *Rodelinda* with Harry Bicket and The English Concert, made his role debut at the Paris Opera as Tolomeo in *Giulio Cesare*, sang Oberon in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Atlanta Opera and at Garsington Opera, and the Boy in George Benjamin's *Written on Skin* with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. In 2024 he made his Australian debut singing JS Bach and Arvo Pärt with the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

An outstanding recitalist, he has performed in Vienna, Tokyo, Paris, and New York in repertoire ranging from Dowland to Clapton. He is a regular favourite at London's Wigmore Hall and Kings Place where he has curated residencies.

His recital discs have won three Gramophone Awards, and he performed on the Grammy-winning recording of Thomas Adès's *The Tempest*. He is the recipient of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award and was nominated for an Olivier Award for his singing role in *Farinelli and the King* opposite Mark Rylance (premiered at London's Sam Wanamaker Playhouse and transferring to the West End and Broadway). In 2017 he was awarded an MBE by the Queen for his services to music.

James Tawadros

Riq' and Bendir



James is a world-class percussionist and soloist. His main instrument is the riq', a small hand-held tambourine, traditionally with skin covering and five pairs of cymbals. An autodidactic child prodigy, James' uniquely innovative style, dexterity and mastery of this ancient instrument has brought him great acclaim worldwide.

James made his debut with the Australian Chamber Orchestra at just 15 years of age. Other career highlights include performing as soloist with Camerata Salzburg and the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the BBC Proms, and a duet recording collaboration with legendary jazz drummer Jack DeJohnette (of Miles Davis fame) for the album *The Hour of Separation*.

He has performed with artists including Béla Fleck, John Abercrombie, John Patitucci, Howard Johnson, Richard Bona, Joey DeFrancesco, Roy Ayers, Christian McBride and Mike Stern, as well as regularly collaborating with his brother, oud virtuoso Joseph Tawadros.

James is the recipient of five ARIA Awards for Best World Music Album.

Joseph Tawadros

Oud

Joseph Tawadros AM is a leading oud virtuoso, composer and a seven-time ARIA Award winner.

Born in Cairo, his chosen instrument, the oud, is an Arabic lute and the ancestor of the lute and modern guitar.

A virtuoso of diversity and sensitivity, Joseph performs in concert halls worldwide and is known for his brilliant technique, deep musicianship, profound storytelling and joyous style of performance.

Joseph's drive to push musical boundaries has inspired collaborations with diverse performers and a solid repertoire of innovative, original music. He performs as a soloist, in duo with his brother James on Egyptian percussion, with his jazz quartet, and with chamber and symphony orchestras all over the world.

Joseph has performed his own works with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Sydney, Melbourne, West Australian and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras, Ukraine National Orchestra, Camerata Salzburg, and the Morphing Chamber Orchestra. His Concerto for Oud and Orchestra was recorded with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and released by ABC Classic in 2019. He is also the only Australian composer to be performed by the Academy of Ancient Music in the United Kingdom.

He has recorded his music with many jazz luminaries including John Abercrombie, Jack de Johnette, Roy Ayers, Béla Fleck, Mike Stern, Joey DeFrancesco, Richard Bona and Christian McBride. He has also collaborated with high regarded musicians



including Richard Tognetti, William Barton, the Grigoryan Brothers, Christian Lindberg, and James Crabb and his songs have been performed and recorded by The Song Company and Andreas Scholl.

Joseph's oud performances can be heard in film and television productions including *Ali's Wedding*, *The Last Days of Yasser Arafat*, *Paper Giants*, *the Birth of Cleo*, *I Remember 1948*, *The Water Diviner*, *Checkpoint*, *The Tentmakers of Cairo*, *All About E*, *Love Marriage in Kabul*, *The Portal*, *Haneen*, *The Black Balloon*, *The Transfer*, and *The Last Ride*.

In 2023 highlights Joseph performed at the opening of the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, premiered his new work *The Three Stages of Hindsight* with the Britten Sinfonia, and performed on a sell-out tour with the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Richard Tognetti.

In 2024 he gave performances in London and with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, as well as in Australia with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, at the National Gallery of Victoria, at the Vivid Festival in Sydney, and with his trio in Sydney. He is also one of the 50 Australian composers chosen to write a fanfare celebrating the Sydney Opera House's 50th birthday.

Joseph was awarded the Member of the Order of Australia for services to music in 2016.

Satu Vänskä

Violin and Voice

Born to a Finnish family in Japan, violinist Satu Vänskä is Principal Violin with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, a position that she has held for the past 20 years. She regularly performs as lead violin and soloist with the ACO.

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

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

Satu is the founder, curator, front-woman, violinist and vocalist of the critically acclaimed ACO Underground, the ACO's electro-infused, experimental spin-off project. With ACO Underground, Satu has



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

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

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

Jennifer Peedom

Film Director



Jennifer Peedom is an Australian director known for visually striking, human-centred documentaries about landscapes and the communities connected to them. Her breakthrough feature, *Sherpa* (2015), reframed the Everest story through the Sherpa community in the wake of the 2014 ice-serac disaster, earning wide acclaim for its access and clarity of purpose.

Her first collaboration with the Australian Chamber Orchestra (ACO) was *Mountain* (2017), created with writer Robert Macfarlane and narrated by Willem Dafoe – a cinematic essay presented both in cinemas and in live performance. Following the ACO's national tour and a simultaneous theatrical release, it became the highest-grossing Australian documentary of all time. The collaboration with the ACO, Macfarlane and Dafoe continued with *River* (2021), a meditation on the power and fragility of the world's waterways.

Her most recent film, *Deeper* (2025), follows Australian of the Year Dr Richard "Harry" Harris – of Thai Cave Rescue renown – on his most dangerous adventure yet. Earlier credits include *Miracle on Everest* and *Solo*, reflecting a long-standing interest in endurance, risk and consequence.

Her films have screened at major festivals and received multiple Australian Academy Awards, as well as international recognition including a Grierson Award and a BAFTA nomination.

Jennifer is currently in post-production on her first narrative feature, *Tenzing*, told from Tenzing Norgay's perspective on the 1953 Everest ascent, starring Genden Phunsok as Tenzing, Tom Hiddleston as Edmund Hillary, and Willem Dafoe as John Hunt. Based in Australia, she runs the production company Stranger Than Fiction Films with co-founder Jo-anne McGowan.

Sydney Dance Company

Dance changes you. More than simply witnessing something beautiful, or engaging with culture, to experience dance is to be positively altered.

From performances at the Joyce Theatre in New York and Shanghai Grand Centre, to Alice Springs in the Central Desert and the Sydney Opera House on the Harbour Foreshore, Sydney Dance Company has proved that there are no passive observers in a contemporary dance audience.

The reward of truly moving audiences, and the raw pride of sharing Australian art with the world has driven our Ensemble of 17 dancers, led by Artistic Director Rafael Bonachela, to become one of the world's strongest forces in contemporary dance.

Alongside Bonachela's original works, our programs have featured guest choreographers like Jacopo Godani, Melanie Lane, Antony Hamilton, Alexander Ekman, Gideon Obarzanek, Marina Mascarell, Gabrielle Nankivell and Cheng Tsung-lung, as well as collaborations with Sydney Festival, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Conservatorium of Music Composing Women, Bryce Dessner, Nick Wales, 48nord and the late Ezio Bosso.

Sydney Dance Company has a broad community beyond the practice and performance of our lead dancers. We believe in the universality of dance, and with the largest public dance class program in Australia, people can connect with the grace, strength and creativity that lives within all of us.

Our nationwide education program offers a strategic curriculum targeting primary and secondary students through to career focused study for pre-professional dancers and university graduates.



St Marys North Public School

“The research has proven that access to a quality music education has far-reaching benefits in children’s lives. We in the ACO have a national platform and it is our civic duty to provide children, particularly those from disadvantaged circumstances, with access to music and learning an instrument. The results are life changing.”

— ACO ARTISTIC DIRECTOR RICHARD TOGNETTI

“The ACO Foundations program affords our students access to the highest quality music program that, quite simply, changes lives.

“Not only do we see the cognitive, social, and behavioural benefits of a daily music program, it is the access our students have to world-class musicians that provides a level of equity and opportunity that I have rarely seen in my career as an educator.

“Our students do not see their level of disadvantage... they see themselves as little musicians who have the world at their feet and can dream of being just like the ACO when they grow up.”

— ST MARYS NORTH PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LISA PARELLO

ACO Foundations is an award-winning in-school program which uses music learning to improve the developmental and educational outcomes of children in low socio-economic status schools.

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

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



Sydney Children's Choir

The Sydney Children's Choir, the flagship ensemble of Gondwana Choirs, enjoys a reputation for artistic innovation and spell-binding performances. Founded as a single ensemble by Lyn Williams AM in 1989, it now includes approximately 400 young people from across Sydney, comprising performing choirs and training ensembles.

The Sydney Children's Choir continues to forge new artistic paths through its commitment to new Australian music. Close to the choir's heart is its repertoire of over 100 specially commissioned works, and it continues to premiere new compositions from leading and emerging composers.

The choir has a long and distinguished history of collaboration with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. In July 2022, the choir performed William Barton's *Of the Earth* with the orchestra and Chief Conductor Simone Young to celebrate the re-opening of the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

In June 2023, the choir joined with Marliya to perform *Spinifex Gum* with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and conductor Aaron Wyatt. In 2024, the choir appeared once again with the SSO and shared the stage with acclaimed Australian band The Cat

Empire in a landmark collaboration that brought together the energy of contemporary music and the power of young voices.

The choir also enjoys rich artistic partnerships with musicians from diverse cultures such as Suara Indonesia Dance and Mongolian singer and horsehead fiddle player Bukhchuluun Ganburged, reflecting Gondwana Choirs' commitment to cross-cultural collaboration and storytelling through song.

Over the decades, the Sydney Children's Choir has performed at many high-profile events including the Sydney Olympics Opening Ceremony, World Youth Day, Sydney Festival, and with the YouTube Symphony Orchestra. It has toured extensively across Australia and internationally, presenting its signature performances of contemporary Australian music to audiences around the world.

As one of the nation's most accomplished youth ensembles, the Sydney Children's Choir continues to inspire audiences with its artistry, discipline, and joy in performance, embodying the vision of Gondwana Choirs to give voice to the spirit of contemporary Australia.



Australian Chamber Orchestra

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

— THE AUSTRALIAN

The Australian Chamber Orchestra lives and breathes music, making waves around the world for its explosive performances that redefine orchestral music. With its fearless leader of 35 years, Artistic Director Richard Tognetti, in 2025 the Orchestra celebrates 50 years of invention, disruption and unforgettable music-making.

The ACO performs more than 100 concerts each year, with programs that embrace celebrated classics alongside new commissions and ground-breaking collaborations, working with artists and musicians who share the Orchestra’s ideology: from Emmanuel Pahud, Steven Isserlis, Polina Leschenko, Pekka Kuusisto, Nicolas Altstaedt and William Barton,

to Jonny Greenwood, Neil Finn and Meow Meow; to visual artists and film makers such as Bill Henson, Shaun Tan, Jane Campion, and Jennifer Peedom, who co-create unique, hybrid productions for which the ACO has become renowned.

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





The ACO has earned a reputation as one of the world's most dynamic and virtuosic chamber orchestras, renowned for its interpretations of the classics alongside new music and groundbreaking collaborations.

My favourite ACO memory is delving into some of Haydn's orchestral music last year with cellist Nicolas Altstaedt. He was incredible!

ANNA DA SILVA CHEN
ACO VIOLIN

My favourite ACO memory is the moment we stepped onto the City Recital Hall stage for our very first performance, after the pandemic concert hall closures. We received the warmest welcome and most rapturous applause from our much-missed audience!

AIKO GOTO
ACO VIOLIN

My favourite ACO memory is playing Beethoven 9th "Choral" Symphony. Playing Beethoven is what the ACO does best, but this was incredibly special as it was the first time for the Orchestra and the excitement was palpable!

ILYA ISAKOVICH
ACO VIOLIN

Tackling Bartók's String Quartet No.4 as a group for the first time was incredible. The insane virtuosity, rhythmic power, incredible dynamism, precision, highs and lows. That kind of energy is what I'm here for.

MELISSA BARNARD
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Sketches of Spain concert in City Recital Hall, 2022. Photo by Nic Walker

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The ACO performing at the Sydney Opera House, 1989.







ACO Violin Aiko Goto leads ACO
Academy. Photo by Julian Kingma

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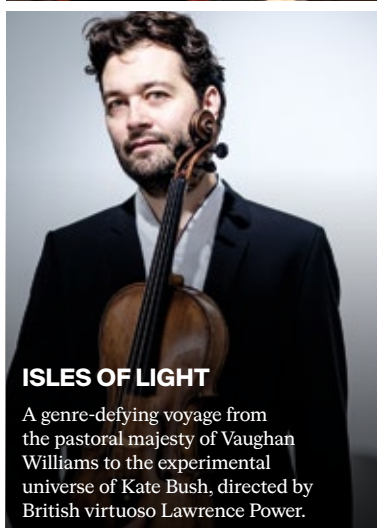
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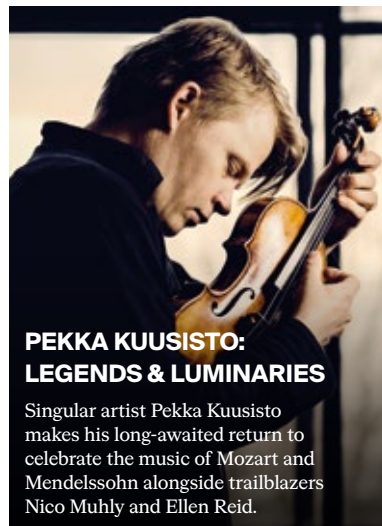
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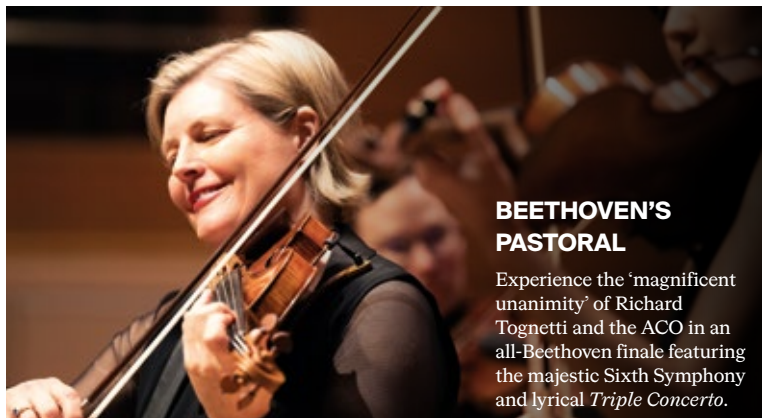
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