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 - [Live Reviews](#)
 - [Film Reviews](#)
 - [Recorded Reviews](#)
 - [Book Reviews](#)
- [Features](#)
 - [World Premiere](#)
 - [Rising Star](#)
 - [Guy Noble's Soapbox](#)
 - [Cutting Edge](#)
 - [Composer of the Month](#)
 - [On Screen](#)
 - [All Features](#)
- [Music](#)
 - [Playlists](#)
 - [All Music](#)
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- [Theatre](#)
- [Dance](#)
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Feature

World Premiere: Graceful to Galloping

Andrew Schultz discusses his new work for the WASO, which draws on Thelonious Monk and a folk song celebrating wild horses.

by *Andrew Schultz* on 22 May, 2023

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My Bassoon Concerto is a three-movement work for bassoon and full orchestra running 21 minutes. The work was commissioned for the [West Australian Symphony Orchestra](#) by Geoff Stearn, and was written in very close collaboration with the orchestra's Principal Bassoon Jane Kircher-Lindner – the wonderful soloist in the work's premiere.



Andrew Schultz. Photo supplied

I composed it in the second half of 2022, whilst I was the Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser Visiting Professor of Australian Studies at Harvard University and living in Boston.

The bassoon has a unique and expressive voice and is probably somewhat unusual as a solo instrument in a concerto. But its expressive and distinct personality, large range, surprising agility and many moods make it a fascinating instrument for which to write a large solo work. As in most of my music, harmony provides the structural continuity throughout. In particular, a harmonic process involving a shift around thirds happens frequently as a formal underpinning of the concerto.

I have opted to use the full orchestra with an emphasis on timbre and colour. The orchestral scoring of the work uses the complete woodwind family: piccolo, flute, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon and contrabassoon. At various times, each of the woodwinds accompanies the solo bassoon.

In the brass, the trumpets have a particularly prominent role. They are nearly always muted, and the work places a lot of emphasis on the blended dialogue between trumpet and solo bassoon. In the second movement, the trumpets move to antiphonal positions on either side of the stage and echo the solo bassoon.

Percussion is also important in the orchestration, with the use of vibraphone, marimba and many tuned percussion instruments throughout, as well as the exciting classic salsa combo of timbales and bongos for the demented galloping rhythms of the last movement.

The titles of the three movements hint at my artistic concerns in the work. In the first movement (marked “Misterioso – moderately fast, graceful and freely”) the bassoon moves from lyrical solo passages to bravura chromatic clowning and back again to arpeggiated lyricism. There are nods to the famous Thelonious Monk song *Misterioso* in quiet corners of the movement.

The second movement (“Exquisite Aeon – sustained, slow, expansive”) is a musical snapshot of the vastness of time and space in which a sequence of widely scored orchestral chords provides a backdrop to duets between lower strings and bassoon, with an elaborate decoration of ethereal percussion and other fleeting colours.

The third movement (“Sable Island Gallop – fast and playful”) takes a short and brilliant folk song from the Canadian East Coast that celebrates Sable Island’s wild, “crazy horses” as its musical source for rapid surges of percussive rhythms and playful bassoon virtuosity. To quote the song: “On the stormy western ocean/ Just eighty miles from land/ Lies a barren little island/ Composed of grass and sand. You’re chasing crazy horses/ From daylight until dark.” The soloist and orchestra toss around rhythmic fragments and the galloping motion of the song as if in a continual game of chase.

The West Australian Symphony Orchestra performs the world premiere of Andrew Schultz’s Bassoon Concerto in its *Symphonic Titans* concert, Perth Concert Hall, 2–3 June.