

Australian Chamber Orchestra

RICHARD TOGNETTI – ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

INTIMATE BACH

Directed by Richard Tognetti

Program in Short

Your five-minute read
before lights down

Like God or Weather

Ellena Savage on Johann
Sebastian Bach



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

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Director Richard Evans

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WELCOME

Welcome to *Intimate Bach*, a concert where we celebrate a composer whose genius and invention has captivated musicians and music-lovers alike for centuries.

This concert also includes new music by a dear friend of the ACO, Australian violist and composer Brett Dean. A joint commission from the ACO and the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, *Approach (Prelude to a Canon)* was written by Brett in response to Bach's Brandenburg No.6 and, delightfully, Brett will join the Orchestra onstage for the performance of both pieces.

We have just returned from Paris and London, a tour which included a special Paris performance for our sponsor BNP Paribas and three sold-out concerts for our second season in-residence at London's Barbican Centre. I'm delighted to report that the residency was another wonderful success and plans are already underway for our third and final Barbican season in 2020.

Thank you for joining us for this performance and I look forward to seeing you in the concert hall in November for our farewell concert for the 2019 National Touring Season: *Brahms & Dvořák*.



Richard Evans
Managing Director

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News



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2020 Season Now On Sale

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Barbican Residency London

We've recently returned from our second season in-residence at London's Barbican Centre, where we performed concerts including *Luminous* and *Goldberg Variations*.

Coming up

OCT



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ACO Principal Violin Helena Rathbone leads ACO Collective through music by Beethoven, Elgar and Mendelssohn.

NOV



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DEC



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4 DECEMBER

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*Savings vary according to venue and price reserve.

PROGRAM

Richard Tognetti Director and Violin
 Atte Kilpeläinen Viola
 Brett Dean Viola
 Timo-Veikko Valve Cello
 Julian Thompson Cello
 Melissa Barnard Cello
 Maxime Bibeau Double Bass
 Erin Helyard Harpsichord and Chamber Organ

PRE-CONCERT TALK	45 mins prior to the performance See page 8 for details	mins
BACH	Sonata No.2 in A minor for solo violin, BWV1003: III. Andante	6
BACH	Sonata for Violin and Harpsichord No.2 in A major, BWV1015 <i>I. Dolce</i> <i>II. Allegro</i> <i>III. Andante un poco</i> <i>IV. Presto</i>	15
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BACH	Brandenburg Concerto No.6 in B-flat major, BWV1051 <i>I. [Allegro]</i> <i>II. Adagio ma non tanto</i> <i>III. Allegro</i>	14

*Commissioned by the Swedish Chamber Orchestra with generous support from Peter Greisler, and the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

The concert will last approximately one hour and 40 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.

Intimate Bach will be broadcast live from the Sydney Opera House on ABC Classic on Sunday 27 October at 2pm and repeated on Sunday 12 January at midday.





PROGRAM IN SHORT

Your five-minute read
before lights down.

Pre-concert talks

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

Sydney – City Recital Hall
Toby Chadd
Sat 19 Oct, 6.15pm

QPAC Concert Hall
Lucas Burns
Mon 21 Oct, 6.15pm

Sydney – City Recital Hall
Toby Chadd
Tue 22 Oct, 7.15pm

Sydney – City Recital Hall
Toby Chadd
Wed 23 Oct, 6.15pm

Wollongong Town Hall
Toby Chadd
Thu 24 Oct, 6.45pm

Sydney – City Recital Hall
Toby Chadd
Fri 25 Oct, 12.45pm

Sydney Opera House
Toby Chadd
Sun 27 Oct, 1.15pm

Melbourne Recital Centre
John Weretka
Mon, 28 Oct, 6.45pm

Adelaide Town Hall
Celia Craig
Tue 29 Oct, 6.45pm

Perth Concert Hall
Cassandra Lake
Wed 30 Oct, 6.45pm

Pre-concert speakers are
subject to change.

Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685–1750)

Sonata for Solo Violin No.2 in A minor, BWV1003: III. Andante

Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin represent the ultimate challenge for any violinist. Technically, they are extremely demanding, but they also make great demands on performers in terms of interpretation and expression. The *Andante* from Bach's second sonata requires the violinist to maintain a singing tone in the top voice while double and triple stopping the accompanying chords on the lower strings.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Sonata for Violin and Harpsichord No.2 in A major, BWV1015

One of the most popular genres of the Baroque era was the *trio sonata* – a work for solo instrument(s) with continuo accompaniment, typically arranged into slow–fast–slow–fast sequence. Corelli, Handel, Purcell and Vivaldi, just to name a few, were prolific composers in the form. Bach's contribution to the trio sonata was to elevate the harpsichord from accompaniment to one of equal prominence with the soloist. Bach's sonatas are masterpieces of the form, but ironically triggered its gradual demise such that, by Mozart and Beethoven's time, the roles had reversed to the point where sonatas were being composed with the *violin* as accompaniment to the keyboard.

György Kurtág

(1926–)

Signs, Games and Messages: Hommage à J.S.B.

György Kurtág is perhaps best known as a composer of supercharged miniatures and blistering, bite-sized experiments, with individual movements lasting no more than a few minutes in his search for musical truth. *Signs, Games and Messages* is one such collection of these miniatures, each capturing Kurtág's mood or thoughts about a friend, an influence, an emotion, and so on. No influence could be more profound than that of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Three-Part Inventions, BWV787-801: Selections

Bach's Two- and Three-Part Inventions are a collection of 30 short keyboard compositions in different keys which Bach intended for players "to learn to play cleanly in two parts, but also, after further progress, to handle three parts correctly and well." Bach's music lends itself to be played on a diverse range of instruments, with Bach himself a prolific re-arranger of his own music. These Three-Part Inventions (also known as Sinfonias) are presented here in an arrangement for string trio.

Marin Marais

(1656–1728)

Sonnerie de Sainte-Geneviève du Mont de Paris

Marin Marais was a French composer and viol (a predecessor to the cello) player who was a musician in the Royal Court at Versailles. He is remembered as the composer who "founded and firmly established the empire of the viol", and is one of the earliest composers of program music, in which music is used to paint a scene. *The Bells of Saint Geneviève* is Marais' most famous composition, evoking the bells of an ancient Parisian church while displaying the virtuosity of the ensemble's viol player.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Chorale Prelude "Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ", BWV639

A chorale prelude is a short liturgical piece for organ in which a chorale melody is presented over a polyphonic accompaniment. A predominant form during the Baroque era, Bach composed 46 of them. "Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ" (I call to you, Lord Jesus Christ) from his *Orgelbüchlein* (Little Organ Book) is based on a Lutheran hymn by Johannes Agricola. Bach's setting is wistful and contemplative, reflecting one's search for God in times of despair.

“In the sixth concerto, Bach pits two duelling violas against an ensemble of cellos and bass.”

Brett Dean

(1961–)

Approach (Prelude to a Canon) (Australian premiere)

Approach (Prelude to a Canon) was commissioned for the *Bach Brandenburg Project* – a three-year venture that saw the commissioning of six new works inspired by Bach’s famous concertos from leading international composers. Responding to Bach’s sixth concerto, which features two solo violas locked in canon and imitative counterpoint, Brett Dean felt compelled to address its musical counterpoint. He writes: “My piece is an attempt to construct an introductory work that segues directly into Brandenburg 6. In establishing two contrasting temperaments between the soloists, I wish ultimately to find a point of reconciliation between them that justifiably leads us into the particular type of close, contrapuntal companionship of voices inherent in Bach’s original.”

Johann Sebastian Bach

Brandenburg Concerto No.6 in B-flat major, BWV1051

Bach’s six concertos presented to the Margrave of Brandenburg are considered to be among the finest orchestral compositions of the Baroque era. They are like the concerti grossi of Corelli, Handel or Vivaldi in that they feature featuring groups of solo instruments, but are even more daringly scored. In the sixth concerto, Bach pits two duelling violas against an ensemble of cellos and bass. The opening *Allegro* sees the violas chase one another in an unusually close canon. The intimate central *Adagio* recreates the trio sonata texture found throughout the rest of this program, and in the final movement the violas engage in even more imitative games while dancing a merry gigue.





MUSICIANS

The musicians on stage
for this performance.



Richard Tognetti

Director and Violin

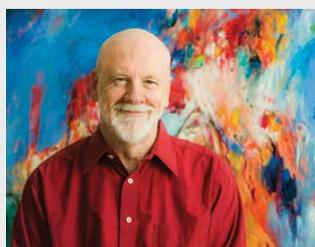
Richard plays the 1743 'Carrodus' Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù violin kindly on loan from an anonymous Australian private benefactor. His Chair is sponsored by Wendy Edwards, Peter & Ruth McMullin, Louise Myer & Martyn Myer AO, Andrew & Andrea Roberts. Richard is dressed by Ermenegildo Zegna.



Atte Kilpenäinen

Guest Principal Viola

Atte plays an 18th-century Italian viola and appears courtesy of Meta4 Quartet. The Principal Viola Chair is sponsored by peckvonhartel architects.



Brett Dean

Viola

Brett plays a viola made by Kevin Gentges, Berlin, in 1995.



Timo-Veikko Valve

Principal Cello

Tipi plays a 1616 Brothers Amati cello kindly on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. His Chair is sponsored by Peter Weiss AO.

Discover more

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

aco.com.au



Melissa Barnard

Cello

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



Julian Thompson

Cello

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



Maxime Bibeau

Principal Bass

Max plays a late-16th-century Gasparo da Salò bass kindly on loan from a private Australian benefactor. His Chair is sponsored by Darin Cooper Foundation.



Erin Helyard

Harpsichord and Chamber Organ

Erin plays a continuo organ by Henk Klop, Garderen, Nederland 2004, and a Ruckers double harpsichord by Carey Beebe, Sydney 2003. In Perth he plays a continuo organ by Robin Jennings, UK 2003, and a French double harpsichord by Michael Johnson 1987. Instruments prepared by Carey Beebe. Perth continuo organ courtesy of UWA Conservatorium of Music. Erin appears courtesy of Pinchgut Opera.



LIKE
GOD ON
WEATHER

A photograph of a violinist performing on stage. The violinist is in the foreground, focused on playing. In the background, a conductor's hand is visible, gesturing. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the violinist against a dark background.

Ellena Savage on Johann Sebastian Bach

Ellena Savage is an Australian essayist and academic. She is the author of the chapbook *Yellow City* and the forthcoming essay collection *Blueberries*.

R IER



“... poetry, music, and storytelling, are all imagined as modes by which people remember the times before they were born.”

Emily Wilson, from her Introduction to her new translation of *Homer's Odyssey*

Did Johann Sebastian Bach have any friends? A few, perhaps. He certainly had his rivals and his oppressors.

There were Bach's employers, who ripped him off, suspended his pay, and charged him with obscene workloads. There were his colleagues, whose terrible playing led Bach to throw things at them during rehearsal, including, it is noted, his wig. There was the student bassoonist on whom Bach once pulled a dagger in the street, although, it is likewise noted, the bassoonist was asking for it.

Music provides its own companions, however: an unbroken chain of human labours, ethereal sound rituals, that connect ourselves – that is, we who are alive and listening at any given time – to all other selves that have lived and will live. From prehistory to the furthest reaches of the psychedelic future.

And Bach?

“Bach is the most travelled composer, in an astral sense,” says Richard Tognetti, Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra. “He's on the *Voyager*. He's travelling through space. When aliens find it, they'll be able to decode Bach.”

Then there are the labourers who meet as friends do in the living field of music: the players. Their encounter in a performance is one of trust and intimacy. A performance, a reinterpretation of an existing work, becomes a link in the chain that bonds us all to history.

Previous page.
Richard Tognetti.
Credit Nic Walker.

Left. JS Bach

“A performance, a reinterpretation of an existing work, becomes a link in the chain that bonds us all to history.”

But not yet.

Tognetti opens this program with an exquisite solo violin performance, Sonata No.2 in A minor. Technically, Bach's sonatas for solo violin are extremely demanding, but also enormously demanding of a musician's expressive and interpretive abilities.

A single line, and then the voice multiplies contrapuntally.

The soloist is not a lonely force; he is in the company of a presence.

Two friends are invited onstage. Tognetti is joined by Erin Helyard on harpsichord and the orchestra's principal cellist, Timo-Veikko 'Tipi' Valve.

Bach's chamber music, says Helyard, “was never meant for a large audience. It was sort of meant for the players. The musicians constitute their own audience. What we're doing now is we're witnessing the joy of the relationship between the musicians.”

Three centuries separate Bach's lifetime and *Intimate Bach*. How ought an audience engage with an artefact so removed from its context?

Bach's music is largely sacred – in a liturgical sense, yes, but also in accordance with the religious logic of Bach's day. The Orthodox Lutheran's "will in serfdom" (Erasmus) would seem distasteful to a modern person. For Bach, though, the church's authority was absolute; the human form was a temple for the Holy Spirit to command; submission to the will of a hostile God was assured. Life's purpose was not to pursue personal happiness but rather to devote oneself entirely to the program of honouring one's vocation, for God, who may or may not have chosen to damn your soul anyway. In a sense, the true audience and addressee of almost all Bach's music is God. "It's so taken out of context," Tognetti says of contemporary performances of Bach. "It's like taking The Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen' to celebrate the monarchy."

Often, this devotional music finds itself ensconced in contemporary, secular institutions. But perhaps the music's function is not so different to what it was 300 years ago. As Helyard says, "Going to the concert hall is now a meditative thing. It's a reclusive act. You're going there to be purified from the bullshit of what we have in our everyday life."

When you go looking for him, Bach is everywhere, like God, or weather. His work haunts the Western musical tradition, as though there is something essential to it.

"Hommage à J.S.B." is one part of the Hungarian composer György Kurtág's *Signs, Games, and Messages*. These occasional miniatures, written for friends and special events, are isolated movements that demand of their audience a suspension of the rational. Here we find mathematics and fantasy in a dance with one another. On stage, viola player Atte Kilpeläinen joins Tognetti and Valve.

In its brevity and intimacy, Kurtág's "Hommage" is both a missive to J.S.B. and a contribution to his all-encompassing legacy. It shows us that Bach's work is, in the philosopher Theodor Adorno's words, "continually unfolding".

But why, exactly?



Top. Timo-Veikko Valve.
Credit Jack Saltmiras.

Bottom. Erin Helyard.
Credit Richard Tognetti.

“The music itself,” says Valve, “is so ultimately perfect. Even if you took a piece written for cello and played it on the kazoo, it would probably still kind of work.”

Music defines itself, writes Adorno on Bach, through the tension between the essence of the composition, which is the work itself, and its sensuous appearance – the interpretation.

Tognetti says it is the openness to interpretation and reception that makes Bach's legacy so lasting. “You can respond to Bach in so many different ways.”

For example, a program such as *Intimate Bach*, he says, is “well-armed, well-researched, and with a convinced set of principles that define the interpretation”, but in the concert hall, when the encounter between text, performance and audience is happening in real time, “you have no idea how an audience will react”.

For some, Bach represents purity; music that is so radically elevated above the mundane; art which seems to have been channelled through the extraordinary labour of a man, but which originates from the centre of the universe.

“It's just mind-boggling, the sheer brain power of the man,” says the composer Brett Dean, “but then if you combine it with the supreme emotional knowledge, the extraordinary depth and compassion – it's the complete package.”

“It's so taken out of context,” Tognetti says of contemporary performances of Bach. “It's like taking The Sex Pistols' ‘God Save the Queen’ to celebrate the monarchy.”

J.S.B. was known as a sincere and compassionate teacher, his displeasure for bad musicianship notwithstanding. His Inventions and Sinfonias were written as exercises for his students, who regarded him affectionately. Bach's pedagogy was driven, as his composition was, by his conviction that "everything must be possible".

The Inventions, as Bach intended, were a set of keyboard exercises in every musical key. In this program, the pieces are performed variously by a string trio (Tognetti on violin, Kilpeläinen on viola, and Valve on cello) and solo harpsichord (Helyard). There is no hierarchy in the musical texture here – each voice is equal, and so it is a true jam session.

The "supreme emotional knowledge" that Dean speaks to in Bach's music is not a quality that tends to come vacuum-like from the centre of the universe. Instead, it is a mark of a maturity of experience. A contemporary noted the "strange, new, expressive and beautiful ideas" in Bach's work. The depth and peculiarity of feeling in Bach's work corresponds, perhaps, to the furthest reaches of experience that Bach's life sent him.

Although 18th-century Germany was largely a mannered, literate, and urban society, the primitive forces that were awoken during the Thirty Years War – starvation, murder, rape and cannibalism – left their mark on the cultural psyche of the region.

J.S.B. himself was orphaned at 10, and lost many of his siblings young. Of his 20 children, only 10 survived into adulthood. Bach's first wife died while he was away for work, and it was two months before he learnt of her death. In the decades after the war, plagues rippled through the country. Food was insecure. It would be another century before germ theory was integrated into European medical practice, and death by simple infection was rife.

At the same time, Germany's ancient woodlands were being deforested at an alarming rate, and the forests that survived, those that encircled Bach's Eisenach, were primeval, dense, and frightening. "Es spukt hier!" – "It's spooky here!" – was a phrase used to describe the landscape for several generations after the war.



Top. Richard Tognetti.
Credit Jack Saltmiras.

Bottom. Brett Dean.
Credit Bettina Stoess.

“The music itself,” says Valve, “is so ultimately perfect. Even if you took a piece written for cello and played it on the kazoo, it would probably still kind of work.”

While Bach’s music may be compositionally perfect, and his pedagogy perfectly rigorous, his aesthetics are neither decorative nor innocent. Bach’s compositions betray a strangeness and profundity that resonates in the body of the listener. His sound conjures a base, almost dangerous, feeling.

The French composer Marin Marais wrote in an earlier period of baroque music – middle baroque, to be exact – and in *Sonnerie de Sainte-Geneviève du Mont de Paris* we hear its shadowy textures.

Tognetti on violin and Valve on cello meet to perform this piece, named *The Bells of Saint Geneviève* for the flamboyant Gothic church in Paris.

Valve describes the performance as chamber music in its best form: “A very intimate setting of little discussions between the players, but also between the music of Bach and Marais.”

The texture of this music harks back to a more extravagant aesthetic context than Bach’s own: Marais served as a musician in the court of King Louis XIV, the lavish Sun King whose substantial patronage of the arts served as part of his campaign to make France the dominant culture of Europe.





Top. Marin Marais.

Bottom. Kurtág György.

That there are resonances of this earlier period in Bach's work led some of his contemporaries to consider the great composer "old-fashioned". In Bach's time, the more orchestral "classical" sound was starting to blaze its trail. But Bach's engagement with these styles and textures was not the anachronism some thought it to be.

As Tognetti says: "One needs to be careful of accusing something of being old-fashioned, or out of fashion, because Bach's music has survived throughout centuries, throughout endless fashions."

He suggests a quote by Jean Cocteau: "Art produces ugly things which frequently become more beautiful with time. Fashion, on the other hand, produces beautiful things which always become ugly with time."

Bach was fairly flexible towards varying performances of his works, and he left even the choices of instrumentation open in some of his mature works. This suggests a man who possessed an awareness of the incredible depth of time, both past and future. Such openness to instrumentation offers us a view of a composer awaiting new sounds in the as-yet unreal future that might animate his transcendent scores.

Sonnerie de Sainte-Geneviève du Mont de Paris is being performed, in this program, in a truly contemporary fashion. "The piece was initially composed for a different set of instruments," says Valve, "so we're modernising it by playing it on instruments that are now in fashion." Valve's cello takes the place of Marais' viol. In the face of life and death and ever-changing technologies, every reading of a text takes on a new meaning.

"We can never be certain of what the original performances were exactly like," says Valve. "The interesting part of performing these works today is that we do not know. We can't ask the composer what exactly he intended, and therefore the fantasy can take over. For me, the music is about fantasy and improvisation."

Brett Dean's *Approach (Prelude to a Canon)* is performed by the full ensemble of seven players. It is an Australian premiere for the celebrated and prolific composer and violist.

The piece was one of six pieces by six composers commissioned by the Swedish Chamber Orchestra to respond to the *Brandenburg Concertos*, which are considered some of the greatest compositions ever written. As a violist, Dean was assigned the sixth, which, unusually, features double viola. It is one of the few genuine double concertos – that is, one where two of the same instruments share equal significance in the composition.

Dean describes the process of meeting such a task. “Bach is just such a hard act to follow,” he says. “It’s just such incredibly profound and in many ways such perfect music, from a technical point of view. I didn’t feel that I had anything to *add* to it, but I could say something *prior* to it.” Hence the title, *Approach*.

“I also had to somehow address the idea of counterpoint,” he says – the independent musical voices that dance and play, that are so prevalent in baroque music. But “counterpoint is not really part of contemporary compositional parlance”.

“There is no hierarchy in the musical texture here – each voice is equal, and so it is a true jam session.”

Dean says that in order to address counterpoint more conceptually, he employs “a counterpoint of personalities or temperaments”. He begins as one of the two violas, with “a very argumentative, cantankerous opening, while the other solo viola responds in a more serene and sovereign way”, he says.

“Somehow there’s a dialogue of these two different types that approach each other, as well as then combining to approach the piece itself.”

The relationship between Dean and the ACO is deep and long. Indeed, Tognetti says the genesis of this Bach program is found in the orchestra’s affectionate relationship with Dean.

“We wanted to collaborate with a dear friend of mine, and one of the world’s most celebrated composers,” says Tognetti. “The genesis came from this personal and musical friendship that I and the orchestra have with Brett Dean.”

Dean says he is thrilled to be performing the work with the ACO.

“In many ways,” he says, “it was through Richard commissioning me for the Huntington festival in 1997 that led me to take the plunge and risk it as a freelance composer.”

Such is this sort of soiree: friends, together on stage.

As Tognetti says: “One needs to be careful of accusing something of being old-fashioned, or out of fashion, because Bach’s music has survived throughout centuries, throughout endless fashions.”

We close with a full ensemble, in conversation with one another, in conversation with the rich and endlessly unfolding legacy of Bach.

While No.6 is still very intimate, in that there are just a handful of players, the piece has a largeness to it, and a more orchestral feel. This is a concerto grosso – a concerto for many soloists.

The concerto, here, offers a way of bringing together the ideas that shape this program: the small, intimate relationship between the man at work in war-ravaged Germany three centuries ago and a handful of musicians interpreting it today; the relationship between Bach and his forebears; between the musicians on stage, who have played together for many years; between the musicians and the audiences and audiences and musicians, and between us, the living, and our memories of the times before we were born.







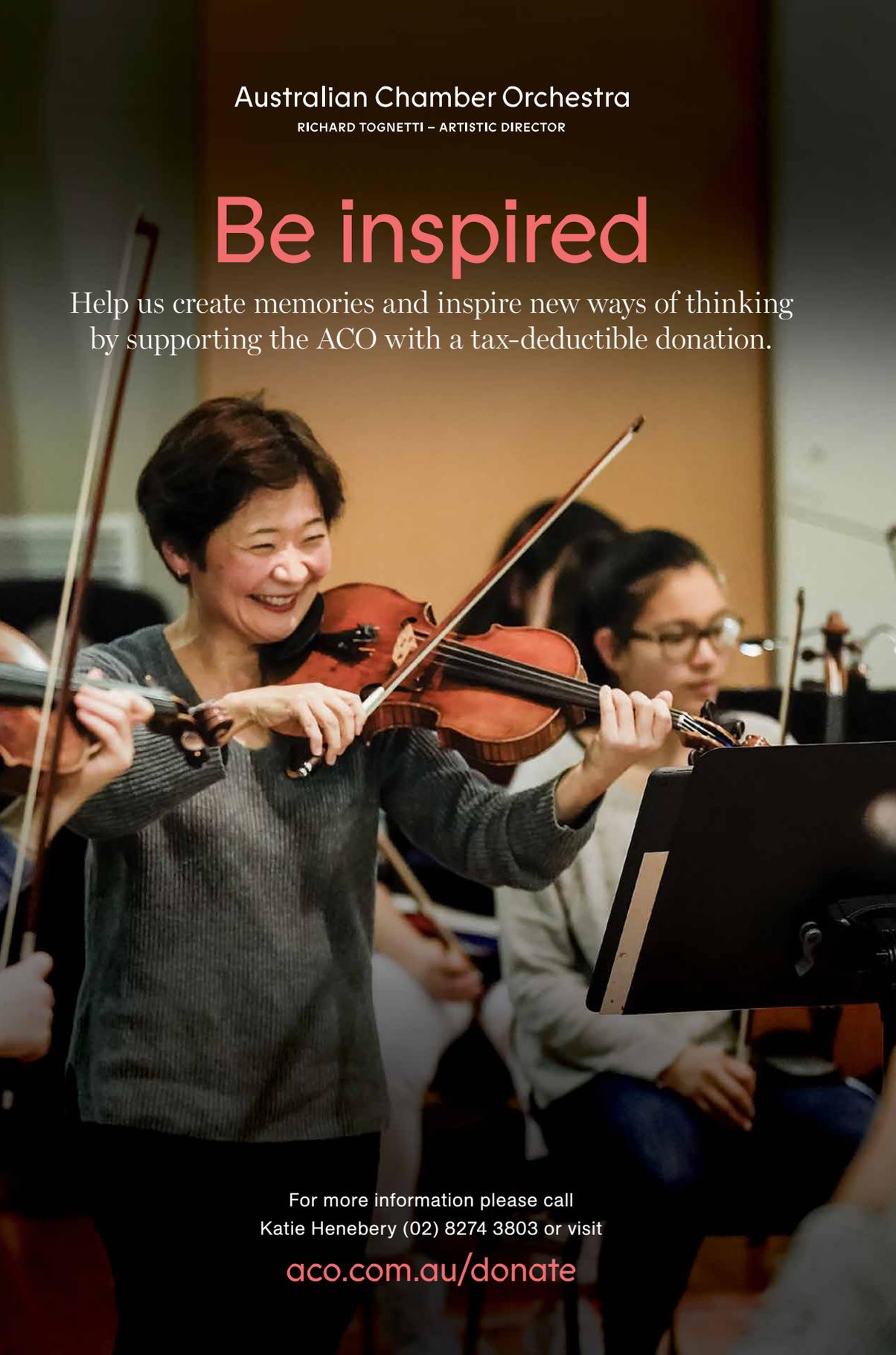
THE ACO

“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 and brave interpretations. Steeped in history but always looking to the future, ACO programs embrace celebrated classics alongside new commissions, and adventurous cross-artform collaborations. Led by Artistic Director Richard Tognetti since 1990, the ACO performs more than 100 concerts each year. Whether performing in Manhattan, New York, or Wollongong, NSW, the ACO is unwavering in its commitment to creating transformative musical experiences. The Orchestra regularly collaborates with artists and musicians who share its ideology, from instrumentalists, to vocalists, to cabaret performers, to visual artists and film makers. In addition to its national and international touring schedule, the Orchestra has an active recording program across CD, vinyl and digital formats. Recent releases include *Water | Night Music*, the first Australian-produced classical vinyl for two decades, *Haydn | Mozart*, and the soundtrack to the acclaimed cinematic collaboration, *Mountain*.

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Australian Chamber Orchestra

RICHARD TOGNETTI – ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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