

Australian Chamber Orchestra

RICHARD TOGNETTI – ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



ILYA GRINGOLTS PLAYS BRUCH

Program in Short

The music you're
about to hear

p.10

Master of Strings

Ilya Gringolts is a
violinist's violinist

p.18

The Truth Slant

In conversation with
Harry Sdraulig

p.30



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

INSIDE



Welcome

From the ACO's Managing Director Richard Evans

p.2



News

What's coming up with the ACO

p.3



Musicians on Stage

Players on stage for this performance

p.6



Program in Short

The music you're about to hear

p.10



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p.18



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In conversation with Harry Sdraulig

p.30

WELCOME

Welcome to ACO 2023!

We couldn't be more delighted to be back from the summer break to perform for you, opening our 2023 Season with the return of our dear friend, the extraordinary violin virtuoso Ilya Gringolts.

Ilya had us utterly spellbound during his debut in 2018, and we immediately knew that he would become a regular ACO collaborator. For these performances, he directs the Orchestra through a rich and diverse program of music, from one of the most beloved Romantic violin works, the Bruch Concerto, through to the world premiere of a new work from the wonderful Australian composer Harry Sdraulig, commissioned by the ACO with generous support from Rob and Nancy Pallin.

This concert represents so much that we have to look forward to in our 2023 Season – virtuosity, innovation, and profound musicality. As ACO concertgoers, we know that you are musical explorers, and we look forward to joining you on another rich and surprising musical journey throughout the year.

Next up, we reunite with another great friend of the ACO, the much-loved oud virtuoso Joseph Tawadros, for a thrilling escapade through Venice and the Middle East in Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. If you haven't yet got your tickets, I urge you not to miss it – it promises to be quite the adventure.



Richard Evans
Managing Director

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#ACO23Season |     

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News



LSH Auto Australia

NEW PARTNERSHIP

We are pleased to announce our partnership with LSH Auto Australia, the nation's leading Mercedes-Benz retail group.

"The partnership with the ACO is founded both on the shared principle of commitment to excellence and the strong connection our customers have with the arts and culture, including the very best of musical performance."

John Good, Managing Director, LSH Auto Australia

Coming up

FEBRUARY



ACO Up Close: Ilya Gringolts Solo

14 FEBRUARY

ACO Pier 2/3, Sydney

Ilya Gringolts steps away from the Orchestra for one night only in an intimate solo recital of stunning Baroque music, including a selection of iconic music by Bach and his contemporaries in this special Valentine's Day concert.



To Whom I May Concern

24 & 25 FEBRUARY

ACO Pier 2/3, Sydney

In this unique collaboration between the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Group Homes Australia, UNSW and Dementia Australia, individuals share their poignant stories of living with dementia through theatre and live music.

MARCH



ACO & ANAM Up Close: From New York to Northern Lights

5 & 6 MARCH

Sydney & Melbourne

Musicians from the ACO and the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) showcase the brightest new-generation composers, including Nico Muhly, Missy Mazzoli and Ólafur Arnalds.



The Four Seasons

11-27 MARCH

National Tour

Join two Australian greats, Richard Tognetti and oud virtuoso Joseph Tawadros, as they unite for an exhilarating adventure through the seasons.



ACO Up Close: Tawadros Brothers

24 MARCH

ACO Pier 2/3, Sydney

Brothers Joseph and James Tawadros are a musical phenomenon. They present an intimate duo concert on oud and riq at ACO Pier 2/3 on Sydney Harbour.

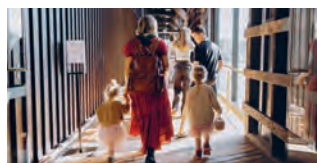


ACO Collective with James Crabb

25 MARCH

ACO Pier 2/3, Sydney

Classical accordionist James Crabb joins ACO Collective, led by Helena Rathbone and featuring some of Australia's most talented young professional string players, to perform this program infused with the world of folk music.



ACO Family Day

26 MARCH

ACO Pier 2/3, Sydney

Bring the whole family along to Pier 2/3 for a day on the harbour. Enjoy a special concert experience with renowned accordionist James Crabb, followed by creative play activities, for children to engage with music-making in a hands-on way.

**“Exemplary. You could
smell the seasons.”**

– The Australian



Australian
Chamber
Orchestra

**Richard Tognetti, Joseph Tawadros and the
Australian Chamber Orchestra in Vivaldi's**

THE FOUR SEASONS

11–27 MARCH

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*Prices vary according to venue, concert and reserve. Booking fees apply. Transaction fee of \$7.50 applies.

PROGRAM

Ilya Gringolts Director and Violin
Australian Chamber Orchestra

FELIX MENDELSSOHN	String Symphony No.13 in C minor "Sinfoniesatz"	6
HARRY SDRAULIG	Slanted* (world premiere)	11
FRANK MARTIN	Polyptyque <i>I. Image de Rameaux (Palm Sunday)</i> <i>II. Image de la Chambre Haute (The Last Supper)</i> <i>III. Image de Jude (Judas)</i> <i>IV. Image de Géthsémané (Gethsemane)</i> <i>V. Image de Jugement (The Judgement)</i> <i>VI. Image de la Glorification (The Glorification)</i>	25
INTERVAL		20
MAX BRUCH (arr. Bernard Rofe)	Violin Concerto No.1 in G minor, Op.26 <i>I. Prelude. Allegro moderato –</i> <i>II. Adagio</i> <i>III. Finale. Allegro energico</i>	24
GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ	Concerto for String Orchestra <i>I. Allegro</i> <i>II. Andante</i> <i>III. Vivo</i>	15

* Commissioned by the Australian Chamber Orchestra with generous support from Rob and Nancy Pallin, to celebrate Rob's 80th birthday.

The concert will last approximately 2 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.

Ilya Gringolts plays Bruch will be broadcast on Saturday 11 February, 1pm 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.



Aiko Goto
Violin

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



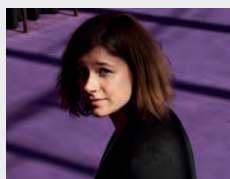
Mark Ingwersen
Violin

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.



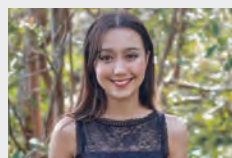
Liisa Pallandi
Violin

Liisa plays a 1759 Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin 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.



Véronique Serret #
Violin

Veronique plays a 1900 violin by Leandro Bisiach.



Tim Yu #
Violin

Tim plays an 1800 violin by R&A Gagliano.



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.



Carl Lee

Viola

Carl plays a Bernd Hiller viola from Marcneukirchen, Germany.



Andrew Jezek

Viola

Andrew plays a 1909 viola by Anton Kreuzinger.



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.



Julian Thompson

Cello

Julian plays a 1729 Giuseppe Guarneri filius Andreae 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.



Charlotte Miles

Cello

Charlotte plays a c.1760 cello by Joseph Hill, generously on loan from Jannie Brown.



Eliza Sdraulig

Cello

Eliza plays a 2011 cello by Roberto Cavagnoli.



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.



Axel Ruge

Bass

Axel plays a c.1830 bass by Thomas Kennedy, London, kindly on loan for this tour from Maxime Bibeau.



Brian Nixon

Timpani

Brian plays a 1999 German 2 Lefima Baroque-styled, belt-driven, calf-headed copper timpani. His Chair is sponsored by Robert Albert AO & Libby Albert.

Guest Musicians



Ilya Gringolts performing with the Australian Chamber Orchestra in 2018. Photo by Julian Kingma



10

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.

Newcastle City Hall
Jack Stephens
Thu 2 Feb, 6.45pm

Melbourne Recital Centre
Toby Chadd
Sat 4 Feb, 6.45pm

Arts Centre Melbourne
Kym Dillon
Sun 5 Feb, 1.45pm

Melbourne Recital Centre
Kym Dillon
Mon 6 Feb, 6.45pm

City Recital Hall, Sydney
Jack Stephens
Tue 7 Feb, 7.15pm
Wed 8 Feb, 6.15pm
Sat 11 Feb, 6.15pm

Sydney Opera House
Jack Stephens
Sun 12 Feb 1.15pm

QPAC Concert
Hall, Brisbane
Matthew Hodge
Mon 13 Feb, 6.15pm

Llewellyn Hall, Canberra
Kim Cunio
Wed 15 Feb, 7.15pm

Pre-concert speakers are subject to change.



Felix Mendelssohn

(1809–1847)

String Symphony No.13 in C minor “Sinfoniesatz”

The young Felix Mendelssohn grew up in a Berlin household that fostered an abundance of music making. It played host to regular salons and concerts during which visitors would enjoy music and dignified conversation with philosophers, artists and diplomats. It was in this environment that a 16-year-old Mendelssohn composed his *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Octet for strings*.

For many years, these wondrous musical achievements seemed too good to be true, but in 1950 a collection of manuscripts were uncovered that confirmed Mendelssohn's brilliance as a child prodigy: 13 string symphonies written when Mendelssohn was between 12 and 14 years old. These dazzling works show the influence of Mendelssohn's favourite composers: Beethoven, Haydn, and especially Bach.

Mendelssohn only completed the first movement of his final string symphony, which is now known as “Sinfoniesatz” (symphony movement). As a standalone movement, it is an effective concert overture: it opens with an arresting *Grave* featuring dotted French overture rhythms, followed by a heavily contrapuntal *Allegro*.



Harry Sdraulig

(1992–)

Slanted

World Premiere

One of Australia's most prolific rising stars, Sydney-based composer Harry Sdraulig has had his music performed by most major Australian symphony orchestras, as well as the Goldner, Orava and Australian String Quartets. His *Fantasia on Waltzing Matilda*, commissioned by Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott, was released by Sony Classical and is widely performed and broadcast internationally.

The composer writes:

In a technical sense, the work constitutes a set of 18 variations on an opening theme which, as the title suggests, is “slanted” in its pitch architecture: most of the melodic and harmonic material throughout slopes in one direction or another. However, these variations flow seamlessly enough for the structure of the overall piece to be perceived by the listener as being in two parts: the first fast and frenetic, and the second slow and lyrical.

Of course, the term “slanted” carries with it distinct present-day connotations in the political and social spheres. Without wishing to advocate for any particular angle, I have become increasingly aware in recent years of how much one's personal beliefs about themselves and the world are influenced by personally lived experiences (of which the sample size is often very small), news and social media consumption, and broad, often unquestioned cultural narratives to the effect that navigating any path towards the “truth” is often a helpless task.



Frank Martin

(1890–1974)

Polyptyque

Swiss composer Frank Martin was commissioned by violinist Yehudi Menuhin to compose *Polyptyque* for the 25th jubilee of the Internationales Musikfest in 1973. Now considered a 20th-century masterpiece, Menuhin said, “When I play Martin’s *Polyptyque*, I feel the same elevation of soul as with Bach’s *Chaconne*.” Martin was greatly influenced by religious subject material, and his scoring for double string orchestra draws inspiration from Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*, with the solo violin acting as both Christ and Evangelist.

On his inspiration, Martin says:

It was when I saw in Siena a polyptyque depicting, in a series of miniatures, the various episodes of the Passion, that I was inspired to try to express the episodes in music. As music is an abstract art I could only seek to transpose the essence of my own personal reaction to those scenes in music.

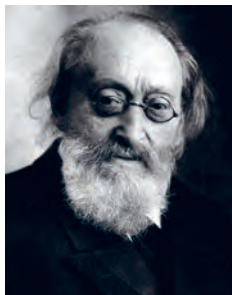
In the *Images des Rameaux* (Palm Sunday) I saw a crowd who clamour to see Christ entering Jerusalem: a crowd who strew palm leaves in his path as they surround and acclaim him. The violin solo reveals Christ’s realisation of the frailty of this momentary human glory.

The *Image de la Chambre Haute* (The Last Supper) is the gathering where Christ bids farewell to his disciples: the anguished questions that they ask him and his loving replies.

The *Image de Juda* (Judas) is that of a man full of anguish, tortured at heart: above all of a soul obsessed, who ends by sinking into despair.

The *Image de Géthsémané* is that of solitary anguish, intense prayer, “If Thou be willing remove this cup from me”, and finally total acceptance: “Not My will but Thine be done.”

The *Image du Jugement* is all the horror of the wild crowd’s sadistic enjoyment of the sight of suffering, leading to the Road of the Cross. Having arrived there, I felt that the only possible ending was the *Image de la Glorification*.



Max Bruch

(1838–1920)

Violin Concerto No.1 in G minor, Op.26

Arranged for violin, string orchestra and timpani by Bernard Rofe

The celebrated violinist Joseph Joachim said that, of the four great German violin concertos, “The richest, the most seductive was written by Max Bruch.” The concerto has gone on to become Bruch’s enduring masterpiece – not only his most-performed work, but one of the most popular violin concertos in the entire repertoire. After its initial premiere, Bruch revised the concerto with considerable help from Joachim, who then performed and championed the work alongside the concertos of Beethoven, Brahms and Mendelssohn.

Bruch had originally called the first movement of this concerto *Introduzione-Fantasia* but changed the title to *Vorspiel (Prelude)*. He involves the soloist from the outset, breaking from the tradition of a long orchestral introduction. (A brave decision, considering Joachim’s conservative views on form and structure.) The violin opens with a passionate, searching lament that almost sounds improvised, interrupted repeatedly by operatic orchestral accompaniment. This gives way to the main body of the first movement, with constant pulsing rhythms in the orchestra creating a brooding, dramatic setting for the violin to perform flamboyant passagework.

The undoubted heart of the concerto is the *Adagio*, one of the richest and most touching movements in the concerto repertoire. Starting with a solo violin melody of great tenderness, the movement progresses through every kind of musical rapture before finally dying away in a moment of perfect sweetness. The *Finale* is an energetic Hungarian dance, concluding the Concerto with generous doses of bravado and gypsy flair.



Grażyna Bacewicz

(1909–1969)

Concerto for String Orchestra

The Concerto for String Orchestra is often regarded as Polish composer Grażyna Bacewicz's magnum opus, and remains her most frequently performed work. Considered one of the finest examples of neoclassicism in Polish music, the Concerto makes numerous references to Classical and Baroque idioms in what has been called "a modern *Brandenburg Concerto*."

The first movement combines elements of the Baroque concerto grosso and Classical sonata form. Bacewicz's sweeping opening theme becomes intertwined in a series of counterpoints throughout the orchestra, giving way to new and wonderful themes. The second movement is a lyrical cantilena, with solo passages from the cellos, violas and violins singing over a lullaby-like ostinato. These lead to a climax of heightened expression, before disappearing into quietude. In the finale, Bacewicz presents a cross between traditional rondo and sonata forms, developing vigorous, folk-like motifs with irregular accents and motoric, broken pulses.

The Concerto was premiered in 1950 during a General Assembly of the Polish Composers' Union, and soon won the State Prize. A friend of the composer noted that Bacewicz's Concerto had saved the honour of Polish music, which had admittedly been dominated by men up to that point: "Her Concerto for String Orchestra, written with panache and energy, full of smooth invention and brilliant instrumentation ideas, finally stirred us from our lethargy. The piece draws on some Bach or Handel ... We finally got a 'red-blooded piece' of wholesome and delicious music written with a creative power that is truly virile."



Ilya Gringolts performing with the Australian Chamber Orchestra in 2018. Photo by Julian Kingma



18



MASTER OF STRINGS

A violinist's violinist, the virtuosity of Ilya Gringolts means that he can play almost anything.

Written by Kate Holden

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

“When an amazing violinist stops the car and goes, ‘I have to know who this guy is’,” says ACO cellist Julian Thompson, “you know there’s something going on.”

The violinist was Richard Tognetti and “this guy” was Ilya Gringolts performing Paganini on the radio. A few years later, in 2018, Gringolts collaborated with the ACO on a thrilling Australian tour featuring his iconic incarnation of Paganini, as well as works by Bartók, Vivaldi and CPE Bach. “He’d go out there and play like a complete god,” remembers Thompson, “and then come out for a beer afterwards.”

Now the soloist and the ACO are close friends and Gringolts returns for a second concert tour with a characteristically wide-ranging program. “We’re going to get a lot out of Ilya while he’s here,” says Thompson cheerfully. “We get a few days of rehearsal and then play 10 concerts. And a program evolves over 10 concerts. You get deeper into the vernacular of whatever composer it is, and obviously you get to know the director much better over the time. So it gives you a meatier relationship than with fly-in-fly-out musos. Someone like Ilya coming in, who has this really rich and broad perspective, from the Baroque to music written yesterday, he brings some real fibre to this.”

With a muso like Ilya Gringolts there is a lot to encounter. The Russian-born violinist is celebrated for his scintillating virtuosic talent, which saw him, aged 16, become the youngest-ever winner of the International Violin Competition Premio Paganini and undertake some – occasionally fraught – adolescent study under Itzhak Perlman at New York’s Juilliard School before a soaring career as a soloist. He has played with leading orchestras across the globe, had ecstatic reviews of his many recordings and founded the Gringolts Quartet with his wife, the Armenian violinist Anahit Kurtikyan, who has also worked with the ACO. He is known for his intellectual rigour and restless questing, experimenting with period instruments, iconoclastic attitudes to vibrato and reconnoitring the many kingdoms of music – from the lush valleys of Baroque to the misty altitudes of contemporary classical.

Gringolts is an innate experimenter, as Thompson points out. “He enters these exploratory realms of playing with gut strings and exploring baroque techniques and styles; then he does that flipside of really contemporary stuff where the ink’s still drying. He has this really wide, enquiring mind about how he approaches things and what he’s looking for, but also when he talks he references the old grand masters of the violin, how they approached the instrument and sound. He’s such an interesting mix of all those things.”



ACO cellist
Julian Thompson

“I see my work as a bit of an archaeologist,” Gringolts explains. “I like things to be historically correct – including music from the recent past. So I’ll listen to the recordings of the time or I’ll read books about it. The process itself is fascinating to me and the ACO is known for that approach as well.”

Now – after much brainstorming and preparation between the ACO office in Sydney and Gringolts in his hometown of Zürich – the explorations continue in a program that vigorously mixes the canonical and the contemporary. Both soloist and orchestra are devoted to such combinations and each program is a work of art in itself.

Gringolts reflects on the puzzle of its devising: “The usual problem with choosing a program to do, with a string orchestra especially, is that there’s so much material out there, and at the same time you want to have a thread in your program and kind of make everyone happy, including yourselves and make it diverse – not necessarily in a fashionable sense of the word but in a true sense, where you have different characters and different years and different types of music, but at the same time, it doesn’t look like patchwork.”

The Russian-born violinist is celebrated for his scintillating virtuosic talent, which saw him, aged 16, become the youngest-ever winner of the International Violin Competition Premio Paganini and undertake some – occasionally fraught – adolescent study under Itzhak Perlman at New York’s Juilliard School before a soaring career as a soloist.

He is excited by the result. “You want to check all the boxes, if possible. Then what binds them together? I think maybe human emotion, that’s universal,” he says. “Of course, you can always find a kind of superficial thread that binds things and that can work, or maybe not work so well. But I think we’re looking for something deeper than that. Something that holds this music together. The emotion that’s in it. Here, I think you have sort of a bit of everything for everyone. You have a great forgotten piece. You have the child prodigy piece. And then a really intense piece, very serious.”

The tone is set by the gorgeous Bruch violin concerto. It’s a piece, Gringolts reminds us, that’s not even in the repertoire of string orchestra. “This piece is one of the most performed works for violin and orchestra of all time probably,” he says. “It’s irresistible in its own way – the kind of hit that you know immediately why it is where it is. A real crowd pleaser classic.” The ACO decided to make one of their celebrated adaptations and their in-house arranger Bernard Rofe has produced a version for strings and timpani. “I’m looking forward to it. It will be very interesting to see how it goes without the winds and without the big orchestra.”

“For Ilya to come out and play the Bruch is really exciting, to see what he brings to that kind of big Romantic repertoire,” says Thompson. “While we do play up to the scale of big symphonic repertoire, with expanded forces, it’s always interesting for us in the chamber orchestra to downsize repertoire originally written for a symphony. That’s quite a creative process unto itself.”

The Mendelssohn is an agreeable new piece for Gringolts: “I know many of the symphonies, which are really marvels of a child talent.” Mendelssohn composed his *Symphoniesatz* in 1823–4 at the age of 14 as the last work in an early burst of creativity that produced 12 other string symphonies. “These are masterworks. And this will be the first time I get to play it. I think it’s actually one of his most powerful little symphonies – well, it’s really just one movement. But it’s so *packed*. So full of energy and wonderfully crafted. His trademark is all over it.”

Another youthful artist presented is Australian Harry Sdraulig with *Slanted*, a set of 18 variations massed in two parts that was commissioned by the ACO and written in late 2022. “This world premiere is very exciting,” says Gringolts. “I know Harry’s music and it’s wonderfully energetic and full of ideas, so I’m looking forward to that. And for me personally it is always important to include new pieces in any program. This is what we what we all strive to do.”

New music these days, he says, often gets sandwiched around the canon favourites. "I think the best solution would be to actually have more new music on the podium than old music, so to speak, but this is not always realistic. And we also have to deal with the fact that we simply have so much baggage now, all this great stuff that's out there to be performed. So many things have to be sacrificed, unfortunately; new music gets sacrificed first. But you know, I'm doing what I can to change it."

Gringolts' singular devotion to supporting new work has seen him establish, with Ilan Volkov, the I&I Foundation to commission it. "This is what we used to do a hundred years ago," he says. "Somehow it got lost along the way, supporting the living composers and music that's hot off the press. And with new works we have the luxury of the composer being there. I really look forward to working with Harry, getting his input and feedback. This is what's really fascinating for me generally playing music: having this immediate connection. This direct link that you spend hours searching for with older music. Here it's there for you to use."

The piece on the program that perhaps most enthralled him is Frank Martin's *Polyptyque*, a religious devotional based on sacred paintings in Siena. "It is a piece that almost makes you uncomfortable because it's so personal. It speaks about life and

“On the surface it’s about Jesus Christ and Golgotha and the resurrection story, but it’s much more than that. It’s profoundly human. So personal it sort of makes you feel uncomfortable at times, but it’s amazing music ... I have a suspicion that that’s why it’s not performed enough. It’s so intense.”



love and death, guilt, redemption, all the important big topics, stuffed into a 25-minute piece,” he says. “On the surface it’s about Jesus Christ and Golgotha and the resurrection story, but it’s much more than that. It’s profoundly human. So personal it sort of makes you feel uncomfortable at times, but it’s amazing music ... I have a suspicion that that’s why it’s not performed enough. It’s so intense.”

This will be the ACO’s first performance of the 1973 masterpiece by the Swiss composer, which was commissioned and debuted by Yehudi Menuhin. Gringolts has played it two or three times in his career. “The ACO is the right outfit to really get into it, to dig into the true emotions,” he says. Thompson is glad of the collaboration as they approach this intricate and sublime work: “It’s great to have someone who knows repertoire like that and has played it before, to help the orchestra find its voice in it.”



Episodes from Christ's Passion and Resurrection, reverse surface from the altarpiece in the Cathedral of Siena, 1308–1311, by Duccio di Buoninsegna (ca. 1255 – pre-1319). Scenes from the altarpiece inspired Frank Martin's *Polyptyque*.
 © NPL – DeA Picture Library / G. Nimatallah / Bridgeman Images

Having surmounted the Martin, the musicians conclude with the Concerto for String Orchestra by another 20th-century European composer, Grażyna Bacewicz, also a solo violinist and pianist and again a new experience for Gringolts. "Bacewicz is one of these best-kept secrets who I think is slowly becoming no longer a secret," he enthuses. "And that is good news. Because there's so much, so *much* great music that she wrote. I mean, this is someone who wrote seven violin *concerti*; you don't see this kind of thing maybe since Vivaldi."

The Polish neo-classicist and Sonorist wrote an abundance of nuanced works, many complex and rewarding to new ears, and the 1948 Concerto – one of the outstanding works of Polish classical music – is remarkable for its facility with both traditional and modern modes, again including the Baroque. "You're going to hear Hollywood, you can hear Stravinsky and the French

Gringolts' technical skills are beyond doubt and his expressive coaxing of beauty is apparent in every recording. Yet virtuosic playing is beyond this: it is something that makes a colleague stop a car in wonder.

influence. But she makes it her own. And this is for me the first time of playing her pieces. That's something I missed in my education, that I feel really bad about, but I'm thankful also to the ACO for giving me the opportunity to do this."

Gringolts' technical skills are beyond doubt and his expressive coaxing of beauty is apparent in every recording. Yet virtuosic playing is beyond this: it is something that makes a colleague stop a car in wonder. It must feel extraordinary to be that person, doing those things. "There's some distance involved," he reveals. "I mean, at least for me, when you're on stage you have to be kind of above it, you can't be *in* it. The audience might think that you're in it, but you're not really there." It can be seen in a filmed performance with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra when Gringolts was 11: his little young face motionless with absorption above relentlessly flying fingers. "'Automatic', you might say, but 'automatic' sounds bad, as if you have no control over it; of course you do. The distance is important."

But if that sounds cold, his three decades of devotion, his hard-won confidence and perpetual exploration suggest there is also delight. "Some languages actually have two words for play," he observes. "You know, one is actual play as in 'playing a game'; then there's *playing* the instrument. I think as soon as you can do both on an instrument you're basically okay. So just making the sound obviously is not enough. Just playing with the music also, not enough. But once you have both something is probably bound to happen. Of course, it's easier said than done." He shrugs. "Ten thousand hours later, you might still not be at that point, but you're on your way."

And when he works with like-minded spirits, the spontaneity of adventure meets the precision of accomplishment. With the ACO friendship, Gringolts appreciates another singular musical entity. “Violinists don’t actually really get along very often,” he says, laughing. “But, in this case, I think you have to admire the sheer ingenuity of the musicmaking. That amazing kind of creativity that Richard has. Actually, everyone in this ensemble has always fascinated me. The way they interact. The way they *sculpt* the music on stage: there’s no pattern. It really feels like every bar, every little phrase is thought through and at the same time another kind of narrative feels improvised as well. So it’s both; I mean, some of it at the same time is spontaneous but you do see how much work has been put into it. So this kind of duality is what makes it so special. It’s a one of a kind experience and I’m very lucky to be part of it.”

Musicians, Thompson observes, enjoy a long arc – “through all those decades and decades of making music, a sort of transformation and development”. “I imagine that someone like Ilya, who seems even to us professional musicians to have not a technical care in the world, is still working on technique, so that his ability as a musical *storyteller* gets better and more direct. The idea is that you get closer and closer to a state of having musical ideas and being so in tune with your instrument that you can realise those ideas – straight away.” A program that involves new works, new encounters with old works, and a renewed relationship with fellow musicians is part of this evolution.

“He can obviously play *anything* on the instrument,” marvels Thompson. “I mean, he’s a *freak*, and I say that in the nicest possible way. In that last tour we did, he would play different encores every night after the Paganini and some of them he played with such ease they almost sounded like different pieces from the versions you’d heard before. No technical impediments whatsoever. He’s legitimately a monster. Well,” the cellist says, deadpan, “it’s only 33cm of violin string: how hard can it be?” ●





Ilya Gringolts performing with the Australian Chamber Orchestra in 2018. Photo by Julian Kingma

30



THE TRUTH SLANT

Drawing from the richness of the early 20th century, rising Australian composer Harry Sdraulig reaches for passion and complexity in his work.

Written by Steve Dow

Steve Dow is an arts and culture writer who writes for publications including *The Saturday Paper*, *Guardian Australia*, *The Monthly*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and *Limelight*. He was the recipient of the 2020 Walkley Arts Journalism Award.

“Slanted” is a word for the internet age, says composer Harry Sdraulig.

“Things are slanted everywhere around us. Articles are written in media in a certain way and tone to persuade a certain interpretation, especially in politics. Where is the truth in that?”

Sdraulig is explaining how his premiere work for the Australian Chamber Orchestra, *Slanted*, was constructed. The composition, says the bespectacled, bearded 30-year-old, is filled with “music ideas that slant in one direction or another”.

“At the beginning is a repeated G ostinato [a repeated motif], supported by pizzicato and string harmonics. But beneath the violas and second violins there are movements up and down, kind of slants off the slope of that,” he says. “It starts in that very focused way, then grows quickly into something a little out of control.”

What was the lockdown era like for the young composer? “It was a mixture of good and bad,” he reflects. “I had concerts lined up, much like everybody else. They got cancelled and for a couple of months it looked pretty scary. But the slight silver lining was a lot of ensembles and musicians were starting to produce recordings of videos online. For that reason, some of [my] recordings reached a much bigger audience than they otherwise would have.”

Sdraulig, who is the brother of ACO Emerging Artist alumna Eliza Sdraulig, grew up in Ivanhoe, in Melbourne’s north-east suburbs. His mother, a former art curator, is of Polish heritage, while his lawyer father’s family is Italian, and his brother Charlie is a composer as well. “My family was extremely supportive,” he says. “Music was made a priority for us.”

Sdraulig lectures in musical composition at the University of Sydney, where he is finishing a Doctor of Musical Arts, and continues to teach young students. As its financial necessity has retreated, he has realised how much he loves teaching. “Especially secondary students,” he says, “budding composers in year 11 or year 12.”

His own music reaches for “passionate melodic lyricism, harmonic richness and intricacy of rhythmic interplay and drive”. He has an eye for pre-1950s classical composers, citing Polish composer Karol Szymanowski as an influence.

“I’ve listened to a lot of Ilya’s playing,” says Sdraulig. “To me, he’s one of the best in the world. On his YouTube channel [are so many comments] saying, ‘This guy is a genius’.

“I’ve always been drawn to that early 20th-century repertoire,” he says. “Post [Igor Stravinsky’s] *The Rite of Spring* and the [first world] war. Szymanowski is not the most performed composer. A lot of these composers have been forgotten, but I love their post-Romantic style ... Szymanowski combines a mysticism and atonality that’s very dear to me. Anybody who listens to my music will be able to spot some influence of that.”

How does he feel *Slanted* will sit in a program headlined by the Bruch violin concerto, one of the most popular Romantic works, played by Russian violinist Ilya Gringolts?

“I’ve listened to a lot of Ilya’s playing,” says Sdraulig. “To me, he’s one of the best in the world. On his YouTube channel [are so many comments] saying, ‘This guy is a genius’. There’s a very enthusiastic base of people, and I can understand why.”

Sdraulig is looking forward to hearing how Gringolts renders the score, in which he has often eschewed vibrato for clean harmonic sounds. “It will be interesting to see how that’s interpreted,” he says. “There’s a big violin solo in the middle, which I’m hoping he’ll play in his brilliant Romantic way. But a lot of it, by its contemporary nature, is not in that frame. It will be interesting to see how it gels.” ●

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Ilya Gringolts wins over audiences with his highly virtuosic playing and subtle interpretations. As a sought-after soloist, he devotes himself not only to the large orchestral repertoire but also to contemporary and historical performance practice.

Gringolts has performed with leading orchestras such as the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and he has play-directed projects with the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Camerata Bern.

As a highly esteemed chamber musician, Gringolts collaborates with artists including Peter Laul, Nicolas Altstaedt, Lawrence Power and Jörg Widmann, and is also first violin of the Gringolts Quartet, which has enjoyed success with performances at the Salzburg Festival, Edinburgh international Festival, Lucerne Festival, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg and Concertgebouw Amsterdam, among others.

In the summer of 2020, Ilya Gringolts founded the I&I Foundation together with Ilan Volkov to promote contemporary music. In addition to his work as a professor at the Zürich University of the Arts, Ilya Gringolts has been appointed to the Accademia Chigiana in Siena from 2021. He plays the 1718 "ex-Prové" Stradivarius violin.

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