



MELBOURNE  
CHAMBER  
ORCHESTRA

A background image of a violinist playing a violin. The image is in a monochromatic blue-grey tone. The violinist's hands are visible, holding the violin and bow. The violin is the central focus, with its body, f-holes, and strings clearly visible. The violinist is wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers.

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY  
2023

# FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Image Credit: Laura Manariti

2023 was a year of great change and fulfilment for me as I embraced the role of Artistic Director of the MCO. Building on the rich history of the MCO, most recently under the directorship of William Hennessy, it was an honour to guide the orchestra through Season 2023.

The musical program was one that advocated for the voices we are lucky to call our own in Melbourne and Victoria. Built around a theme of 'transformation' the programs sought to offer audiences a balance of new and old, of the familiar and the thought-provoking.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the musicians of the MCO who joined me on the stages through the year. Together we created magical moments that I will treasure for a long while to come.

While it is difficult to pinpoint highlights given the plenitude of musical riches that came our way, I am particularly delighted that the MCO continued to build on its rich history of commissioning new work. Caerwen Marten and Lior & ADE Vincent's works are remarkable additions to our repertoire. I look forward to fostering the creation of new work in years to come, particularly that of our local composers.

It was wonderful for me to meet our audiences throughout the state. From our subscribers to those who came to a concert for the first time and to our youngest audiences who were introduced to a chamber orchestra through our education program, it was a thrill to know that our music was resonating through the community. As musicians, especially as musicians in Melbourne's and Victoria's Chamber Orchestra, it is a very powerful motivator to be a musical voice that has the ability to touch so many in our state.

On a personal note, the whole season can perhaps best be summed up by the title of Melody Eötvös' mesmerising piece *Meraki* that appeared in our season opening concert – to put something of yourself into what you do, and to do it with love.

*Sophie Rowell*

**Sophie Rowell**  
Artistic Director

# FROM THE CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sophie Rowell's first year as Artistic Director was one of many pleasures for audiences across Victoria. Emphasising the orchestra's Victorian roots with the return of beloved and longstanding collaborators of MCO including Aura Go and Genevieve Lacey, Sophie imagined a path for MCO that honoured our musical traditions while framing them in a contemporary and urgently relevant new light.

With renewed artistic vitality, Melbourne Chamber Orchestra has continued to recover from the disruptions of 2020–2022. The orchestra reached a new record audience for the first time since the pandemic. Extensive regional and peri-urban touring; an innovative chamber music program; national streaming; and deeper education work combined to enhance the impact of the orchestra's work beyond its flagship Melbourne orchestral seasons.

Other 2023 highlights were MCO's first performances in a non-Victorian capital, to open the Snow Concert Hall in Canberra with flautist Ana de la Vega; performances at the Castlemaine State Festival; and critically-acclaimed performances of Mozart's *Idomeneo* with Victorian Opera at the Palais Theatre.

Organisationally, 2023 was a year of positioning MCO for the future. We introduced a confident new visual identity by Lone Studio to better project Sophie's vision for MCO, with a new logo and website. We also rolled out a best-in-class ticketing and customer relationship management system, to better serve and connect with MCO's audience.

The orchestra under Sophie is now positioned to continue its contribution to our cultural conversation with verve, excellence and curiosity. The Board has a high level of confidence for the future of the MCO, and looks forward to exploring innovative ways we can bring this wonderful music to Melburnians and beyond. The enduring commitment of our donors and supporters is integral to MCO's achievements. We would like to renew our thanks for your support, and trust that your ongoing encouragement will remain a guiding force for the orchestra's future endeavours.



**Fran Thorn**

Chair



**Richard Jackson**

Executive Director

## 2023 AT A GLANCE

	2023	2022	+/-
Total number of attendees (all events)	14607	9677	51%
Mainstage (Melbourne Season) attendances	6180	4317	43%
Streamed attendances	884	862	3%
Paid (Melbourne Season) attendances	3845	2767	39%
Income generated for artists	\$620,400	\$417,094	49%
Number of performers employed	120	76	
Number of performances & events	63	71	
Number of different locations	26	32	
Number of touring performances	30	38	
Number of new works and arrangements	6	9	



Image Credit: Lucien Fischer

# MELBOURNE ORCHESTRAL SEASON

Image Credit: Lucien Fischer



MCO's Melbourne season offered 12 performances across 6 orchestral projects, with Thursday evening and Sunday afternoon performances at Melbourne Recital Centre. Three orchestral projects were also streamed on the Australian Digital Concert Hall.

The 2023 Melbourne Orchestral Season	
March	<b>Woven Threads*</b>
May	<b>Higher Power*</b>
June	<b>The Beginning of the World</b>
August	<b>Art of the Symphony</b>
October	<b>Mozart &amp; Beethoven Concertos*</b>
November	<b>Of People &amp; Song</b>

\*Performances featured on the Australian Digital Concert Hall

*Woven Threads* was the season opener, with Sophie Rowell curating an eclectic and virtuosic program of music by JS Bach, Melody Eötvös, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Arensky and Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson. Sophie performed the solo in Mendelssohn's youthful Violin Concerto in D minor.

*Higher Power* featured MCO collaborators Polyphonic Voices under the directorship of Michael Fulcher, with Vasks' *Da pacem, Domine* and Vivaldi's *Magnificat*.

Genevieve Lacey joined MCO for *The Beginning of the World*, which she devised in conjunction with Sophie Rowell. Featuring a rich tapestry of English works from the first Elizabethan period to the second, the performances also included novel arrangements by Erkki Veltheim.

Symphonies were the stars of *Art of the Symphony*, including Caerwen Martin's commissioned Sinfonia, *Embracing Duarte*; symphonies by Stamitz, Britten and Haydn; and a haunting performance of a sinfonia by seventeenth century Flemish composer Leonora Duarte.

Finnish pianist and ANAM Artistic Director Paavali Jumppanen joined MCO for Mozart and Beethoven Concertos with Mozart's final piano concerto and Beethoven's concerto in B flat.

The final concert of the year, *Of People & Song* featured vocalist and songwriter Lior performing a new song cycle *To Be Human*, co-written with Ade Vincent. The new cycle was matched with music of Grieg and da Falla. Merewyn Bramble also performed the solo in a Rebecca Clarke's *Passacaglia*.

## CHAMBER MUSIC SEASON

With the end of pandemic-related restrictions assured, MCO presented a chamber music season closer to the size and scope of those presented pre-2020.

Two projects were presented in collaboration with the Australian Digital Concert Hall as part of their weekend festivals at Federation Square. *Inspirations* featured quartet music of Haydn, Caroline Shaw & Beethoven. *Transformations* offered arrangements of Tchaikovsky's Album for the Young and Mozart's Piano Concerto No 17 for piano quintet, featuring guest pianist Aura Go.



Image Credit: Lucien Fischer

Curated by MCO Principal Bass Dr Emma Sullivan, *Illuminations* presented rarely-heard chamber works and arrangements featuring bass. MCO used its regular rehearsal venue, Australian Nurses Memorial Centre, as an intimate performance venue for the first time in this performance.

The final chamber program for 2023 was *Poets & Fighters* with Victorian baritone Stephen Marsh, featuring Barber's *Dover Beach* and Carl Vine's *Poets & Fighters*, alongside quartet music of Meale and Ravel. This program's Melbourne performance was presented in conjunction with Kingston Arts Centre.

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## DAYLESFORD FESTIVAL



Image Credit: Lucien Fischer

In its ninth festival in Daylesford and Hepburn Springs, the orchestra pursued a five-concert program over two days, with a chamber music dinner at the new venue of Hotel Bellinzona in Hepburn Springs.

With guests Peter Luff (horn) and Kristian Chong (piano) the program featured highlights including Shostakovich's Piano Trio No 1, Brahms' Horn Trio and Schumann's Piano Quintet.

Particular thanks to the current Chair of the Daylesford Committee, Eileen Thompson, and the members of the Committee whose tireless work is essential to the presentation of this annual event. We would also like to acknowledge the significant support provided by Tony DeMarco and Theresa Albioli of the Hotel Bellinzona to the success of the weekend.

## OTHER EVENTS



Image Credit: Charlie Kinross

Melbourne Chamber Orchestra was invited to open Snow Concert Hall in Canberra, a new professional-standard facility on the grounds of Canberra Grammar School. The orchestra performed with internationally esteemed flautist Ana de la Vega for this performance.

The orchestra also provided the pit orchestra for Victorian Opera and Opera Australia's production of Mozart's opera *Idomeneo* at the Palais Theatre in St Kilda. A larger than usual MCO featured guest concertmaster Allie Osborne and was conducted by Benjamin Bayl.

Other special performances included festival appearances at the Peninsula Summer Music Festival, the Castlemaine State Festival and the 3MBS Marathon.

# TOURING



Image Credit: Lucien Fischer

MCO performed in 26 regional and urban centres in 2023, continuing its long-held commitment to reaching audiences throughout Victoria. Eight of MCO's main-season orchestral and chamber programs were taken outside of central Melbourne.

In 2023 the orchestra's touring was substantially made possible by generous donations by individuals and foundations, with the addition of some Touring Victoria funds remaining from the previous year.

## Touring Destinations 2023

- Bairnsdale
- Canberra (ACT)
- Casterton
- Castlemaine
- Daylesford
- Flinders
- Geelong
- Glengarry North
- Horsham
- Mallacoota
- Merimbula (NSW)
- Moorabbin
- Mornington
- Mt Beauty
- Narre Warren
- Nunawading
- Pakenham
- Portland
- Sale
- Shepparton
- Swifts Creek
- Traralgon
- Wangaratta
- Warragul
- Werribee
- Yackandandah

# EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Encounter the Orchestra!

Primary school students in Grades 3 to 6 in Portland, Werribee and Narre Warren were provided with a live encounter with Melbourne Chamber Orchestra. The structured, narrated events include performances, interaction, explanations, demonstrations and an opportunity for students to sing accompanied by the orchestra. The purpose of the program is to provide a strong stimulus for students' achievement in their music study.

567 students participated in the program, which was conceived by Karen Kyriakou.

This program is funded through the Victorian Department of Education's Strategic Partnerships Program.

Members of the orchestra and Stephen Marsh also ran a workshop with musicians from Mallacoota and surrounding areas. This two-hour session was the third iteration of this meaningful experience, in which local composers had the opportunity to have their compositions played/sung by a small ensemble of their local musical colleagues alongside the touring MCO musicians.

On the orchestra's various visits to Mallacoota, it's been obvious the crucial role that music plays in this tight-knit community in helping them to continue the healing process following the devastating bushfires of 2019. It has been a privilege for MCO to play a small part in facilitating the expression of these emotions through the medium of music.

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## SELECTED REVIEWS

"There is trust in all directions and this was true chamber music making of a world-class level. Melbourne Chamber Orchestra's future looks bright and audiences are the beneficiaries."

*Woven Threads, Stewart Kelly, Classic Melbourne*

"This concert was marked by fine playing and a joyous team spirit together with a blend of respect for the past and hope for what is to come. As Rowell journeys through her first season as director, the performance bodes well for the future of the MCO"

*Art of the Symphony, Tony Way, The Age*

"Thoughtfully conceived and engagingly executed... Such polished music making sets the seal on Rowell's first, fine year with the MCO, whetting the appetite for what is to come in next year's season."

*Mozart & Beethoven Concertos, Tony Way, The Age*

"The Melbourne Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Benjamin Bayl, played superbly throughout, with a balanced, clarion sound that filled the theatre and occasionally ran the risk of overwhelming the principals. The Overture was done with panache, and there were memorable passages throughout."

*Idomeneo, Peter Rose, Australian Book Review*

## MCO GIVING CIRCLE

Melbourne Chamber Orchestra thanks its many generous supporters who contribute to the continued excellence of the orchestra.

### CONCERTO \$10,000—\$49,000

Nicholas Callinan AO & Libby Callinan  
Dennis Goldner AM & Kate Murphy  
Maria Myers AC & Allan Myers AC KC  
Fran Thorn  
Anonymous (1)

### SOSTENUTO \$5,000—\$9,999

Mrs Jim Peart

### SERENADE \$2,500—\$4,999

The Arnold Foundation  
Carolyn Baker  
Alastair & Sue Campbell  
Dr Catherine Duncan AM  
Sue Johnston  
Jeremy Ruskin KC & Roz Zalewski OAM  
Romney & Susanne Smeeton  
VISA Plan  
Igor Zambelli

### INTERMEZZO \$1,000—\$2,499

The late Marc Besen AC  
Bill Forrest  
Lyndsey & Peter Hawkins  
Sue Johnston  
Gwen & Edna Jones Foundation  
Dr Richard Knafelc & Grevis Beard  
Joan Lefroy AM & Dr George Lefroy AM  
Jan McDonald  
Marian Neumann  
Louise Persse & John Stapleton  
Marshall P Segan  
Fiona Steffensen  
Ray & Joyce Uebergang Foundation  
Dr Valerie Britton Wilson & John Wilson OAM  
Anonymous (2)

*As at 22 November 2023*

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## PRO ARTE BEQUEST CIRCLE MEMBERS

Ann Badger  
Gunta Eglite  
The late Rosemary Gleeson  
Beth Heinrich

Richard Jackson  
The late Judith Steele  
Profs Gabriela & George  
Stephenson

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