**MUSICA VIVA AUSTRALIA**

Concert Guide

**TRIO ISIMSIZ**

Pablo Hernán Benedí, violin

Edvard Pogossian, cello

Erdem Mısırlıoğlu, piano

**Acknowledgement of Countries**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the many lands on which we meet, work and live, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present—people who have sung their songs, danced their dances and told their stories on these lands for thousands of generations, and who continue to do so.

**Other acknowledgements**

With special thanks to our Concert Champions for their support of this tour within their state. We also gratefully acknowledge the Creative Development Collective for their generous support of new artistic projects, and to the Amadeus Society for their support of the 2025 Concert Season.

**TOUR OVERVIEW**

Adelaide

Adelaide Town Hall

Thursday 2 October, 7.30pm

Lesley Lynn Tribute Concert

Pre-concert talk: 6.45pm, Prince Alfred Room

Brisbane

Queensland conservatorium

Saturday 11 October, 7pm

Recorded for delayed broadcast by ABC Classic

Pre-concert talk: 6.15pm, Boardroom

Canberra

Llewellyn Hall, ANU School of Music

Friday 3 October, 7pm

Pre-concert talk: 6.15pm, Larry Sitsky Room

Melbourne

Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, Melbourne Recital Centre

Tuesday 7 October, 7pm

Pre-concert talk: 6.15pm, Eva and Marc Besen Suite, level 2

Meet the artists after the concert

Newcastle

Newcastle City Hall

Thursday 9 October, 7.30pm

Pre-concert talk: 6.45pm, Mulubinba Room

Meet the artists after the concert

Perth

Regal Theatre, Subiaco

Tuesday 30 September, 7.30pm

Sydney

City Recital Hall

Monday 13 October, 7pm

Pre-concert talk: 6.15pm, Level 3 Foyer

**FOREWORD  
from the Artistic Director**

In the same way that you can tell a lot about a music agent from the artist list they assemble, so too can you evaluate a performer or ensemble from the composers they commission. In choosing the young Spanish composer Francisco Coll as an artistic collaborator, Trio Isimsiz (Turkish for ‘trio without name’) announced itself as a fearless, imaginative ensemble, one able to approach Coll’s considerable challenges head on, creating arguably the most superb and original addition to the piano trio repertory this century. Coll has written for them a showpiece, one that fractures the genre and then threads together disparate, brilliant jewels into a single, opulent string, its virtuosity disguised (though barely) beneath the most beguiling surface.

Coll himself described the piece in 2022 around the time of its UK premiere at the Aldeburgh Festival, where a hundred years ago I was Head of Music. ‘To write a piano trio is something very important for a composer of my profile. You know, it has this historical connotation, and I like to play with history somehow... So, this was the perfect match. Everything was very stimulating for me.’ For me too: it was the resulting work that first brought to my attention the superb and easy musicianship of Trio Isimsiz.

That ‘historical connotation’ is underlined in the remainder of the ensemble’s program. Brahms’s third piano trio and Schubert’s first have legitimate claim to being the genre’s calling cards, each a four-movement 19th-century colossus, each perfectly crafted to the three individual performers and instruments involved – an almost self-conscious riposte to the genre’s less independent 18th-century forebear.

It is always a pleasure and a responsibility inviting artists to Australia for the first time. Many of you would have heard recordings or even live performances of this canonic repertory by the Beaux Arts Trio, long a touchstone ensemble for us all. It is no invidious comparison to mention Erdem, Pablo and Edvard in the same breath as that great trio, for here we have three outstanding musicians looking to the musical past all the while they tend to its future with certain steps and no small virtuosity.

— Paul Kildea

**PROGRAM**

Johannes BRAHMS (1833–1897)

Piano Trio in C minor, Op. 101 (1886) 22 min

I Allegro energico (Fast, energetic)

II Presto non assai (Quick but not very quick)

III Andante grazioso (Moving gracefully at an easy walking pace)

IV Allegro molto (Very fast)

Francisco COLL (b 1985)

Piano Trio (2020) 18 min  
  
In four movements  
Australian premiere performances

INTERVAL

Franz SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat major, D898 (1827) 42 min

I Allegro moderato (Moderately fast)

II Andante un poco mosso (Moving along at an easy walking pace)

III Scherzo. Allegro (Fast)

IV Rondo. Allegro vivace (Fast and lively)

Please ensure that mobile phones are turned off before the performance. Photography and video recording are not permitted during the performance.

**REGIONAL TOURING**

Musica Viva Australia is passionate about sharing outstanding music and artists with communities across regional and remote NSW. Our Regional Featured Artists change each year and include dynamic young ensembles as well as established musicians at the peak of their careers.

We collaborate and partner with a wide range of presenters including regional conservatoria; music societies and clubs; festivals; and independent venues. We are grateful for funding which allows us to level the playing field for regional presenters, through supporting costs of touring and logistics.

As part of Musica Viva Australia’s Regional Touring Program, Trio Isimsiz will perform a concert for the New England Conservatorium of Music on Tuesday 14 October, 7pm at Armidale Town Hall.

For details visit: [www.musicaviva.com.au/regional](http://www.musicaviva.com.au/regional)

**MASTERCLASSES**

Musica Viva Australia creates opportunities for Australian and internationally acclaimed artists to share their experience and expertise with talented early-career artists and young music students, creating an enriching learning experience.

The following masterclasses are presented as part of this tour:

Perth

University of Western Australia

Tuesday 30 September

Brisbane

The University of Queensland

Friday 10 October

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YMF Australia

Anonymous (3)

Musica Viva Australia Masterclasses are also supported by Wesfarmers Arts in Western Australia, Monash University in Victoria, University of Queensland, and the Australian National University in Canberra.

For details visit: [www.musicaviva.com.au/masterclasses](http://www.musicaviva.com.au/masterclasses)

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

Trio Isimsiz

Formed in 2009 at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Trio Isimsiz won First Prize and the Audience Prize at the 2015 Trondheim Competition, and Second Prize at the 2017 Haydn International Competition in Vienna. They were selected for representation by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2013 and were awarded a fellowship from the Borletti-Buitoni Trust in 2018.

The Trio has performed widely in Europe, with highlights including recitals at the Stavanger, Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Peasmarsh and Gower Festivals (the last of these broadcast by BBC Radio 3), Tivoli Concert Hall, Snape Maltings, Fundación Juan March in Madrid and Marianischer Saal in Lucerne. Further afield, they have undertaken tours in China and Argentina.

In 2017 the Trio returned to the Aldeburgh Festival and completed their first CD, for the Rubicon label. Recent engagements include an all-Beethoven program at the Théâtre des Abbesses in Paris, concerts at the Kölner Philharmonie, Trondheim Chamber Music Festival and recitals at Wigmore Hall, Brighton Dome and Saffron Hall.

Trio Isimsiz have enjoyed a Chamber Music Fellowship at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. They have collaborated with Anthony Marwood, Krzysztof Chorzelski, Richard Lester and Aleksandar Madžar, and attended IMS Prussia Cove working with Ferenc Rados.

During their studies the Trio undertook residencies at the Banff Centre in Canada, Jeunesses Musicales Chamber Music in Germany and the Mozarteum, Salzburg, and participated in masterclasses with András Schiff, Steven Isserlis, Menahem Pressler, Thomas Riebl, Wolfgang Redik, the Gould Piano Trio and the Belcea and Takács Quartets.

All three members of Trio Isimsiz enjoy great success individually. Pianist Erdem Mısırlıoğlu was a Concerto Finalist in the BBC Young Musician competition in 2008, violinist Pablo Hernán Benedí was a founding member of the Chiaroscuro Quartet, formed by Alina Ibragimova, and cellist Edvard Pogossian’s accolades include first prize in the Juilliard Concerto Competition.

**ABOUT THE MUSIC**

**Johannes Brahms**

The summer of 1886 was a blissful and productive time for Johannes Brahms. Following the successful premiere of his Fourth Symphony, a work over which he had ‘laboured long and hard’, Brahms left Vienna to spend the summer at Lake Thun in Switzerland. Surrounded by the tall peaks of the Alps, Brahms wrote of his idyllic setting to a friend: ‘You have no conception of how beautiful and comfortable it is here in every respect. You can picture for yourself what’s involved – delightful lodgings, lovely walks, the company of pleasant people, and good taverns…’, all of which the composer no doubt enjoyed.

In this environment, Brahms was also musically reinvigorated. Over a period of just six weeks, he completed three highly contrasted chamber works for strings and piano: his grand Second Cello Sonata, the lyrical Violin Sonata in A major, and the dramatic Piano Trio in C minor. The Trio, his third and final work in this genre, was to become one of his proudest achievements. It is widely considered to be one of Brahms’s most refined yet intense compositions; the composer had never before produced a four-movement work in such compact dimensions. With a length of just a little over 20 minutes, this score was less than half the duration of his first efforts in the genre some 23 years earlier.

Though compressed in length, the score’s mighty temperament is imposingly concentrated, with Brahms wasting no time to establish the drama. From the outset, powerful declamatory chords and gritty rhythmic figures take hold, providing the threads that form the basis of the entire opening movement. Some commentators have suggested that its striking sense of grandeur may have been a reflection of Brahms’s surrounds – the alpine landscape with all its jagged peaks. While we may wonder about the inspiration, what is certain is that this movement is one of the most arrestingly bold and forthright statements in all of Brahms’s output.

By contrast, the second movement was described by English theorist Donald Tovey as a piece that ‘hurries by, like a frightened child’. The fleeting scene of disquiet is masterfully rendered. Rarely venturing outside of the realm of soft dynamics, and indicating that the strings are to play with mutes, Brahms creates a sound world of shadows and whispers, an understated response to the grandeur of the previous movement.

In what is perhaps the most purely tuneful four minutes in all of Brahms’s chamber music, the third movement imparts an air of contentment. The piano and strings gently alternate in their entries; indeed, there are relatively few occasions where the whole ensemble plays together. Less immediately perceptible are the alternating time signatures – a bar of 3/4, followed by two of 2/4 – which ingeniously give the movement its gentle sway. There are seemingly no constrictions placed upon the melody to fit into a certain structure or number of beats: Brahms simply lets it unfold. The contrast with the final movement – a return to the intense drama of the first – could not be greater.

This C minor Trio was premiered on 20 December 1886, with Brahms at the piano, and two of the great string virtuosos of the time, violinist Jenő Hubay and cellist David Popper. Soon after its publication in 1887, Brahms’s dear friend Clara Schumann was moved to declare: ‘What a work this is, inspired throughout in its passion, its power of thought, its gracefulness, its poetry. No previous work of Johannes’s has so completely carried me away.’

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**Francisco Coll**

Composer-conductor Francisco Coll has found advocates in the world’s leading orchestras and ensembles, including the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Los Angeles Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra and Ensemble Modern. His music has been heard at festivals from Aldeburgh, Aix and Aspen to the BBC Proms, Verbier and Tanglewood; his work is performed by leading instrumentalists including Pekka Kuusisto, Augustin Hadelich and Sean Shibe.

Born in Valencia, Coll studied at the Valencia and Madrid Conservatoires before moving to London to work privately with Thomas Adès (as his only pupil to-date) and with Richard Baker at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Coll’s concert opener Hidd’n Blue was premiered in 2012 by the London Symphony Orchestra. His 2014 chamber opera Café Kafka was premiered to great acclaim by Aldeburgh Music, Opera North and the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. In 2019 he became the first composer to receive an International Classical Music Award.

Recent highlights include a Violin Concerto for Patricia Kopatchinskaja, a Cello Concerto for Sol Gabetta, the double concerto Les Plaisirs Illuminés (winner of the BBC Music Magazine concerto prize) for Kopatchinskaja and Gabetta, Ciudad sin sueño for piano and orchestra for Javier Perianes, and Two Waltzes Towards Civilization, premiered by Kirill Gerstein. Enemigo del pueblo, an evening-length opera after Ibsen, debuts in November 2025 at the Palau de les Arts.

Commissioned for Trio Isimsiz by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, Centro Nacional de Difusión Musical (Madrid), and Britten Pears Arts, Francisco Coll’s Piano Trio (2020) stemmed from a conversation between the composer and violinist Pablo Hernán Benedí a few years prior. ‘Pablo asked if I would write a piano trio,’ Coll recalled. ‘I thought it was a great idea. It was clear they wanted a substantial work.’ Staying true to the trio’s request, this 17-minute work is rich in contrasting styles and influences, ‘a voyage between the familiar and unconventional’, he says. It is cast in four movements of brilliant – but barbed – invention. Its impressive imaginative range encompasses allusions to Strauss’s Die schweigsame Frau, a Larghetto ‘imbued by melodic features from flamenco’ and a ‘hallucinated fugue’, as well as fragments of tango.

The work’s first performance was given by Trio Isimsiz at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain, on 24 January 2022.

© Faber Music

**Franz Schubert**

Over the course of Franz Schubert’s lifetime, the piano trio genre went through something of an extreme makeover. Evolving from what was essentially an accompanied keyboard sonata, each of the trio’s instruments would see an increase in independence, with the cello in particular moving from a role of support to feature more equitably in the ensemble. Beethoven’s widely acclaimed last trios (including the grand ‘Archduke’ of 1811) had helped transform the genre; Schubert’s two trios, appearing some 16 years after the ‘Archduke’, confirmed Beethoven’s model with its large-scale, robust offerings, and assisted the trio to emerge from the shadow of the string quartet.

Although the precise composition date of Schubert’s First Trio is subject to conjecture, it is believed that Schubert worked on the score between October and November 1827. In what were to be his final 12 months, suffering badly from the chronic illnesses that would eventually claim him at the age of 31, he pushed himself to produce what he termed ‘more substantial’ works. The result was a rather imposing set of masterpieces. In addition to his two trios, this was the time of his ‘Great’ C major Symphony, the F minor Fantasie for piano duet, the Cello Quintet, the three last Piano Sonatas, and perhaps most stunningly, the song-cycle Winterreise.

Many of these late works are filled with a sorrow and a pervading sense of melancholy: even his closest friends were shocked by the sustained sense of gloom in Winterreise. But his First Piano Trio, though composed concurrently with the song-cycle, imparts little of the weariness or sense of the inevitable, nor of the parallel torment that he was facing in his own life. Indeed, when Robert Schumann heard the Trio, he declared, ‘One glance at it and the troubles of our human existence disappear and the whole world is fresh and bright again.’

The Trio opens in the cheerful key of B-flat major – the same key and using the same five initial notes as Beethoven’s ‘Archduke’. Giving the movement a distinctive swagger of self-confidence, there is much rhythmic interplay between the strings – unified in rising melody – and the striding, dotted figures in the left-hand piano part.

From this exuberance and optimism, Schubert presents the Andante movement as he does in many of his songs: the piano’s accompaniment gently sets itself in the background, and the cello sings its expressive theme, relishing its time in the upper register. In this movement, it is these beautiful melodies that take precedence. The theme is passed from instrument to instrument, as if all three players are engaged in eloquent dialogue. The composer chooses not to develop the tunes in any major way, instead subtly changing their presentation by way of fine nuances of expression, harmony and colour. It appears Schubert originally intended a different second movement, posthumously published as the Notturno, D897, but later changed his mind and composed the present movement in its place.

Whereas the second movement is all flowing lines, the light-hearted third movement teases with merriment. Its brief trio section portrays a graceful Viennese waltz led by the violin, before a restatement of the playful Scherzo, with its colourful key changes, closes the movement.

Schubert scholar Alfred Einstein (not to be confused with his distant cousin, the scientist Albert Einstein) suggests that the theme of the Trio’s final movement bears a likeness to the composer’s 1815 song Skolie. Not only does the theme correspond, its lyrics seem to aptly express the spirit of Schubert’s optimism in this final movement: ‘Let us in the bright May morning take delight in the brief life of the flower, before its fragrance disappears.’

Like many of Schubert’s works, the First Trio was not publicly performed or published during his short lifetime. Instead, it appears to have received its first performance at an informal gathering of friends in either December 1827 or January 1828. The Trio would have been beyond most amateur musicians of the time, but Schubert enjoyed the company of distinguished professional instrumentalists Ignaz Schuppanzigh (violin), Josef Linke (cello) and Carl Maria von Bocklet (piano), who gave the informal premiere. Incidentally, they were the very same string players who had given the premiere of Beethoven’s ‘Archduke’ some 13 years earlier.

Eight years after its composer’s death, its publication finally secured, the Trio’s arrival was announced by Robert Schumann with his usual insight: ‘Let the work, which he bequeathed to us, be a cherished inheritance. Time, though producing much that is beautiful, will not soon produce another Schubert!’

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**RETROSPECTIVE  
Strike A Chord 2025**

From the 170 groups who entered across the Championship and Foundation sections; to the 12 ensembles who took to the stage in the National Final, we are so proud of these incredible young musicians and everyone who took part in the 2025 competition.

Musica Viva Australia extends its thanks to all participants, teachers and families for their dedication and passion. The creativity and joy displayed by this year’s ensembles has been remarkable.

WINNERS National Final 2025

First Prize – $5,000 – The Robert Salzer Prize

The IncrediBows (QLD)

Second Prize – $4,000 – The Paul Morawetz Prize

Kingussie Trio (VIC)

Third Prize – $2,500 – Youth Music Foundation of Australia Prize

ATC Trio (QLD)

See the full list of winners in each section, and learn more about the program: [www.musicaviva.com.au/strike-a-chord](http://www.musicaviva.com.au/strike-a-chord)

**INTERVIEW**

by Ariane Todes

The word ‘play’ has a special double meaning for musicians. On one hand, it’s sitting in front of a score with an instrument, making music. On the other, it involves doing things for sheer pleasure and fun, in the spirit of a child. I’m reminded of this as I talk to the three members of the Isimsiz Trio. Even as violinist Pablo Hernán Benedí, pianist Erdem Mısırlıoğlu and cellist Edvard Pogossian log into Zoom from Lausanne, Cambridge and Newcastle, respectively, separated by land, sea and the little black boxes on the screen, they obviously have a lot of fun together. Where most Zoom meetings tend to be a little dour, these three tease each other constantly. It’s a little insight into what their practice sessions must be like, why they work so well together musically, and what will happen on their Australian tour.

Their close camaraderie dates back to the group’s foundation in 2009, as students at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, with their original cellist, Michael Petrov. Rehearsing many times a week together they developed a musical bond that would win them a place on the prestigious YCAT (Young Classical Artists Trust) scheme in 2013, as well as First and Audience prizes at the 2015 Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition. The Trio went on to perform in prestigious halls and festivals around Europe and record two celebrated albums. Then came the pandemic, and everything changed.

‘We went from rehearsing many times a week to barely seeing each other,’ says Mısırlıoğlu. ‘Then it stayed like that, and now we get together more based on tours in terms of rehearsing.’

During the pandemic, cellist Petrov left music in 2021 for software design and they recruited Pogossian. He reflects on what it was like joining such a tight-knit group: ‘A lot of the strength of the Trio comes from the fact that they were friends as well, and enjoyed not just playing music together, but spending time together. I think I slot well into that. We have a similar fun vibe. We’re a collective. They established so much in the Guildhall days, and Pablo and Erdem play so well together, so it took me a little time to feel I was an equal part of it, but they made it very easy for me.’

The players now pursue their own paths outside the Trio, whether in teaching, orchestral or other chamber work. Benedí says: ‘It’s great that we all bring different energies and experiences from in between these patches. We try to enrich each other from that.’

Working outside the Trio even makes coming together all the more enjoyable, according to Pogossian: ‘I do a lot of orchestral playing and teaching now and I don’t get to play as much chamber music as I would like, so when we meet it’s like Christmas. It’s nice to be able to get deep into the music.’

There are other advantages, Mısırlıoğlu says: ‘When we get together, it’s always fresh. And we don’t fight because we don’t see each other enough!’

Benedí adds: ‘What I enjoy most with this group, having worked in several other groups, is that I find rehearsals soothing and calming. There is rarely any confrontation, but just an openness to try out, listen and be listened to. It sounds   
a little cheesy!’

How do they rehearse when they’re finally in a room together? ‘We all enjoy doing things slowly,’ says Mısırlıoğlu. ‘If you spend time travelling through any territory in slow motion, you enjoy all the flavours, smells and tastes more, and some of that is retained as you go into it and get closer to a performance. We spend plenty of time discussing what we’re going for. It’s important to meet each other and be on the same page, but actually, the most enjoyable rehearsing doesn’t involve a lot of speaking. It can just be listening.’

Where does this ethos come from?

Mısırlıoğlu says: ‘It’s probably to do with various figures in each of our personal musical journeys, who helped us feel the freedom to explore, and not necessarily being told how to play. That’s very important. We feel we have an identity, something to say, and we don’t have to be in any kind of a box. We all come from that kind of culture.’

For this Australian tour, they’re playing the same program across eight concerts. What does that feel like?

‘I love having many concerts back to back,’ says Mısırlıoğlu. ‘It’s a huge psychological game. The first concert, you don’t know how it’s going to go. The second, you’ve had the first one and it tends to grow. And I enjoy the later ones even more, as you become a bit more accustomed to the touring, although, of course, there are other things, like fatigue and travel days, which can work in the other direction.’

However, the fatigue sometimes helps the playing (in both senses), according to Benedí: ‘Even though some things happen by accident, these become something to play with. That’s also part of the game. We are not always all going to be on the same page when we’re tired but how do you get energy from your colleagues? How can you be poked, as well as poking? That’s very exciting.’

What does he mean by poke? ‘Sometimes you’re tired, because you’ve been travelling, the violin is upset because you’ve arrived in a humid hall with an ungrateful acoustic and perhaps you’re listening to yourself more than you should. It’s nice that a colleague pokes you – they do something radically new musically and draw you back into the conversation. The unexpected is a tool to bring a sharp focus on listening.’

It won’t just be music they’ll be playing on tour – they also enjoy ping pong and poker. Mısırlıoğlu teases Pogossian, ‘I’ve been playing ping pong this summer, so I’ve upped my game.’ But where Mısırlıoğlu loses ping pong, he’s the master poker player, Pogossian admits: ‘Erdem is the champion of poker. He was teaching me and would beat me every time.’ Mısırlıoğlu says, ‘It’s nice to have some competition going on next to the more collaborative stuff!’

The trio is playing ping pong across Australia, from Perth to Armidale. And Francisco Coll, Brahms and Schubert, of course.

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We are also grateful to the following for their generous support of this work: Katherine & Reg Grinberg, D R & K M Magarey, Ken & Liz Nielsen, Playking Foundation, Richard Wilkins, A gift to share the love of music, Anonymous

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We are deeply appreciative of those who have chosen to leave a bequest to Musica Viva Australia in their will, to make a lasting impact that not only celebrates their passion for music but enables music for future generations of audiences and artists alike. Your legacy will live on through our work.

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NSW

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QLD

The late Steven Kinston

SA

The late Edith Dubsky, In memory of Helen Godlee, The late Anne Hirsch, The late Lesley Lynn

VIC

In memory of Anita Morawetz, The family of the late Paul Morawetz, The late Dr G D Watson

WA

Anonymous

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**Untold Stories**

by Mathew Jordan

Huntington Estate: A Harmony of Wine, Craft and Community

Wandering through the quiet barrel hall at Huntington Estate in Mudgee, once the heart of the much-loved Huntington Festival, a visitor can still hear the echoes of music, laughter and celebration. The space, now cool and serene, once played host to world-class string quartets and chamber ensembles.

We sat down here with General Manager Maddi McFarlane and Winemaker-Owner Tim Stevens for a glass and a conversation – a chance to reflect on what it takes to create something lasting and beautiful in both wine and music.

‘There’s a real symmetry between the two,’ Tim reflects. ‘In both, there’s the structure – the science, the practice, the hours of preparation. But then there’s the artistry. The leap of faith. The ego, even – that little spark that gives a wine, or a performance, its X factor.’

That balance between science and creativity runs through everything at Huntington Estate. It’s a full-service winery that not only produces its own renowned wines, but also supports neighbouring vineyards with bottling and services. Consistency and quality are its hallmark, but beneath that steady surface lies a quiet thread of innovation, intuition, and bold risk-taking – all grounded in respect for the land, the vines, and the people who work with them.

Tim Stevens first arrived in Mudgee with long hair, a journalist’s background, and a dream to make wine. In 1996, he bought a vineyard next door to Huntington Estate and founded Abercorn – a small but mighty label that, within just a few years, was sweeping local wine show awards. In 2005, he purchased Huntington Estate from his mentor Bob Roberts and became its custodian, committed to preserving the signature style he loved while preparing the business for the future.

‘I’ve been here nearly 20 years now,’ he says with a grin. ‘And I feel like I’m just finding my feet.’ There’s some awe in his voice – at the shifting seasons, the hard-won lessons, and the sheer resilience of the 56-year-old vines that have endured drought, flood, frost, fire, and even the odd mouse plague.

Tim still remembers the night he proposed to his now-wife Nicky – and the elaborate ruse he orchestrated so that the big news could be announced on stage at the Huntington Festival. ‘We may have forgotten to tell the families first,’ he laughs. ‘They were a little surprised to find out they weren’t the first to know. But it was such a special moment, and the festival was our family too.’

There have been plenty of challenges along the way – the devastating 2020 vintage lost to smoke taint, the 2019 heatwave, COVID disruptions, trade bans and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns. And yet, through it all, Huntington’s wines have continued to earn accolades and loyal fans. It’s a testament to the strength of the brand and to Tim’s thoughtful evolution as a winemaker.

For Tim, winemaking isn’t just a creative pursuit – it’s a long-term responsibility. Huntington Estate has embraced sustainability as a guiding principle, not a marketing buzzword. ‘It’s not a checklist,’ he says. ‘It’s a mindset. It’s about leaving things better than we found them.’

That mindset shows up across the business: in solar-powered infrastructure, soil regeneration, cover crops, composting, minimal packaging, and the planting of hardy varietals like Grenache that are built to withstand the harsher seasons ahead. ‘We live among these vines,’ Tim says. ‘They’re part of the family.’

General Manager Maddi McFarlane knows this land well. The daughter of viticulturalists, she returned to Mudgee after living and working around the world, including a stint in Sydney, and started out at Huntington in administration. Today, she brings a broad perspective to a deeply local business, helping to shape its next chapter.

‘It’s a place that welcomes people,’ she says. ‘Whether you’re an international artist or a neighbour from down the road, there’s warmth and openness here.’

That welcoming spirit extended naturally to Musica Viva Australia, whose artists have felt completely at home performing in the barrel room, tasting the wines, and forming friendships along the way. ‘The Goldner String Quartet were a real catalyst,’ Tim says. ‘It felt like we had a shared language –   
of excellence, curiosity and connection.’

These days, that shared spirit continues in a simple but meaningful way. At Musica Viva Australia events around the country, from Brisbane to Melbourne, Sydney to Canberra, audiences, artists and supporters are often greeted with a glass of Huntington wine. Whether it’s a Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay or Semillon, it’s a gesture that speaks to the warmth and generosity at the heart of this partnership.

As Musica Viva Australia celebrates its own 80-year history, it’s a pleasure to celebrate our partnership with Huntington Estate – a company built on dedication to craft, enduring relationships, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Just as we have championed the transformative power of live performance across generations, Huntington has nurtured its vines, its people, and its wines with integrity and vision. It’s a partnership that feels as natural as it is enduring – a shared celebration of art, connection, and the things that get better with time.

This is part of a series of Untold Stories, about the people behind the music at Musica Viva Australia. Play your part in the future story of Musica Viva Australia by making a gift in our 80th anniversary year.

To discuss making a gift, please contact Zoë Cobden-Jewitt, zcobden-jewitt@musicaviva.com.au