

Australian Chamber Orchestra

RICHARD TOGNETTI – ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



THE AMERICAN

DIRECTED BY RICHARD TOGNETTI

Program in Short

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about to hear

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American Dreams

Alex Ross on America's
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Working with Uncertainty

Kate Holden speaks
with composer
Samuel Adams

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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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WELCOME

Welcome to the ACO's final national tour of the 2022 Season, where the Orchestra are fresh from seasons in Berlin and London.

The American brings together some of the most extraordinary composers to have emerged from North America over the last 150 years, from 20th-century pioneers George Walker, Florence Price and Morton Feldman to modern-day greats including The National's Bryce Dessner and John Adams, alongside a performance of Dvořák's American String Quartet. Fresh, optimistic and full of rustic charm, this quartet has been arranged by Richard for full string orchestra, bringing a new warmth and power to this beloved music.

During this concert Richard put down his 1743 'Carrodus' Guarneri del Gesù violin in favour of an electric instrument for the world premiere of *Echo Transcriptions*, written especially for him by the wonderful Californian composer Samuel Adams in a joint commission by the ACO with our friends Stanford Live in Paolo Alto.

We are delighted to have prominent American writer Alex Ross contribute an essay for this program, where he delves into the rich and complex history of American classical music. It's a fascinating and enlightening read, particularly in the context of the music you will be hearing at this performance.

Thank you so much for joining us in the concert hall throughout the year. It has been a joy to share our 2022 Season with you all. I hope you all have a wonderful and rejuvenating festive season and I look forward to seeing you and your friends back in the concert hall in 2023.



Richard Evans
Managing Director

Join the conversation

#ACO22Season |     

@AustralianChamberOrchestra

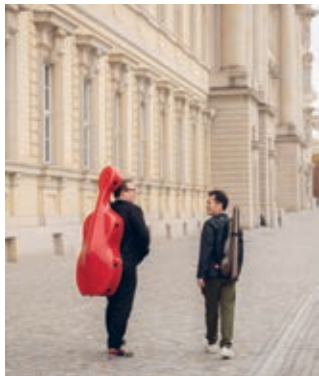
News



2023 National Concert Season

NOW ON SALE

Join Richard Tognetti and the Orchestra for a season of familiar favourites and exciting discoveries. Full-season Subscriptions, Flexi-subscriptions and single tickets are now on sale. To discover the thrill of live music visit aco.com.au/2023.



International Tour Berlin & London

The ACO just returned from a tour in Berlin and London, where Richard Tognetti, the Orchestra and didgeridoo virtuoso William Barton gave concerts at the Pierre Boulez Saal and the Barbican Centre.

Coming up

DECEMBER



Encounters with Music: Bill Henson in Conversation

2 DECEMBER

Pier 2/3, Sydney

Photographer Bill Henson joins host Fenella Kernebone for an intimate and enlightening discussion on the music that has shaped his life and career.



ACO Collective: Chamber Music Celebration

7 DECEMBER

Pier 2/3, Sydney

Helena Rathbone leads the young guns of ACO Collective through a concert of chamber music favourites.



Dear Santa

17-22 DECEMBER

Pier 2/3, Sydney

Actress and singer Rachael Beck joins the ACO for a joyful new Christmas show filled with wonder and magic for young children and their families.

FEBRUARY



Ilya Gringolts plays Bruch

2-15 FEBRUARY

Newcastle, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Canberra.

The electrifying Russian violinist returns to perform one of the most beloved Romantic violin concertos.



Philanthropy



Thank you for your support

From performances on the world stage, to nurturing the next generation of string players through our life-changing Learning & Engagement programs, your donations have been vital in bringing our vision to life.

As 2022 draws to a close, we thank you for your support this year and for keeping us moving forward.

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Australian Chamber Orchestra

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The concert will last approximately two hours, including a 20-minute interval.

The Australian Chamber Orchestra reserves the right to alter scheduled artists and programs as necessary.



ACO concerts are regularly broadcast on ABC Classic.

The American will be broadcast on Friday 9 December, 1pm AEDT.

The performance will also be live-streamed via ACO digital channels on Sunday 13 November, 2pm AEDT.

MUSICIANS

The musicians on stage
for this performance.

Discover more

Learn more about our musicians, go behind the scenes and listen to playlists at:

aco.com.au



Helena Rathbone

Principal Violin

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



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 McMullin AM & Ruth McMullin, Louise Myer & Martyn Myer AO, Andrew & Andrea Roberts.



Satu Vänskä

Principal Violin

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



Aiko Goto

Violin

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



Mark Ingwersen

Violin

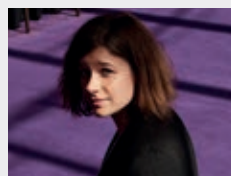
Mark plays a 1728/29 Stradivarius violin on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. His Chair is sponsored by Prof Judyth Sachs & Julie Steiner AM.



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

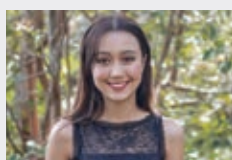
Liisa plays a 1759 Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin kindly on loan from the ACO. Her Chair is sponsored by the Melbourne Medical Syndicate.



Ike See

Violin

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



Anna Da Silva Chen

Violin

Anna plays a 1922 violin by Pierre Hel.



Amy Brookman #^

Violin

Amy plays a 1996 violin by Ernst Heinrich Roth.



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 her own 1968 Parisian viola by Pierre M. Audinot. Her Chair is sponsored by Terry Campbell AO & Christine Campbell.



Meagan Turner

Viola

Meagan plays a 2019 viola by Samuel Zygmuntowicz on private loan.



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 a cello by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume made in 1846. Her Chair is sponsored by Jason & Alexandra 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 the late 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.

Guest Musicians

^ Amy plays courtesy of New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.



Jean-Michel Basquiat was born in Brooklyn to a Puerto Rican mother and a Haitian father. In his decade-long career Basquiat achieved staggering success as an artist, producing Neo-expressionist works that often focused on dichotomies including wealth versus poverty and integration versus segregation. Since his tragic death at the age of 27 he has become regarded as a pioneering and celebrated American cultural icon.

Famous Moon King, 1984. Artwork by Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988).



PROGRAM IN SHORT

Your five-minute read
before lights down.

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

Llewellyn Hall, Canberra
Kim Cunio
Fri 11 Nov, 7.15pm

City Recital Hall, Sydney
Andrew Bukenya
Sat 12 Nov, 6.15pm
Tue 15 Nov, 7.15pm
Wed 16 Nov, 6.15pm

Sydney Opera House
Andrew Bukenya
Sun 13 Nov, 1.15pm

Newcastle City Hall
Andrew Bukenya
Thu 17 Nov, 6.45pm

Melbourne Recital Centre
Andrew Aronowicz
Sat 19 Nov, 6.45pm
Mon 21 Nov, 6.45pm

Arts Centre Melbourne
Andrew Aronowicz
Sun 20 Nov, 1.45pm

Adelaide Town Hall
Russell Torrance
Tue 22 Nov, 6.45pm

Perth Concert Hall
Hugh Lydon
Wed 23 Nov, 6.45pm

Pre-concert speakers are subject to change.



Bryce Dessner

(1976–)

Aheym

“Aheym” means “homeward” in Yiddish. Bryce Dessner, best known as a member of the band The National, dedicated the work to his grandmother, Sara, “as a musical evocation of the idea of flight and passage”. Sara would tell Dessner and his brother stories about how she and the rest of their family emigrated to the United States from Russia and Poland: “they all found their way into our collective imagination, eventually becoming a part of our own cultural identity and connection to the past”. *Aheym* consists of many small, repeated modules. Whether you choose to hear “homewardness” in the modules themselves, the rapid running notes that underpin them, or the consistent return to the home key, Dessner certainly succeeds in bringing the concept to life.



George Walker

(1922–2018)

Lyric for Strings

George Walker began his career as a virtuoso pianist before being admitted to the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music, becoming the first Black graduate of the renowned music school with a dual diploma in both piano and composition. His works demonstrate a wide range of artistic excellence in genres ranging from instrumental and vocal solos and chamber music to compositions for orchestra and other large ensembles. In 1996, Walker became the first Black composer to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music.

The *Lyric for Strings* was composed in 1946 when Walker was only 24 years old, forming the second movement of his first string quartet. Inspired by fellow Curtis Institute graduate Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*, the piece was initially titled “Lament”, being dedicated to his grandmother who had passed away one year prior. Walker later orchestrated the movement for string orchestra, and as a standalone movement it has remained one of his most enduring compositions.



Florence Price

(1887–1953)

Five Folksongs in Counterpoint: Selections

Arranged for string orchestra

Florence Price was a composer, pianist and teacher who is recognised as the first African-American woman to be acclaimed as a symphonist, and the first to be performed by a major orchestra. She was a leading figure in what is known as the Harlem Renaissance, which saw an explosion in African-American intellectualism and culture in the early 20th century. When her First Symphony was performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933, it was a social and cultural milestone in American history.

Originally titled *Negro Folk Songs in Counterpoint*, Price added two more folksongs from broader traditions to the set. They are not simplistic harmonisations, but present the melodies with sophistication and pride, employing a variety of textures and variations. No.2 is based on the popular ballad “Oh My Darling, Clementine”. No.4 is based on “Shortnin’ Bread”, an African-American plantation song. No.5 is based on one of the best-loved African-American spirituals, “Swing Low Sweet Chariot”.



Samuel Adams

(1985–)

Echo Transcriptions *World premiere*

The composer writes:

The first time I heard the Australian Chamber Orchestra was on a program that included Brett Dean's *Electric Preludes*, a buzzing, resonant work for electric violin and chamber orchestra. I suppose it's appropriate to say that things have come full circle with my new piece *Echo Transcriptions* scored for a similar instrumentation consisting of electric violin, strings, electric bass, and Moog synthesizer. Like the work by Brett Dean, *Echo Transcriptions* reads less like a concerto and more like an exploration of energy, tone colour, and texture. The electric violin plays one long, unbroken line – searching, singing – and the orchestra echoes and refracts its gestures to create a rippling tapestry of sound.

My second work for this brilliant and virtuosic group, it was a total joy to write.

Co-commissioned by the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Stanford Live, and generously supported by Roberta and Charles Katz.



Morton Feldman

(1926–1987)

Rothko Chapel: Movement V

Morton Feldman lived in New York City, where many European artists had sought refuge during the Second World War. Among his friends were the painters William de Kooning and Mark Rothko, to whom he owed his concept of music as a colouring of time. As the closest disciple of John Cage, Feldman's music paints enormous musical landscapes with only a handful of notes and silences, holding audiences motionless with delicate sounds.

Rothko Chapel is an actual chapel in Houston, Texas, but also a major work of modern art whose walls are adorned with 14 abstract expressionist paintings by Rothko. The chapel has become an intellectual and cultural centre, inspiring numerous works of art, including Feldman's famous work. Long viola solos and ethereal chords evoke the space and paintings in the chapel.



John Adams

(1947–)

John's Book of Alleged Dances: Selections

Arranged for string orchestra

John Adams's "Book" is a collection of ten dances, six of which are accompanied by a recorded percussion track made of prepared piano sounds inspired by the music of John Cage. The dances were "alleged" because the steps for them had yet to be invented. Adams describes their general tone as "dry, droll, sardonic".

"Judah to Ocean" is a piece of vehicular music, following N Judah rail/streetcar tracks way out into the fog and ultimately to the beach, where Adams used to rent a cottage. In "Habanera", the strings strum and limn a serpentine tune. The loops dance a robot habanera while an ageing dictator watches from the wings.

"Toot Nipple" is inspired by a quote from *Postcards* by E. Annie Proulx: "Mrs Nipple ... You probably don't remember her husband, Toot. When he was young he was a big fellow, quick and clever, a terror on the dance floor." "Ständchen: The Little Serenade" is a little serenade in three, but also in four. So which is it? Adams describes the dance as an homage to those ecstatic Beethoven and Schubert finales in 12/8 time.



Antonín Dvořák

(1841–1904)

String Quartet No.12 in F major, Op.96 "American"

Arranged for string orchestra

In many ways, Dvořák's music is typical of any late-19th-century European composer. He was, after all, mentored by Johannes Brahms. And yet his unique Bohemian roots are ever present. We hear these most clearly in works like the "Dumky" Trio, the *Slavonic Dances*, or the Eighth Symphony – all of which explicitly reference Czech/Bohemian song and dance. But even in his attempts to evoke the spirit of totally *different* countries, powerful traces of his homeland are impossible to ignore.

Dvořák left Czechoslovakia for the United States in 1892 to become head of the National Conservatory in New York.

He stayed for three incredibly productive years, becoming entranced by the African-American spirituals and Native American melodies of his new home. He proposed that, rather than be pale imitators of Europeans, American composers should create a truly national music “derived from Negro melodies... the most potent and the most beautiful among them ... are certain of the so-called plantation melodies and slave songs.”

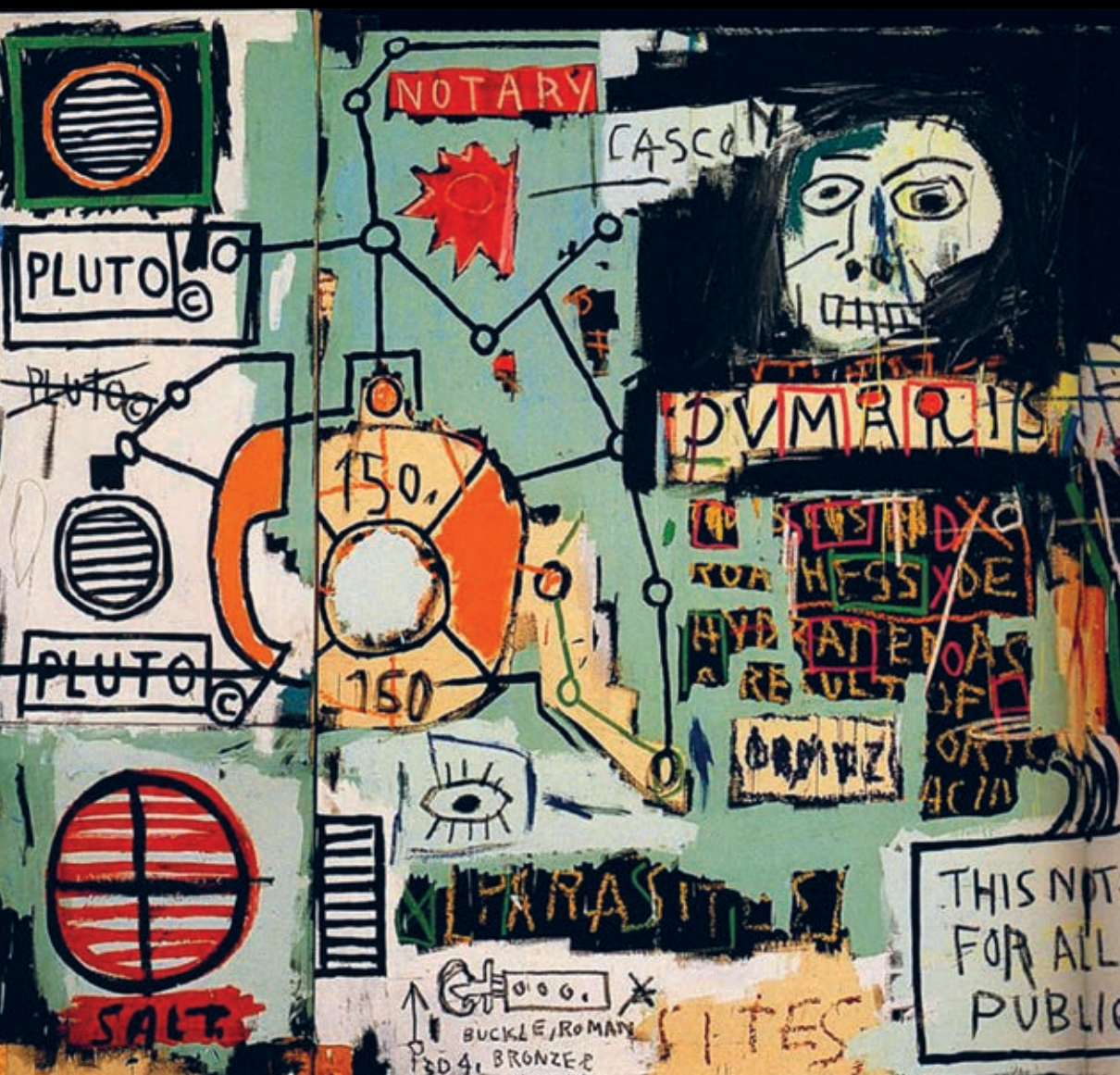
Dvořák led by example most famously in his “New World” Symphony, of which he said “I have not actually used any of the melodies. I have simply written original themes embodying the peculiarities of the Indian music.”* In actuality, the “New World” Symphony is one of Dvořák’s most superb manifestations of the Czech/Bohemian spirit. And yet there is still something, perhaps only imagined, that speaks to modern audiences as being “of America”.

The same may be said of the “American” Quartet. Dvořák composed his 12th quartet over three idyllic weeks during 1893 holidaying in Spillville, Iowa. Ever the post-Beethoven figure, Dvořák’s quartet is in the pastoral key of F major, reflecting his pleasant walks in the Spillville countryside. Forest murmurs are evident in the first movement’s accompaniment figures, over which the ensemble take turns in singing a simple, but lyrical pentatonic melody. The mood constantly shifts from sunny, to turbulent, to melancholy, to consolation, but is always approachable and singable.

The second movement features a passionate but bittersweet duet between the violin and cello, growing to a climax then subsiding. The scherzo that follows boasts more cheerful pentatonic melodies, as well as violin motifs that supposedly imitate the scarlet tanager, a bird with striking red plumage, that is native to Spillville. The boisterous finale is perhaps the most “American” sounding of the four movements, with possible evocations of folksong, the chugging of stream trains, and native American drum rhythms.

Whether or not any of these musical traits is *actually* American is perhaps beside the point. Dvořák would always be a Bohemian at heart, but served as a crucial model to American composers who would later shape a truly American tradition throughout the 20th century.

* Dvořák’s referral to “Indian Music” is a reference to the music of Indigenous Americans.



Notary, 1983. Artwork by Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988).



DEBTS
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MALE TORSO
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MATTOCKS

SALT

18

AMERICAN DREAMS

In the American national psychodrama, composers from classical music traditions have always been the outsiders.

Written by Alex Ross

Alex Ross has been the music critic at *The New Yorker* since 1996. He is the author of three acclaimed books including *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*, which won a National Book Critics Circle Award and the Guardian First Book Award and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.



Chrysler Building and city skyline view in New York.

The history of American music cannot be divorced from the fraught history of the nation itself. A republic founded on ideals of freedom and equality betrayed those ideals in the first moments of its existence, and it continues to betray them today. Racism, imperialism and hyper-capitalism remain as fundamental to American identity as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Nonetheless, the putative American dream still holds a global audience spellbound, principally through the worldwide domination of popular culture.

American composers – those who are in conversation with classical-music traditions – occupy a strange position in the never-ending, all-consuming national psychodrama. They have been cultural outsiders from the beginning: when classical music began arriving on American shores, it was desirable chiefly as a symbol of European refinement. After the founding of the New York Philharmonic in 1842, local composers complained that the ensemble was ignoring them in favour of endless reams of German music. George Frederick Bristow fumed in 1854: “Is there a Philharmonic Society in Germany for the encouragement solely of American music? Then why should there be a society here for the encouragement solely of German music?” Similar laments would be heard for generations.

Once American schools of composition began to coalesce at the end of the 19th century and especially in the first decades of the 20th, debates raged over what American music should sound like and how it should position itself in relation to Europe. Charles Ives acquired something like godfather status not only for his exuberant use of native sounds – hymn tunes, marches, national airs – but also for his brazen eruptions of dissonance. Here, many felt, was the true original that had long been sought: a “maverick” occupying a position of solitary defiance, like the macho hero of a Western. Aaron Copland, emerging in the 1920s

They have been cultural outsiders from the beginning: when classical music began arriving on American shores, it was desirable chiefly as a symbol of European refinement.

and 1930s, established a quite different model of Americanness: a communal, collective, we're-all-in-this-together stance evident in New Deal-era works such as *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*. From Ives and Copland descended compositional schools of modernism and populism, with much shuttling between; Copland, too, had his hyper-dissonant phases.

Certain faces and voices were, however, missing from this emergent pantheon. Although a few people of colour and very few women were able to pursue compositional careers, white men dominated the procession. This was in contradiction to the multifarious makeup of the national population. It revealed a patriarchy as monolithic as that of the European inheritance toward which Americans assumed a self-consciously rebellious stance. In the early 21st century, the question is not only *what* composers were writing but *who* was writing. It was not enough for well-meaning white artists to make gestures toward Native American or African American traditions: the contemporary heirs of those traditions needed to speak for themselves, in whatever language they saw fit.

This concert is based around Richard Tognetti's new arrangement of Antonín Dvořák's 12th String Quartet, nicknamed the "American." Dvořák played a prominent role in the evolution of the nation's musical identity, through the repercussions of his visit to the United States from 1892 to 1895. He wrote two of his most celebrated works during his stay – the "American" Quartet and the "New World" Symphony – and he also intervened in critical debates through an article titled "Real Value of Negro Melodies." Although the essay was ghost-written, it reflected his sentiments. The most widely quoted statement was this:

I am now satisfied that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the negro melodies. This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States ... All of the great musicians have borrowed from the songs of the common people. Beethoven's most charming scherzo is based upon what might now be considered a skilfully handled negro melody.

According to a familiar historical narrative, Dvořák kickstarted an upward surge in American music. Ives began writing his First Symphony three years after Dvořák left, and it echoed the Czech composer's preoccupations. Ives's slow movement, like the Largo of Dvořák's "New Word," leads off with a soulful English-horn melody.

It suddenly seemed as though gifted young Black artists could break through the monumental walls of racism that surrounded the classical world.

Latter-day scholars are apt to doubt the myths surrounding around Dvořák's visit. The musicologist Douglas Shadle has pointed out that the ideas contained in "Real Value of Negro Melodies" had been in circulation for years and that Dvořák was merely echoing the progressive line. Attempts had already been made to use Black spirituals as the basis for large-scale works. The difference was that Dvořák executed the idea at an exalted level. Indeed, though he listened to spirituals and other folk song with a keen ear, he tended to absorb only those aspects that fitted his established musical vocabulary. Some sceptics, notably Leonard Bernstein, questioned whether there was *anything* indubitably American in Dvořák's American pieces. But Dvořák never claimed to be creating a perfect model. Instead, he was following his own inborn instinct to unite the "high" European legacy with the sounds of everyday life. This fusion came naturally to him, given his poor, rural origins.

Probably Dvořák's most radical gesture came neither in his music nor in his public statements but in his teaching at the National Conservatory of Music of America, in New York. Under the leadership of Jeannette Meyer Thurber, the conservatory had made the enlightened decision to admit Black pupils. Dvořák grew especially close to a young Black singer and composer named Harry T. Burleigh, who sang spirituals for him and showed him around New York. Dvořák's students also included the violinist and composer Will Marion Cook, who went on to play a pivotal role in Black popular music and served as a mentor to Duke Ellington. It suddenly seemed as though gifted young Black artists could break through the monumental walls of racism that surrounded the classical world. In fact, Dvořák's encouraging signals turned out to be misleading: the path was immensely hard. Black composers wouldn't begin to find their way into leading concert halls until decades after Dvořák's death.



Florence Price with National Association of Negro Musicians board members, 1941. Left to right: Blanche Thompson, Josephine Inness, Henry Grant, Mary Cardwell Dawson, Clarence Hayden Wilson, and Florence Price.

One of them was Florence Price, who was born in 1887 in Little Rock, Arkansas, and studied at the New England Conservatory. In the Arkansas of her youth and early adulthood, lynching murders of Black people were routine. In the 1920s Price moved to Chicago, where new opportunities opened to her. In 1933 Frederick Stock, the conductor of the Chicago Symphony, led the first performance of Price's First Symphony, one of several works by Black composers that found an audience in the 1930s. (Three others were William Grant Still's *Afro-American Symphony*, William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony*, and R. Nathaniel Dett's *The Ordering of Moses*.) These pioneers tended to follow the Dvořák template, at least superficially, although each had their own distinct personality. Price was notable for the elegance of her formal designs and the variety of her motivic development. Those virtues are evident in the *Five Folksongs in Counterpoint*, completed in 1951.

George Walker, who was born in 1922 and died in 2018, followed a quite different path. Although he has incorporated Black musical traditions in his works, devising his own monument to the spirituals in his *Folk Songs for Orchestra* (1992), he is best known for abstract music in a rugged, angular, often atonal style.



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His output includes five Sinfonias, five piano sonatas, a quartet of concertos and his Walt Whitman setting *Lilacs*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1996 – the first Black composer ever to receive that award. *Lyric for Strings* is a much earlier score, written in 1946 and couched in what might be called an American-Romantic idiom, not dissimilar to that of Samuel Barber’s familiar *Adagio for Strings*.

The piece was written in memory of Walker’s grandmother, who had escaped slavery and established a family in Washington, DC. Walker remembered her as “extraordinarily gentle, with a shyness that made eye contact impossible for her if strangers were present”.

Although Black traditions assume a central place in American musical history, other inheritances, especially from immigrant populations, have a substantial presence. Think of George Gershwin, the master of classical-popular fusion, the son of Russian Jews who fled to America to escape anti-Semitic pogroms in their native land. The formidable Modernist composer Morton Feldman, an ally of John Cage, pursued a radically different direction, yet he came from a very similar background: his father was born in Ukraine, his mother in Belarus, and both came to the United States in the first decade of the 20th century, seeking a more hospitable environment. Feldman’s father Irving is said to have walked from Vienna to Rotterdam, a distance of 700 miles, as part of his quest to reach the New World. Like Walker, Feldman preferred to speak in abstractions, but the plaintive “Hebraic melody” of his masterwork *Rothko Chapel*, written for Mark Rothko’s nondenominational chapel in Houston, is a voice from a lost Jewish world, shrouded in memory and grief.

Left: The Chicago Theater, constructed in 1921.

Although Black traditions assume a central place in American musical history, other inheritances, especially from immigrant populations, have a substantial presence.

Bryce Dessner, a composer who also has a career as a rock guitarist, honors his Jewish heritage in his 2009 piece *Aheym* – “homeward” in Yiddish. Like Walker, he is thinking of his grandmother, Sarah Dessner, one of a number of Jewish immigrants in the composer’s family who fled Poland and Russia. Her experiences are linked to Irena Klepfisz’s poem “Di rayze aheym,” which contains the lines: “Among strangers is her home / here right here she must live / her memories will become monuments.” The furious repetitive patterns that set *Aheym* in motion are far removed from Feldman’s quietude, suggesting a history of resistance and resilience. But the modal melody that runs through the score seems to have a common genetic thread with the otherworldly song that Feldman first wrote down in childhood.

John Adams grew up in rural New England, in an environment saturated in the kind of Americana that is the stuff of classic films: Little League games, bands playing bandstands, spear-fishing, deer-hunting, and the like. His mother’s stepfather ran a lakeside marina and dance hall, where swing bands came through. At an early age Adams met Duke Ellington and got to sit down at the piano bench next to him. His full name, John Coolidge Adams, suggests a lineage that goes back deep into American history, though his father’s father was actually born in Sweden, “Adams” being short for “Adamson”.

The Americana of Ives and Copland is a substantial presence in Adams’s music, though his polymorphous style draws on a far wider array of influences: the late-Romantic sonorities of Wagner and Richard Strauss, the asymmetrical rhythms of Stravinsky and Ellington, the Manhattan Minimalism of Philip Glass and Steve Reich, the muscular lyricism of classic rock ‘n’ roll. Most of his music is rooted in tonality, yet he often couches conventional harmony in an ironic sensibility. In his breakthrough 1987 opera *Nixon in China*, the character of Richard Nixon waxes lyrical about the wide-open American landscape, yet the surrounding instrumentation hints at the paranoia that would turn Nixon into a monster of reaction. *John’s Book of Alleged Dances*, a suite of pieces for string quartet, are much lighter and more playful in their manipulation of popular styles, suggesting memories of those nights on the bandstand in New Hampshire, with nostalgic airs wafting over the restless waters of Lake Winnepesaukee.

In the Europe of old, leading musical families produced multiple generations of composers: the Bachs, the Scarlattis, the Couperins. Whether a dynasty will emerge from the Adams



Immigrants disembarking from a ship at Ellis Island in New York, 1907.

line remains to be seen, but Samuel Carl Adams, John's son, has established a significant career independent of his father, his vocabulary shaped by the vast array of impulses available to a young composer in the digital age. The ensemble for *Echo Transcriptions*, written for Richard Tognetti and the Australian Chamber Orchestra, includes not only a solo electric-violin part but also an electric bass and a synth bass. These timbres may trigger associations either with pop music or with the 20th-century avant-garde. Notwithstanding the fields of distortion, a clear tonal centre is audible in the unfolding of the principal melody, which begins and ends in the area of E-flat major. Adams describes this line as "a series of waves", as "one unbroken line that crests and falls". Listeners may decide for themselves whether anything recognisably American resides in the music: they may be more inclined to hear the rhythm of the oceans that encircle our invented nations and are rising inexorably against their shores.



Untitled (detail), 1981. Artwork by Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988).



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Sam Adams. Photo by Lenny+Gonzalez

WORKING WITH UNCERTAINTY

Contemporary composer Samuel Adams
desires to give audiences a little clarity
in the midst of the world's mess.

Written by Kate Holden

Kate Holden is a writer and the author of two acclaimed memoirs, *In My Skin* and *The Romantic*, and nonfiction book *The Winter Road*.

On the first morning of the first day of this year, Samuel Adams sat down to compose a piece of work like nothing he'd done before. He was back in San Francisco in a new apartment, with a new baby and his wife, a violinist, had just returned to work. It was a moment of pressure: he figured he had only five months to finish the piece, a short electric violin concerto co-commissioned by the ACO and Stanford Live. Previously Adams has been commissioned by the two and produced *Movements (for us and them)* (2018), inspired by the Baroque *concerto grosso* form. This was to be different. Adams had been walking in vastness.

"I was basically by myself, going on really long walks every day in the desert," he says of his time living in Reno, Nevada during the height of the pandemic, "and paying attention to the minute changes over the course of the 18 months I was there. I think being out there really changed me. Being in the rhythm of life that didn't change day to day, didn't have the kind of interruptions that we'd encountered in the pre-Covid times. So that feeling of being in a kind of mental space with few external interruptions somehow made its way into this piece. I think you'll hear that very clearly."

The son of legendary composer John Adams and photographer Deborah O'Grady, Adams has had few opportunities to slow down. A graduate of Stanford University and student performer on double bass, he is now in his late 30s and has an impressive reputation for contemporary classical work through an array of musical disciplines, including classical modes, improvised music, field recordings and his acclaimed work with electronic instrumentation in the classical arena. His willingness to collaborate, explore new forms and produce music for a variety of audiences has seen him gain commissions and residencies from orchestras and conductors both American and international,

The son of legendary
composer John Adams and
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O'Grady, Adams has had few
opportunities to slow down.

Adams, who had an instant rapport with Tognetti over electronic music when they met nearly 10 years ago, is thrilled when the initial compositional ideas are completely transcended by those he calls “a master musician, like the members of the ACO.”

and in 2019 he was given a Guggenheim Fellowship. Working across the world in many spaces he has become fascinated with resonance – “how space affects how we listen” – and with the potential for electric instruments to transform the relationship between composer and performers.

“With the electric violin, you can really make it sound like anything,” he observes. “You can make it sound like a wall of noise, like a synthesiser, literally have it do anything. But Richard is fundamentally a violinist, so the challenge with this piece was really to find that fine balance between allowing the instrument to function in a way that pays tribute to his expertise as an acoustic violin player, while also giving him the opportunity to explore sonically.”

Adams, who had an instant rapport with Tognetti over electronic music when they met nearly 10 years ago, is thrilled when the initial compositional ideas are completely transcended by those he calls “a master musician, like the members of the ACO. That is a very satisfying thing when that happens. When you realise you’ve created enough interpretive flexibility in your music that it can sound better than you had anticipated”. For this work, he says, “I have a couple of general sonic ideas that I’m encouraging him to explore, like I would with an acoustic violin piece, but I’m taking a step back, to let Richard make those big sonic decisions. I’m really curious to see what he does with it.”

Working with uncertainty was part of *Echo Transcriptions* from the start. “Paradoxically, when I’m feeling the burn of a deadline I find myself writing more intuitively. I don’t have as much time to analyse every little detail and second-guess everything.” Everything in the piece is tested, he hastens to add. “When I started it I just had a very simple impulse and I let it go. It’s really just this one simple idea that gradually transforms, in the way it’s orchestrated and also in the way that the electronic manipulations evolve over the 12 minutes of the piece. I’ve never done anything like this before.”

The score undulates, braids and surges across the measures: “it’s a series of waves, it’s one 12-minute unbroken line that crests and falls – there’s no breath, really, in the entire work.” Adams was cresting new parenthood, a global crisis, a relocation, a time of hectic social flux and reassuring natural rhythms; surfers will recognise the oceanic swells of this music.

“I thought a lot during the pandemic about what I want my audiences to hear, about creating a piece that is uplifting,” he says thoughtfully. “I certainly feel that is the hardest thing to do. It’s much easier to wallow in despair and write dark, grey music – I can do that, I think anyone can do that. So with this piece I really wanted to challenge myself to make something that felt grounded, and uplifting at the same time, that had a sense of weight and aims upwards.

“I try to reinvent myself with every piece, which of course is impossible, because with every piece I’m forced – if I’m really, truly composing – to ask myself what fundamentally matters to me, and those things don’t change. It sounds so banal to say this, but the moments in my life that have the most meaning are musical moments: whether that’s attending a concert or hanging out with my friends in the car, listening to something, and maybe escaping for a little bit, or engaging with an idea that is refracted through sound. These are the moments which I think have made me who I am. I want to be able to provide similar moments to people, since I’ve been given so many of these experiences as a listener.

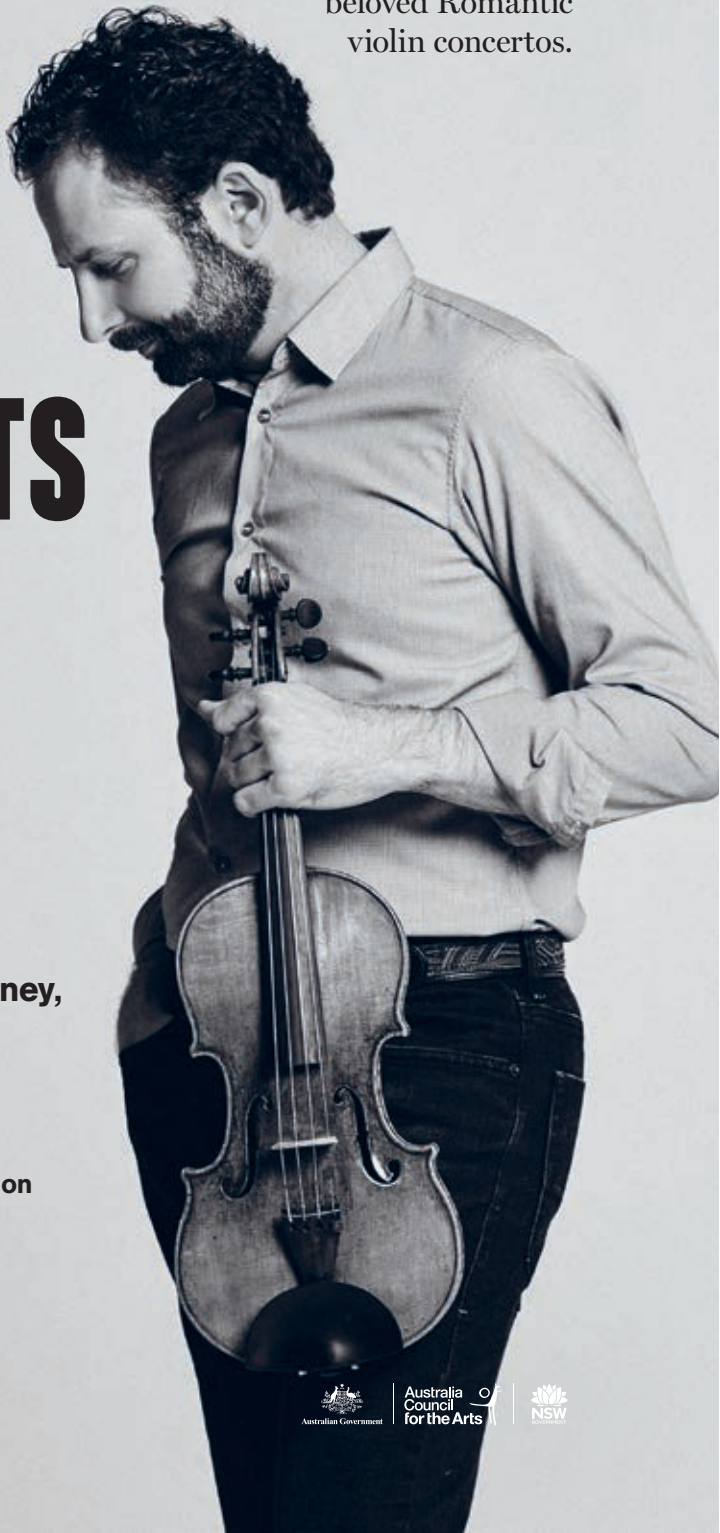
“Even if it means that I can move someone once every five years, I think it’s worth it. Especially right now. The world’s an incredibly messy, difficult place and if I can create something that sheds a little bit of light, or creates a little bit of clarity for a listener, whether that’s another musician or someone who’s happened to stumble into the concert hall or had an algorithm on Spotify show them one of my pieces, if I can create a little bit of clarity for others, that’s really what I’m after.”





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RICHARD TOGNETTI

Artistic Director

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 of 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, he 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, most recently as soloist and director with the Melbourne and Tasmanian symphony orchestras.



Richard also performed the Australian premieres of Ligeti's Violin Concerto and Lutosławski's Partita. He was appointed the Barbican Centre's first Artist-in-Residence at Milton Court Concert Hall in London in 2016. 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 was the co-composer of the score for Peter Weir's *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*, starring Russell Crowe; he co-composed the soundtrack to Tom Carroll's surf film *Storm Surfers*; and created *The Red Tree*, inspired by Shaun Tan's book. He also created the documentary film *Musica Surfica*, as well as *The Glide*, *The Reef* and *The Crowd & I*. Richard collaborated with Director Jennifer Peedom and Stranger Than Fiction to create the films *Mountain* and *River* for the ACO, the former of which went on to become the highest-grossing homegrown documentary in Australian cinemas ever following its release.

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 1999. He performs on the 1743 'Carrodus' Guarneri del Gesù violin, lent to him by an anonymous Australian private benefactor.

THE ACO



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

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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, *Indies & Idols*, and the soundtrack to the cinematic collaboration, *River*.

In 2020 the ACO launched its inaugural digital subscription 'ACO StudioCasts', an acclaimed award-winning season of cinematic and immersive concert films.

aco.com.au



ABC Classic have released the latest in ACO's series of live concert recordings: ***Indies & Idols***.

This digital release features music by Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood, The National's Bryce Dessner, and Sufjan Stevens, presented alongside their musical idols: Polish composers Witold Lutosławski and Krzysztof Penderecki.

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SPOTLIGHT ON BNP PARIBAS

We recently caught up with Karine Delvallée, CEO of BNP Paribas Australia and New Zealand, to discuss music and growing the next generation of Australian musicians.

Karine, you are a passionate supporter of the ACO. Tell us a little about your connection with music and the arts.

I have always found inspiration and great joy in the creativity and beauty of the arts, and truly admire the discipline required to be an artist. Supporting the ACO ensures the ongoing success and development of this amazing orchestra and its musicians, allowing them to share their talents with the world.

Do you have a favourite music genre or style?

There is something special about the connection you experience when watching any live performance, and I enjoy listening to all forms of music. I have missed live performances over the last couple of years and am glad that they are returning to the stages across Australia and the world.

BNP Paribas has been a longstanding partner of the Orchestra since 2006, and supports visual and performing arts organisations across the world. Why are the arts meaningful to BNP Paribas globally?

The Bank is committed to supporting projects dedicated to social inclusion, the environment and culture because we know that philanthropy is a key lever for transformation, and this supports our commitment to creating a more prosperous and sustainable future. Our focus is on preserving and promoting cultural heritage and encouraging artistic expression. We believe culture provides an excellent platform for individual and social development, and that artistic creativity enriches and connects us as a society.

BNP Paribas is the Presenting Partner of ACO Academy and in 2021 launched the ACO BNP Paribas Pathway Scholarship. Why is it important for BNP Paribas to support young musicians?

We are extremely proud to sponsor both these programmes which are supporting and growing the next generation of Australian string musicians, providing them with training opportunities and real life mentoring, so they can reach for their dreams. BNP Paribas is committed to enriching the local communities in which we operate, and this is one example of how we are doing that in Australia.



BNP Paribas has a long history here in Australia. Can you tell us about how the business started, and how it operates today?

BNP Paribas is proud to be the oldest European Bank and the oldest French company to operate in Australia. We came here in response to the needs of clients who wanted to buy wool from Australia and ship it directly to France. It's a really nice link that our history supporting the wool trade locally mirrors the history of the ACO's spectacular new home at Pier 2/3 Walsh Bay, which was originally a wool stall!

In 2021, we celebrated this 140 year history of supporting the local economy, and we continue to be a major provider of financing to corporate Australia, with a focus on the top 150 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange.

Your career with BNP Paribas has taken you all over the world. Now travel is possible again, is there somewhere in Australia or New Zealand that is on your bucket list?

I enjoy discovering new cities, meeting new people and immersing myself in the local culture. As for my bucket list, I have not yet been able to visit Australia's Red Centre and would like to see Uluru, and learn more about the culture and history of its traditional owners and the surrounding lands.

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Olli Mustonen. Photo by Julian Kingma.

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

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

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To discuss making a donation to the ACO, or if you would like to direct your support in other ways, please contact Jill Colvin, Director of Philanthropy & Partnerships, on (02) 8274 3835.

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