



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA 50th ANNIVERSARY PERFORMANCE

Wednesday 24 September 2025

Acknowledgments

Martyn Myer, Chair, and **Louise Myer**

Peter McMullin, Board Member and **Ruth McMullin**

and **Supporters of the Australian Chamber Orchestra**

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this House stands – the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Eastern Kulin Nation – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

Earlier this month, this House recognised another milestone of 50 years.

This year's Order of Australia investiture ceremonies coincided with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Australian Honours System.

When it was created in 1975, these honours marked an important moment in the formation of our nation's modern identity.

Yet it didn't happen in isolation – the 1970s more broadly was a time of cultural transformation and self-expression in Australia – and music was central to our artistic offering to the world.

In 1975, Olivia Newton-John was topping the charts across the world, AC/DC released their first studio album, and Molly Meldrum was hosting *Countdown* just as colour television began broadcasting.

It is an era not normally associated with classical music in popular memory.

Yet Australia was making its mark in this space too.

The Sydney Opera House was completed in 1973, and the following year renowned conductor Sir Bernard Heinze was recognised as Australian of the Year.

In 1975, Australian composer Malcolm Williamson became the first and only non-Briton ever to be appointed the Master of the Queen's Music, and the score for the film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* – released that year – would go on to be nominated for Best Soundtrack in the British Film Academy Awards.

It was in this context – and between these vastly different musical worlds – that the Australian Chamber Orchestra was born.

John Painter was a pioneer in this era of cultural trailblazers.

He founded the Orchestra to provide a space for greater creative freedom in classical music, combining the timelessness of the genre with the demand for self-expression of the times.

The Orchestra has been sharing this unique joy with audiences ever since – thanks in no small part to the efforts of Richard Tognetti, who has been at the helm for 35 of those 50 years.

More than just a success defined by length of time, this milestone reflects the excellence of this Orchestra and also the demonstration of a new way of thinking about classical music.

It's an ethos underpinned by continuous innovation in artistic expression, sustained by a depth of creative talent and passion.

This approach has seen the Orchestra captivate audiences not only across Australia, but across the world.

Yet despite this success – or perhaps because of it – the Orchestra continues to strive for the new and different.

While many of the cultural achievements of the 1970s stand as icons of the era in which they were created, this Orchestra remains forward-looking as it continues to redefine contemporary music boundaries.

As Richard himself put it when reflecting on this anniversary:

“If I’d put a program like this together 30 years ago, people would have been aghast... it’s fair to say they’ve grown with us, and trust us to find weird and interesting things.”

It’s this spirit that the Orchestra continues to inspire, fifty years from when it first began to do so.

I want to congratulate all members and supporters of the Australian Chamber Orchestra on this significant milestone.

While we regularly mark anniversaries here at Government House, it is less often that we have the chance to experience these joys firsthand.

I’m looking forward to hearing tonight’s performances, which will offer an insight into the creativity and talent that has sustained this Orchestra for decades, and that will no doubt continue to pave the way for a bright future.

Thank you.