

# AUSTRALIAN STRING QUARTET CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

2025 marks the 40th anniversary of the Australian String Quartet. Across the following pages we invite you to view a selection of highlights from our four decades of music-making, and below we pay tribute to the musicians who have served as full-time employees of the Australian String Quartet. They remain a treasured part of the organisation's legacy and we thank them for their outstanding contribution.

## Violin One

William Hennessy	1985–1996
Peter Tanfield	1997–2001
Natsuko Yoshimoto	2002–2005
Sophie Rowell	2006–2011
Kristian Winther	2012–2014
Dale Barltrop	2016–Current

## Violin Two

Douglas Weiland	1985–1990
Elinor Lea	1991–1998
James Cuddeford	1999–2005
Anne Horton	2006–2013
Ioana Tache	2013–2014
Francesca Hiew	2016–Current

## Viola

Keith Crellin	1985–2001
Esther van Stralen	2001–2002
Jeremy Williams	2002–2005
Sally Boud	2006–2011
Stephen King	2012–2021
Chris Cartlidge	2021–Current

## Cello

Janis Laurs	1985–1995
The late Cameron Retchford	1996–1997
Niall Brown	1997–2005
Rachel Johnston	2006–2013
Sharon Grigoryan	2013–2020
Michael Dahlenburg	2021–Current

# 1985

Violinist William Hennesy forms the Australian String Quartet (ASQ), with Douglas Weiland (violin II), Keith Crellin (viola) and Janis Laurs (cello).

With foundational support from the South Australian government and the South Australian College of Advanced Education, the ASQ becomes a professional full-time string quartet, based in South Australia.



The ASQ sitting on the stairs near the Madley Studio, University of Adelaide. Photography: David Wilson, 1986.

# 1986

On 7 March, the ASQ makes its public debut at the Adelaide Town Hall for the 1986 Adelaide Festival.

With a growing national reputation, the ASQ makes its first television appearance on the ABC, performing at St. James' Church in Sydney.



The ASQ performing at St James' Church Sydney. ABC Music and Heritage, 1986. Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation – Library Sales Music and Heritage © 1986 ABC.



## WIZARDRY OF OZ

Phillip Coggin talks to members of the Australian String Quartet

"Sustaining a meaningful relationship with the rest of the world and remaining in Australia is fundamental to being an artist in our country," says William Hennessy, leader of the recently-formed Australian String Quartet. "It's making a serious attempt at establishing an ensemble of high international standing and stature, that's based on the opposite side of the world to where it actually happens and that raises all sorts of problems which most quartets don't have to consider".

Having gained a formidable reputation in their own country, the Adelaide-based group were in London earlier this year for three recitals at the court of major European patron. When caught up with them at St. John's South Square they had just finished rehearsing the programme of Beethoven's Quartet in E-flat, op. 127, and Elgar's Piano Quintet in A minor, op. 84, in which they were joined by the talented young British pianist, Marie-Nicole Lemieux. Unfortunately, second violinist Douglas Weiland and cellist John Lane had other commitments and with St. John's about to be invaded by a local symphony orchestra, William Hennessy, Keith Cullin and I myself off in search of more secular surroundings. As Cullin expressed a particular fondness for English folk and what we settled down to that in a nearby pub restaurant.

"One thing is clear," says Cullin, as our food arrives, "we didn't make the quartet by advertising four positions in the paper. It was referring to the long evolutionary period before the Australian String Quartet finally came into being. Hennessy and Cullin have been friends since their student days in Berlin during the early seventies. Since then, the softly-spoken violinist, had led most of the leading chamber ensemble work in Australia, and it was during his nine twelve year sabbatical with the Sydney Chamber Orchestra that he met Lane. From 1977 to 1980 Hennessy was based in London as a member of the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields where he met Weiland, the British-born member of the quartet. They also played together for a short time in 1981 at the Henry Street Quartet, which Hennessy had been asked to lead following the resignation of Harry Kirby. Weiland stepped out after notice to fulfil the commitments of a major

Australian tour after the tragic death of second violinist Dorrit Finkler. The two violinists often spoke about forming a quartet, though it was a curious piece of integrity that provided the glimmers of hope. They had not corresponded for several months when Hennessy suddenly wrote to Weiland saying that as neither of them was getting any younger, if they were serious about forming a quartet they should do so now. Coincidentally, over in England, Weiland was performing similar thoughts to Hennessy. The letters crossed simultaneously. "Neither of us is superstitious," says Hennessy. "But from that moment, there was no looking back".

In April 1985 the quartet began a year's intensive preparation, supported by a number of bodies, including the South Australian Government for the Arts, the Australian Council and the South Australian College of Advanced Education where the members hold teaching positions and where they also rehearse. "It's just incredible to see such a forward-looking government," says Hennessy, who played a central role in setting up the sponsorship. "What's more," he continues, "they don't just want us to do anything. In Adelaide they also want to establish an international profile. Every quartet is a huge risk and we are no exception, even though we all have substantial track records. But we've always had long term plans and goals and we can say that we're very much on target".

Many people were surprised at the quartet's decision to use Adelaide as a base in preference to a more cosmopolitan city like Sydney. But as Cullin explains, it has several advantages.

"With a population of around 100,000 it's large enough to have a dynamic artistic life without being totally overwhelming. There is a lot of interest in the arts and also a very active art festival... it's a lovely place to live, as well".

The quartet made their first public appearance at the 1986 Adelaide Festival with a series of recitals, including works by Bartok, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, Dvorak, Brahms and Haendel. Prior to this, both players admit that a lot of technical problems had to be solved. "It's difficult to talk about quartets being a blend of different personalities," says Hennessy. "But in this quartet you're talking about very different

Wizardry of Oz, Phillip Coggin for The Strand, 1988.

# 1987

ASQ collaborates with Australian Dance Theatre for performances at the Adelaide Festival Centre's Playhouse as its first cross-artform collaboration.

ASQ makes its debut at London's prestigious Wigmore Hall in 1987, on its way to performing over 50 concerts internationally by the early 1990's.



An Australian Dance Theatre poster for a performance featuring the ASQ. Design and Photography: Aspect Photographics, 1987.



A photograph of the ASQ's headquarters, the Hartley Building. South Australian Tourism Commission, c.1990, State Library of South Australia PRG 1049/31/15.

# 1991

The ASQ becomes the Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Adelaide's Elder Conservatorium of Music following the merger with the Australian College of Advanced Education.

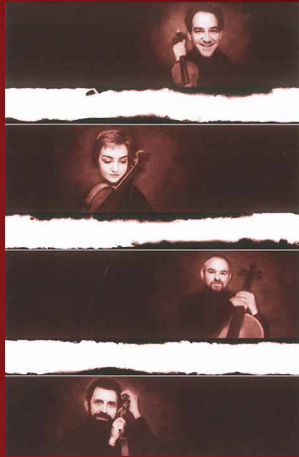
# 1993

The ASQ presents its inaugural Composers' Forum to encourage the creation of new Australian works for string quartet.

# 1997

The ASQ launches its own concert series in South Australia, eventually expanding across the country to include regular concerts in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Canberra and Brisbane.

ASQ's recording output celebrates Australian composers with the completion of the Alfred Hill Collection for the Naxos record label.



## THE AUSTRALIAN STRING QUARTET

### Concert 1

**Thursday**

**22 May**

8pm Elder Hall  
North Terrace

#### Mozart

String Quartet K387

#### Shostakovich

String Quartet no. 4

#### Brahms

String Quartet op. 51 no. 2

Book at  
BASS  
131 246



1997 **Subscription Season**

ASQ Subscription Season flyer, Concert 1. Design: Beverley Studio. Photography: Grant Hancock, 1997.

# 1998

The ASQ establishes a national Board to support the Quartet's artistic vision and the continued growth of the organisation.

# 1999

The ASQ's commitment to regional and remote touring is celebrated through an ABC TV documentary *Strings Across the Strzelecki* following the ASQ's journey through central Australia.



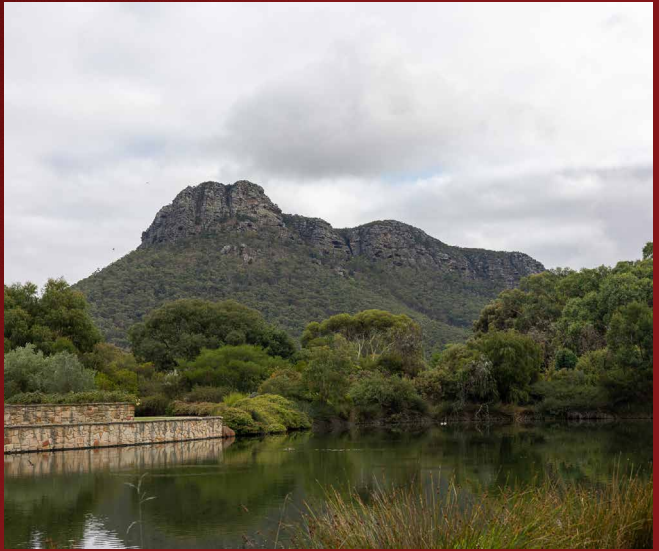
A photograph of the ASQ from the *Strings Across the Strzelecki* Tour. Photography: Ian Kenins, 1999.

# 2000

ASQ becomes a registered charity, recognising its work contributing to the cultural life of Australians through excellent live music performances in capital cities and country venues.

# 2002

With the support of Maria Myers AC and Allan Myers KC AC, the ASQ pilots bespoke performances in the Southern Grampians, to establish its flagship *Dunkeld Festival of Music*.



A view of Mt Sturgeon from the ASQ's Dunkeld Festival of Music.  
Photography: Kane Moroney.



An exclusive event invitation for national subscribers across Australia. Design: Linehan Scott Design.  
Photography: Jacqui Way, 2007.

# 2003

Lasting seven weeks and encompassing seven nations across Asia and Europe, in 2003 the ASQ undertakes its most ambitious and extensive international tour to date.

During the early 2000's, ASQ establishes communities of passionate supporters across Australia through local advisory boards, post-concert hospitality and giving programs.

# 2010

From 2010, as recipients of a quartet of rare 18th century instruments on loan from UKARIA, the ASQ begins its discovery of the sound world of Giovanni Battista Guadagnini's artistry.

Following the success of its Dunkeld festivals, the ASQ establishes the *Margaret River Weekend of Music* in Western Australia, collaborating with local wineries and community organisations.



A photograph of the 1748–49 Guadagnini Violin (Piacenza). Design & art direction: Cul-de-sac Creative. Photography: Jacqui Way, 2011.



ASQ performing at the *Trasimeno Music Festival*. Photographer: Unknown, 2012.

# 2012

ASQ performs with leading artists in the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Italy, including cellist Guy Johnston, pianist Angela Hewitt, Quartetto di Cremona and soprano Anne-Sofie von Otter.

Long-standing collaborator, brand design company Cul-de-sac Creative wins Art Direction award at the AGDA Australian Design Biennale Awards for ASQ's 2012 National Season campaign.

# 2014

ASQ performs with acclaimed guitarist Slava Grigoryan for his 2014 Adelaide Festival, later touring nationally, and records their ARIA-nominated CD *Migration* for ABC Classic.

Internationally acclaimed filmmaker Scott Hicks features the ASQ and the Guadagnini instruments in his documentary *Highly Strung*, premiering at the 2015 Adelaide Film Festival.



Slava Grigoryan and ASQ Migration CD cover art, released by ABC Classic. Design: Cul-de-sac Creative. Photography: Shane Reid, 2017.

# 2016

From 2016, the ASQ collaborates with Port Fairy Spring Festival, UKARIA and Iain Grandage on *Quartet and Country*, supporting first nations artists to create works for string quartet.

Working with 16 string quartets, in 2017-18 ASQ delivers a residency for the Elder Conservatorium at Beijing's China Central Conservatory of Music, as part of a cultural exchange.



ASQ and William Barton performing at the Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre. Photography: Sam Jozeps, 2019.



ASQ and Post Dining performing *PitchFork* at the Masonic Lodge, Adelaide. Photography: Sam Jozepe, 2019

## 2019

The first recording from ASQ's *Australian Anthology* catalogue is released, giving a spotlight to Australian composers with support from Creative Australia's Multi-Year Investment Funding.

With a focus on innovation, the ASQ creates acclaimed and award-winning interactive concert experiences ASQ *Close Quarters*, *Project Ludwig*, and *PitchFork*.

## 2020

A continuing commitment to sharing music in new communities sees the delivery of new festivals: ASQ *Queenstown* (New Zealand), *Robe*, *Dungog*, and *Barossa Weekends of Music*.

ASQ co-commissions, records and performs the award winning score for Rafael Bonachela's *Impermanence* by Bryce Dessner with Sydney Dance Company, touring Australia, Europe and the United States over a number of years.



Sydney Dance Company and ASQ performing Rafael Bonachela's *Impermanence*. Photography: Pedro Greig, Sydney Dance Company, 2020.

# 2021

Reaching beyond the concert hall the ASQ collaborates with William Barton, Stephen King, Jumpgate and Go Patterson Films to create *Square Circles* for global distribution.

ASQ's streaming platform *ASQ On Demand* is launched in 2021, hosting more than 100 films, and expands its digital offerings with the *Inner Voices* podcast in 2025.



A photograph from *Square Circles* at the Sydney Opera House. Photography: Ravyna Jassani, 2025.



ASQ and Dr Lou Bennett AM performing *nyilamum song cycles* at the String Quartet Biennale Amsterdam. Photography: Sam Jozeps 2024.

# 2024

ASQ debuts at the prestigious String Quartet Biennale Amsterdam for the World Premiere of *nyilamum song cycles*, a multi-year collaboration with Dr Lou Bennett AM and Paul Stanhope.

# 2025

ASQ celebrates 40 years with its *BIG GIG*, featuring exhibitions, guest string quartets, interactive elements and free ASQ performances at the Adelaide Town Hall.