

Australian Chamber Orchestra

50TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

AACO

BRAHMS & BEETHOVEN

Directed by Richard Tognetti

PRINCIPAL PARTNER


Wesfarmers Arts

ACO GOLD

50TH ANNIVERSARY CIRCLE

Help us blaze a trail into our next 50 years by joining ACO GOLD – our special golden anniversary circle – to celebrate this key moment in our story.

Call Celeste Moore, Head of Philanthropy,
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ACO.COM.AU/GOLD

Australian
Chamber
Orchestra

50
Years

INSIDE

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

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@AustralianChamberOrchestra

Upfront

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

The Concert

- 7 **Program**
The music you're about to hear
- 8 **Musicians on Stage**
Players on stage for this performance
- 12 **Program in Short**
Your five-minute read before lights down
- 14 **Years of Passion**
An interview with Richard Tognetti



- 20 **In It Together**
Twenty years of the Emerging Artist Program



- 24 **About the Artists**

Behind the Scenes

- 28 **ACO Staff**
- 30 **Acknowledgements**

WELCOME

On behalf of Richard Tognetti, our musicians, Board, and all our permanent, casual and occasional staff, I am delighted to welcome you to the opening tour of the ACO's 50th Anniversary Season.

This milestone Season opens with two works of extraordinary breadth and ambition: Brahms's mighty Violin Concerto, featuring Richard Tognetti, and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.

Adding to the excitement, on stage we are joined by current and former members of the ACO Emerging Artist Program, our world-renowned musician training program that celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. Since its inception in 2005, over 100 Australian musicians have spent a year as Emerging Artists with the Orchestra, where they receive critical mentoring and training opportunities with our core ensemble.

Many of our alumni have gone on to distinguished careers in leading orchestras worldwide, and we are proud to count five former Emerging Artists among our core ensemble, including our two newest members, violinists Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba and Tim Yu.

Whether you have been coming to the ACO for 50 years, or this is your very first concert, your presence and participation is what brings our performances to life. Over the decades we have performed for millions of people around the world, yet each performance remains unique, shaped by the dynamic energy of our musicians and the essential connection we share with you.

It is a privilege to launch this celebratory Season with all of you. Thank you for being part of this momentous occasion, and I hope you enjoy the performance.



Richard Evans AM
Managing Director



Wesfarmers Arts



Australian Chamber Orchestra & Wesfarmers Arts
Bringing People & Music Together

NEWS

Upcoming concerts and the latest announcements.

Latest News

The Four Seasons

In cinemas 1–5 March

As part of our 50th Anniversary celebrations, our latest ACO StudioCasts film, *The Four Seasons*, will be released in cinemas nationally this March.

Our *Four Seasons* collaboration with oud virtuoso Joseph Tawadros and riq master James Tawadros has been performed on stages across the world, from Tokyo to New York, as well as two national sold-out Australian tours. Our latest StudioCast sees director Matisse Ruby bring this cinematic and vivid performance to life on the big screen in a must-see film for music lovers and cinephiles alike.

For screening information and tickets visit aco.com.au/fourseasons

Kilar & Rautavaara

Digital recording

We have recently released a new recording, a digital EP featuring Einojuhani Rautavaara's *The Fiddlers* and Wojciech Kilar's *Orawa*.

Richard Tognetti and the Orchestra bring unrivalled virtuosity to the music of these groundbreaking composers, who both revel in celebrating the power and vitality of the folk fiddle.

To listen, visit snd.click/ACOKilarRautavaara

1.
The Four Seasons



Special Event
TarraWarra Festival

1-2 MAR

Join Richard Tognetti and the ACO for an intimate and exclusive cultural weekend at the TarraWarra Museum of Art.

2.
TarraWarra
Museum of Art

3.
Abel Selaocoe

4.
*The Princess,
The Pea (and The
Brave Escapee)*



2

On Tour
Abel Selaocoe

3-15 APR
National Tour

International cello sensation Abel Selaocoe brings a kaleidoscope of rhythm and sound to his highly anticipated Australian debut.

**Bach to the Beach Boys
and Beyond**

8-20 MAY
National Tour

Explore new musical frontiers as you take a deep dive into the thrilling soundworld of the theremin, the world's first electronic instrument.

Death and the Maiden Revealed

21 JUN - 2 JUL
National Tour

A Schubert odyssey directed by the electrifying violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja.



3

ACO Families
ACO Family Day

10 MAR, 15 JUN
ACO On The Pier

Bring the whole family to ACO On The Pier to experience a 30-minute concert, hands-on creative play and music-making activities and the opportunity to try a musical instrument!

**The Princess, The Pea
(and The Brave Escapee)**

13-20 JUL
ACO On The Pier

There is the fairytale you know and love... but what isn't known is why our brave princess was out in the middle of a storm, in the middle of a night, at the end of an adventure. This is *that* story.

This stunning theatrical production comes alive with classical music performed live by ACO musicians. It's perfect for audiences of all ages who need a reminder that they can be brave, even if they feel scared of the unknown.



4

ACO

The international
cello sensation brings
a kaleidoscope of
rhythm and sound to
his highly anticipated
Australian debut.

ABEL SELAOCOE

3-15 APRIL
Wollongong, Sydney, Canberra,
Melbourne and Adelaide.

Tickets from \$49* | \$35* for U35s
ACO.COM.AU

*Transaction fee of \$8.50 applies

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



GOVERNMENT PARTNERS



Pre-Concert Talks

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

NEWCASTLE CITY HALL

Genevieve Lang

Thu 6 Feb, 6.45pm

MELBOURNE RECITAL CENTRE

Bernard Rofe

Sat 8 Feb, 6.45pm

Mon 10 Feb, 6.45pm

ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE

Bernard Rofe

Sun 9 Feb, 1.45pm

SYDNEY – CITY RECITAL HALL

Bernard Rofe

Tue 11 Feb, 7.15pm

Genevieve Lang

Wed 12 Feb, 6.15pm

Fri 14 Feb, 6.15pm

Sat 15 Feb, 6.15pm

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

Genevieve Lang

Sun 16 Feb, 1.15pm

BRISBANE –

QPAC CONCERT HALL

Matthew Hodge

Mon 17 Feb, 6.15pm

PROGRAM

Richard Tognetti Director & Violin

Australian Chamber Orchestra

with current and former members of the

ACO Emerging Artist Program

COMPOSER	TITLE	MIN
Johannes Brahms	Violin Concerto in D major, Op.77 <i>I. Allegro non troppo</i> <i>II. Adagio</i> <i>III. Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace</i>	36
Interval		20
Ludwig van Beethoven	Symphony No.7 in A major, Op.92 <i>I. Poco sostenuto – Vivace</i> <i>II. Allegretto</i> <i>III. Presto – Assai meno presto</i> <i>IV. Allegro con brio</i>	38

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. *Brahms & Beethoven* will be broadcast on Saturday 1 March, 1pm and available on demand for 30 days after.

MUSICIANS ON STAGE

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



Richard Tognetti
Director and Violin

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



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.



Satu Vänskä
Principal Violin

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



Anna da Silva Chen ^
Violin

Anna plays an 18th-century violin made in the style of Pietro Guarneri of Venice, kindly on loan from Jannie Brown. Her Chair is sponsored by Alenka Tindale.



Aiko Goto
Violin

Aiko plays the 1714 'ex-Isolde Menges' Giuseppe Guarneri filius Andrea violin kindly on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. Her Chair is sponsored by Anthony & Sharon Lee Foundation.



Ilya Isakovich
Violin

Ilya plays a 1590 Brothers Amati violin kindly 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.



Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba ^
Violin

Thibaud plays a 1756 Giovanni Battista Gabrieli violin kindly on loan from Helena Rathbone. His chair is sponsored by The Minta Group.



Ike See
Violin

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



Tim Yu ^
Violin

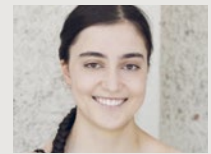
Tim plays an 1850 violin by John Lott, in the style of Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù, kindly on loan from an anonymous Australian private benefactor. His Chair is sponsored by Barbara & Ralph Ward-Ambler.



Harry Egerton *
Violin



Fiona Qiu *
Violin



Louise Turnbull *
Violin



Janet Anderson ^
Violin

Janet appears courtesy of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.



Beatrice Colombis ^
Violin



Lily Higson-Spence ^
Violin



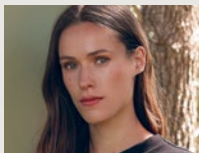
Riley Skevington ^
Violin

Riley appears courtesy of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.



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.



Isabella Bignasca *
Viola



Martin Alexander ^
Viola

Martin appears courtesy of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.



Charlotte Burbrook de Vere ^
Viola

Charlotte appears courtesy of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra.



Thomas Chawner ^
Viola

Thomas appears courtesy of the Orava Quartet.



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 Prof Doug Jones AO & Prof Janet Walker CM.



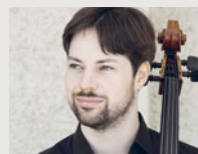
Melissa Barnard
Cello

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



Julian Thompson
Cello

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



Jack Overall *
Cello



Hamish Jamieson ^
Cello

* 2025 Emerging Artist
^ Emerging Artist alumni
Guest Musician



Maxime Bibeau
Principal Bass

Max plays a late-16th-century Gasparo da Salò bass kindly on loan from UKARIA.



Oakley Paul*
Bass



Rohan Dasika^
Bass

Rohan appears courtesy of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.



Georgia Browne#
Principal Flute



Mikaela Oberg#
Flute



Tatjana Zimre#
Principal Oboe



Stefaan Verdegem#
Oboe

Stefan appears courtesy of Royal Conservatorium Brussels, Anima Eterna Brugge and Dresden Festival Orchestra.



Nicola Boud#
Principal Clarinet



Ashley Sutherland#
Clarinet



Jane Gower#
Principal Bassoon



Sim Walters#
Bassoon



Anneke Scott#
Principal Horn



Martin Lawrence#
Horn

Martin appears courtesy of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.



Louis-Pierre Bergeron#
Horn

Louis-Pierre appears courtesy of the National Arts Centre Orchestra of Canada.



Dorée Dixon#
Horn



Leanne Sullivan*
Principal Trumpet



Richard Fomison#
Trumpet



Brian Nixon*
Principal Timpani

* 2025 Emerging Artist
^ Emerging Artist Alumni
Guest Musician



ACO

THE FOUR SEASONS

IN CINEMAS 1-5 MARCH

Filmed for cinema and in 5.1 surround sound, Richard Tognetti and the ACO bring their iconic presentation of Vivaldi's masterpiece to the big screen. The film features Richard Tognetti directing *The Four Seasons* in full, interspersed with the captivating music of Joseph Tawadros and the story of this unique collaboration. Whether you're an ACO fan or new to classical music, this immersive, cinematic experience is for you.

For national screening details and tickets visit
ACO.COM.AU/FOURSEASONS

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PROGRAM IN SHORT

Your five-minute read
before lights down.



Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Violin Concerto in D major, Op.77

Brahms began composing his Violin Concerto in 1878 while holidaying in Lake Wörth in southern Austria, a place the composer described as so abundant with melodies that he had to take care not to step on them. He dedicated the concerto to his friend, the celebrated violinist Joseph Joachim, whom he had known since 1853 when Brahms was 20 and Joachim 22.

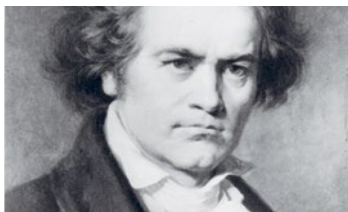
Their collaboration on the concerto was a close one – with Joachim, the leading violinist of his day and a composer in his own right, consulted at every step. Joachim suggested numerous re-writes to the solo part, knowing Brahms was more at home writing for the piano. Brahms sometimes adopted these suggestions, and sometimes ignored them, casually threatening to take his concerto to a “stricter” violinist. Near the end of the process, Brahms gave Joachim free rein to compose the cadenza, the one most commonly heard in future performances.

Joachim gave the first performance on New Year’s Day 1879 in Leipzig, with the composer conducting the Gewandhaus Orchestra. Anticipation was high – there were few significant violin concertos apart from those of Beethoven and Mendelssohn, already championed by Joachim. Brahms was tense on the podium, and his soloist unnerved by last-minute revisions. In the end, the response was underwhelming enough for Brahms to pull out of conducting the Vienna premiere. The Vienna performance, however, turned out to be a triumph, with Brahms writing it was “a success as good as I’ve ever experienced.” The crowd had even launched into rapturous applause mid performance after Joachim’s first-movement cadenza.

Brahms had originally intended for the concerto to be in four movements – a symphony for violin and orchestra. The first movement certainly has symphonic proportions, opening with a lengthy introduction out of which the violin explodes into being. Echoes of Beethoven’s 1806 violin concerto are present at every turn, with its unsuspecting opening theme that grows to militaristic turbulence in the orchestral tuttis. All the while, the violin has the incredibly difficult task of executing a massive and exposed solo above all this for nearly 20

minutes. Several of those minutes are dedicated to the cadenza, equally immense. Although Joachim's is the most-performed, numerous violinists have composed cadenzas of their own. Richard Tognetti's is a synthesis of cadenzas composed by Ferruccio Busoni, Hugo Heermann and Leopold Auer.

The concerto's famous *Adagio* almost never came to be. Two very different movements originally stood in its place before Brahms decided he had written himself into a corner with his four-movement idea. To have the concerto ready in time for its New Year's premiere, he swapped out the middle movements for "a wretched *Adagio* instead." Brahms remained symphonic in his writing, and Pablo de Sarasate complained of having to "stand on the rostrum, violin in hand, and listen to the oboe playing the only tune in the *adagio*". But the movement's tender lyricism truly makes it the heart of this concerto. At the concerto's first performance, it was the finale that elicited the most enthusiasm from audiences. In this movement, Brahms returns to his love of gypsy music with a thrilling rondo with "dashing rhythms and delirious trills in the winds" whose sudden turn before the end is a true Brahms trademark.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Symphony No.7 in A major, Op.92

Beethoven's nine symphonies stand as pillars of the Western canon. With each, Beethoven strived to take a new direction, musically and thematically. His *Eroica* Symphony responded with humanism to the dominating power of the day (Napoleon Bonaparte), his Fifth Symphony evoked the power of humankind to overcome intense struggle, and his *Pastoral* Symphony illustrated the experience and divinity of nature. When it came to writing his Seventh, Beethoven took a step back from individual heroism and pastoral grandeur to a more direct form of human joy, the impulse to dance, such that the symphony has been called the "apotheosis of dance itself".

Dance in orchestral music was nothing new. Orchestral suites of the Baroque era were almost entirely comprised of dance music, and the Classical formula of the string quartet and symphony nearly always included a stately minuet. But Beethoven's

Seventh Symphony dances like nothing before it, boasting impulsive, obsessive rhythms in all four movements, and a ferocity that bears greater resemblance to the folk traditions of Scotland and Central/Eastern Europe than the stylish halls of Beethoven's Vienna.

The symphony's premiere took place on 8 December 1813 under Beethoven's baton. The orchestra was in fine form, and counted some of the finest musicians of the day among its ranks, including Louis Spohr, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Giacomo Meyerbeer and Antonio Salieri. Paired together with *Wellington's Victory*, the concert was one of the most triumphant moments of Beethoven's career. The audience called for an encore of the *Allegretto*, and by popular demand the concert was repeated only four days later. Although Beethoven was in poor health and in between two disastrous relationships, the audience and newspapers' rapturous response to the premiere gave him ample opportunity to bask in his own success.

The symphony opens with a grandiose introduction that harks back to the overtures of Mozart and Haydn. Unlike the magisterial renditions of his predecessors, Beethoven's introduction has a brashness about it that hints at things to come. The introduction gives way to an enormous dance in 6/8 time, its dotted rhythms reminiscent of rowdy English giges and Italian forlanes. As in his Fifth Symphony, rhythm plays a larger role than melody itself, reinforcing the impulse to dance. The *Allegretto* is the symphony's most celebrated movement, a restless funeral march that intensifies into one of the most memorable experiences in all classical music. Just as the music reaches a state of almost unbearable power, Beethoven masterfully transitions into a middle section of incredible sweetness and wistfulness.

The *Scherzo* that follows is even more giddy and unrelenting in vigour than the first movement, with two sustained Trio sections providing maximum contrast without sacrificing any momentum. Just when things couldn't get any more frenzied, Beethoven's finale, marked *Allegro con brio* (fast with fire) puts the pedal to the floor, hurtling wildly into rapturous delirium. The obsessiveness of Beethoven's rhythms is unrelenting, with ceaseless interplay of repeated motifs and longer repeated sections. By the end of the symphony, we have danced to the point of ecstasy multiple times over, a "triumph of Bacchic fury" that celebrates the glory of dance.

As the Australian Chamber Orchestra celebrates its 50th anniversary, Artistic Director Richard Tognetti is marking 35 years of shaping it into one of the world's most exciting ensembles.

YEARS OF PASSION

Written by Peter Craven



Richard Tognetti and his wife, Australian Chamber Orchestra Principal Violin Satu Vänskä, are on their way to Hong Kong to play at Tai Kwun's Prison Yard Festival. Having been delayed by security, Tognetti is now in an airport lounge waiting to board. When I tell him I'm "blind, lame and deaf", he laughs and says, "Well, I'm lame, a loser and en route."

Tognetti has been the Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra for 35 years now – he was appointed when he was 24 – and is simultaneously about to celebrate the Orchestra's 50th anniversary. He's chosen to open the Season with Brahms's joy-filled Violin Concerto and Beethoven's sombre and stormy Seventh Symphony. Though it turns out the symphony is a bit more complex than that.

I ask Tognetti what leading one of the world's incontestably grand chamber orchestras represents to this boy from Wollongong. "Well, it's still pretty fervent," he says. "The fire hasn't gone out. I'm still stupidly ambitious as only a Southern Hemispherian can be. And I'm still really curious to see how canonical works can appear in fresh contexts. I'm always driven to play for people who have never heard the music before. That's been a constant with me."

Does he think that Australia's relative isolation feeds a desire to conquer the world? "Yeah, it really does," he admits. "But not conquer the world in the sense of standing on stage and bowing to merely traditional expectations. But by defining a certain nationalism."

You can hear the intensity in Tognetti's voice. "We're all here," he says. "We're huddled on these coasts, we've got this amazing interior which we rarely look towards, and we're still trying to describe it. It's really clumsy. And it actually feels more clumsy 35 years later. So I'm still challenged by that..."

The ACO's international success is striking. Is there a particular kind of ratification and satisfaction in getting rave reviews from shows at, say, London's Barbican? "Yeah," he says. "But that's feeding the rat. You can never get enough and you'll always want more. And you need to keep it in check. Otherwise it gets in the way of trying to create something."

He agrees that without that international validation he "probably would have left", but says it can be hard having to rest on laurels that are patronisingly given. "Let's say we played extraordinarily well but we're still called the Australian Chamber Orchestra – there remains an extreme prejudice against Southern Hemispherians."



“But the day I went to the Conservatorium – literally the first day – I met this bass player and he gave me a cassette of Bruckner and I found a lyricism there that I didn’t know existed.”

And that Northern Hemisphere prejudice won’t change for a hundred years. At least.”

Tognetti grew up in Wollongong and took off for the Sydney Conservatorium High School at 11. At 17 he continued tertiary study at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. I remind him that there are photos of him playing a violin when he was six. “There were other kids who were in the same position who didn’t end up playing the violin,” he says. “It’s just that I grabbed it. I did not live in a rarified atmosphere.” He laughs.

“Wollongong in the 1970s was very much Meatloaf. But the day I went to the Conservatorium – literally the first day – I met this bass player and he gave me a cassette of Bruckner and I found a lyricism there that I didn’t know existed. So I suppose that’s where it came from. Later on I discovered punk, and much later on I found the German new wave people and electronica – *if* it’s electronica, of course; it wasn’t really alive back then.”

Tognetti is a surfer and sees the moment of riding a wave – in music or the sea – as akin to the Zen state of detachment. “When things go okay – which is all too rarely – you’re not thinking, *Oh wow, I played that phrase in a way that I think Ligeti or Beethoven might have been happy with.* You just have this sense of nothingness. You just think, *well, what’s it all about?* But that nothingness is, I think, an enviable place. But most of the time, as with surfing, you’re just in a state of wipe-out.”

The Seventh is a towering symphony for which Tognetti has assembled an expanded ACO featuring gut strings and period wind instruments,

making authenticity the counterpoint for a radically contemporary vision. For both pieces he’s importing a great swag of musicians to join him in the endeavour. Some are talents from the ACO’s Emerging Artist Program and there’s also a brace of woodwind and brass players.

He brings a classic alive by reimagining it as absolutely contemporary, as if it is an ACO commission. “I’m of the strong belief that if you’re going to play anything from the canon, it shouldn’t just be rinse and repeat,” he says. “My way of looking at it is that Brahms delivered the Violin Concerto to me last week and I’m grappling with it and it’s really difficult and dense and strange in its conception. And it’s the same for the Beethoven.”

So is he immune to the anxiety of influence? Brahms’s Violin Concerto was famously done by Heifetz and then there’s Vengerov around the corner.

“Of course, but I try to ignore it,” he says. “I’m totally inspired by Heifetz’s sound and some of the particular aspects of phrasing. But as far as the whole structure of the piece goes? No, I’m not daunted by those interpretations. I really embrace the challenge I set for myself – and I’m not being hubristic or egotistical – that Brahms has just sent the Violin Concerto to us. We were fortunate to be able to commission him in one of his weak moments. He’s taken a few years to write this concerto for these people Down Under and it’s finally arrived.”

Tognetti laughs with pleasure at this fantasy, which is also a rigorous aesthetic. “He’s an unknown sort of Austrian–German composer – well, he lives in Austria but grew up in Hamburg – and he was ignored because he was sort of slightly old-fashioned. But I believe in him, and I’m looking forward to presenting this new score to an open-eared and highly temperamental public.”

He’s at pains to admit the realities of the music world. “Most people grew up with Baroque music as their introduction to classical music,” he says. “The Brandenburgs, say. And isn’t that a wonderful thing? But what it also does is set a seal on the listener. You know, the audience member you overhear saying, ‘I prefer *my* Bach to be slower.’ I’ve got to ignore all that by saying Brahms has just sent us this score and the same thing with Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony. Even more so.”

I ask him why he’s paired the zestful Brahms with the Seventh. Isn’t Beethoven’s symphony broodingly dark and enigmatic in the most Northern European manner? “Only the slow movement is,” he says. “But the allegretto doesn’t really exemplify its mood at all. And in the last movement of Brahms’s Violin Concerto, which was inspired by [the violinist Joseph] Joachim’s desire for zest, there’s all that

Hungarianness and dizziness. The high-minded elitist Europeans hate this aspect which pervades a lot of that music, whereas I, being a bogan from Wollongong, love it.” He’s defiant and self-mocking at the same time. Then he’s pensive again about the Seventh. “With the Beethoven you could argue also that it’s a symphony of extreme contrasts – which is, I think, what sets it alight.”

Tognetti is a showman who believes passionately in the conception of the work he reinterprets, but stays humorous at the same time. He tells me about an evening he spent with the American playwright Edward Albee, which he describes as one of the most memorable of his 35 years at the helm.

“We had an incredible night with him. Well, we had two experiences with him,” he says. “He was like a bird. He had that pokey curiosity that one is attracted to. Endless talking. We went to the opera. It was a double bill, I think – Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* and Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*? And anyway, it was like a dance party – they had naked men on the stage with Walkmans – and Edward just hated it.

“And so after 10 minutes he looked at me – we were sitting in about the third row, and everyone knew that we were there, or that *he* was there, we were unknowns – and then he asked, ‘Are you

enjoying this?’ in his rather high-pitched, hard-to-define American accent. And I, of course, was going to say, ‘Oh yes, I’m thoroughly enjoying it, what do you reckon, my new best friend?’ And I realised he wasn’t and said, ‘Oh, no.’ And he said, ‘Let’s leave. I’m so good at that.’

“So we went to walk out – you know, from the middle aisle, going *excuse me, excuse me*. And out we walked. Albee thought the director had tampered with the ‘originating force’. He hated it when people tampered with his work – so did Ligeti, interestingly. And my point to him was, ‘Well, one day you’re going to be gone – which was much sooner than one anticipated – then what will happen?’”

I ask about Tognetti’s professional and marital relationship with Vänskä. They work together both with the ACO and in its renegade electro-acoustic spin-off band, ACO Underground, which also goes by Satu In The Beyond. How does that work? “When I was making my first surf films, I’d written some hundred tunes that I wanted to be sung by someone. And I asked Satu to just have a go,” says Tognetti. “And I went, holy moly, that’s good. And then there she is singing, side by side, with Meow Meow and Barry Humphries at the Barbican. So, yeah, Satu’s an amazing violinist, and a really wonderful supporter of mine. She’s honest, she’s a sounding board and fiercely independent.”

Tognetti’s new violin, made by Guarneri del Gesù, dates from 1741. Is it superior to a Stradivarius? “Oh, no, I wouldn’t say that. I just think it’s more mysterious, more complex,” he says. “And at the end of the day, a more alluring proposition because they’re rarer. If you want a visual art analogy, I think that it’s more Caravaggio. What’s also interesting about the del Gesù is that it is more shrouded in mystery. We know a lot about Stradivarius. But del Gesù disappeared for a couple of years and they think he might have been involved in a murder. Wasn’t Caravaggio involved in a murder?”

You can tell from the rapt tone in which Tognetti speaks that the violin’s historical mystery has an associative glamour. He’s a fascinating character, full of ambition but with a purity that can encompass all the irony in the world. But the trail of symbolism surrounding the violin is interrupted by the physical problem of boarding a plane with these priceless objects. “Hey, can you just give me a second. Yeah, we’re just moving violins here.” He apologises for sounding distracted. “We were just boarding and fighting off people, you know, dumping their stuff on our violins. But it seems to all still be working, and I haven’t lost my passport.”

You can see why the nation has so fallen in love with Tognetti and the ACO that much of

“I’m of the strong belief that if you’re going to play anything from the canon, it shouldn’t just be rinse and repeat,” he says. “My way of looking at it is that Brahms delivered the Violin Concerto to me last week and I’m grappling with it and it’s really difficult and dense and strange in its conception. And it’s the same for the Beethoven.”

“What’s also interesting about the del Gesù is that it is more shrouded in mystery. We know a lot about Stradivarius. But del Gesù disappeared for a couple of years and they think he might have been involved in a murder.”

their funding is self-generated. This is a man who is chuffed that his work with Radiohead’s Jonny Greenwood on *Water* influenced Jane Campion’s decision to ask Greenwood to write the score for *The Power of the Dog*. The ACO will confound and enchant its audiences as long as there’s a feeling for why music matters *now*. ●

Peter Craven is one of Australia’s best known culture critics and has written extensively about theatre, film, television and books. He writes a weekly arts column for the *Australian Spectator* and regularly wrote a Second Thoughts column about literary classics for *The Sunday Age*. He was the 2004 Geraldine Pascall Critic of the Year.

Page 15.
Richard Tognetti.
Photo by Simon Lekias

Page 16.
The Australian Chamber Orchestra,
The Barbican Centre, London.
Photo by Nic Walker


Below.
Richard Tognetti and Satu Vänskä
performing *River* with the ACO.
Photo by Nic Walker





IN

IT



Tim Yu and Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba – both graduates of the ACO’s successful Emerging Artist Program – are making their debut as fully fledged members of the Orchestra.

TOGETHER

Written by Kate Holden

Every happy and successful musician is made by their talent, their teachers and encouragement. For 20 years the ACO's Emerging Artist (EA) Program has made a cherished space for young musicians in which they can practise, learn, tour and prepare themselves vocationally for a big, enriching professional life – sometimes with the ACO itself.

“Playing with experienced, professional musicians takes a young musician's playing to a different level,” says ACO Principal Violin Helena Rathbone, who has been deeply involved with the EA Program from the start. “Their listening skills improve; they develop better communication skills – both with the audience and within the playing group – and they get that feeling that every musician in the group is striving for the same goal. This is the invaluable opportunity we wanted to give these talented youngsters.”

One hundred and thirteen youthful string players have participated in the ACO's Emerging Artist Program since its 2005 inception. In the ACO's opening tour for 2025, EA alumni Tim Yu and Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba are taking their full-time place next to former mentors and friends, now colleagues. This brings the current number of Emerging Artist graduates in the ACO to five, with another former EA, violinist Anna da Silva Chen, currently on probation following a successful audition for a third full-time violin position within the Orchestra.



In their year as Emerging Artists, the young musicians are paired with a mentor from within the ACO who offers individual lessons and access to the Orchestra for rehearsals, concerts and backstage. They can also ring for advice whenever they need.

Emerging Artists are provided with the opportunity to perform on stage with ACO core musicians as part of the ACO Collective ensemble, and together participate in three projects a year: a full-scale regional touring program – which has taken the ACO Collective group to 85 regional centres in 20 years; a chamber music intensive experience of small-ensemble playing; and a third project which might include working with interesting guest artists or learning to play on gut strings.

It's more than a decade since Pavlovic-Hobba had his time as an EA, and he's played with the Orchestra as an alumnus and casual, but he's warmly grinning at the prospect of full-time ACO life. “I didn't know what direction to go in so I was just trying a bit of everything.” He joined the Flinders Quartet for five years, and spent a year in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra Fellowship. “I've always kept coming back to the ACO – I would try something else, and miss it, and always come back. So it felt like the right moment to apply for the job. Now I'm very happy to be here full-time.” Rathbone, who was his EA mentor, has been “secretly crossing my fingers that he would apply for a job with us!”

Yu had his EA moment in the ill-fated year 2020, in which normal opportunities were dramatically constricted to a few duets and online mentoring. The organisation allowed him a further year. “He's worked extremely hard,” says Rathbone, “and proved to be a worthy colleague.” He too has had a stint with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra Fellowship program and played as a casual for Opera Australia and in chamber ensembles. Yu's EA mentors included ACO violinist Liisa Pallandi and former ACO violinist Glenn Christensen, both themselves EA alumni (“That was a bumper crop,” remembers Rathbone) and then full-time members of the Orchestra, as well as ACO violinist Ike See.

The ACO audition process of half an hour's performance with members of the Orchestra is daunting, even for their own protégées. “They already like you and trust you,” says Pavlovic-Hobba, “but you have to prove it again – and again. It's weird playing for friends in that environment, as opposed to a completely anonymous room. It's comforting,” he laughs, “but also terrifying.” But they made it through to what seems like a warm welcome. “We're proud of them,” says Rathbone, “and it's really like a creative family. It's great to know we've been part of this journey with them.”



The ACO's opening national tour for 2025 sees current EA members, EA alumni and these two EA graduates now within the ACO all onstage together to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the program. "It'll be joyful," Rathbone declares. "It's wonderful to see them grow from being students into colleagues. They've done the hard work themselves, but to know that we have somehow guided and inspired them along the way is a real privilege."

"The good thing about the EA program" remarks Pavlovic-Hobba, "is that you get trained in the ACO's style." And everyone in the ACO, he adds, "is in it together. No one is complacent. We explore and don't limit ourselves to a singular idea of what we're good at."

Teachers and mentors leave a deep legacy, and classical musicians seem exceptionally alert to succession planning and the cultivation of fresh talent. As Yu observes, "Mentors provide all these different perspectives that you wouldn't think of on your own, because their perspective is built up from all the things *they've* encountered on their journey, and the mentors in their memory. We're on the receiving end of all those years, and hopefully will add to our own collection." And "we don't," Pavlovic-Hobba chimes in, "want to keep these secrets to ourselves!" Both of these young talents have already commenced *their*

own mentorship of young players, including with the ACO Academy Program for talented high school-aged musicians.

"For the more experienced players it's just a real joy to have the young blood come in, and bounce off their new, fresh ideas, energy and enthusiasm." Rathbone couldn't be more proud. "It's just a joy to get to know these musicians and see how they develop and flourish." ●

Kate Holden regularly contributes to *The Saturday Paper* and other publications. She is the author of *In My Skin: A memoir* (2005), and *The Romantic: Italian nights and days* (2010). *The Winter Road: A Killing in Croppa Creek* (Black Inc, 2021) won the Walkley Book Award and the NSW Premier's nonfiction award. A book of linked essays will be published in 2026.

Page 20.
Helena Rathbone and Tim Yu
perform with the ACO.
Photo by Nic Walker

Page 22.
Tim Yu.
Photo by Nic Walker

Above.
Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba.
Photo by Charlie Kinross

Richard Tognetti

Artistic Director
& Lead Violin



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

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

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

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

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

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

Richard was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2010. He holds honorary doctorates from three Australian universities and was made a National Living Treasure in 1999. In 2017 he was awarded the JC Williamson Award for longstanding service to the live performance industry. He performs on a 1741–44 Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù violin, lent to him by the ACO.

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The Australian Chamber Orchestra has lived and breathed music for 50 years, 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 ACO 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, *Beethoven 1, 2, & 3 Eroica* and ARIA award-winning albums *River* and *Indies & Idols*.

In 2023 the ACO launched its digital streaming platform, ACO On Demand, which hosts the Orchestra’s award-winning season of cinematic concert films, ACO StudioCasts, alongside live concert streams and premium on-demand content.



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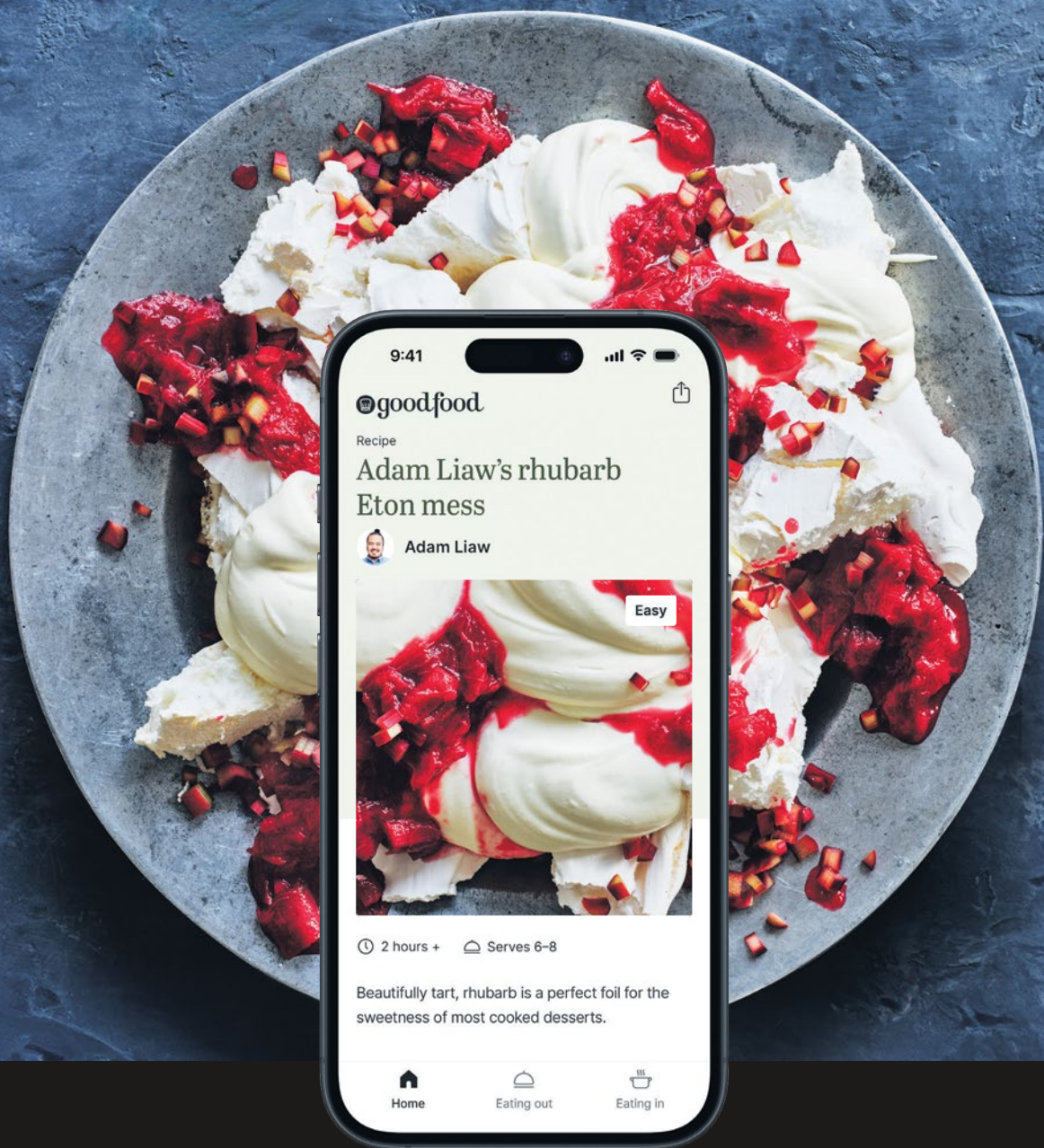
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