

WASO plays Symphonic Titans Mozart & Mahler, with Asher Fisch, Jane Kircher-Lindner & Andrew Schultz



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Jane Kircher-Lindner plays the world premiere of Andrew Schultz's bassoon concerto, with WA Symphony Orchestra and conductor Asher Fisch at Perth Concert Hall. Credit: Daniel James Grant

A world premiere and a brand new tech aid spiced the night for WA Symphony Orchestra's Symphonic Titans program at Perth Concert Hall on Friday.

WASO principal Jane Kircher-Lindner cut a striking figure in the premiere of Andrew Schultz's bassoon concerto, artist and instrument emerging from the heart of the orchestra in a rare lead role.

Each was elegantly eloquent in a tuneful first reading, a lyrical solo introduction summoning call and response from muted trumpet over the "Misterioso" soundscape of the opening, with harp and flute highlights and oboe echoes.

Woodwind and brass formed tributaries to the main event, with bassoon ambling through pensively as glittering colours erupted all around; Kircher-Linder progressing like a Disney princess in an enchanted forest.

Sudden energy inspired a flurry of notes from bassoon, rhythmic and expressive with a cinematic sweep, before plunging into a probing, teasing cadenza, then rejoining the ensemble in renewed conversation with muted trumpets (Fletcher Cox and Peter Miller) and tuba (Jason Catchpole).

The second stanza, Excquisite Aeon, summoned a meditative solo over strings, percussion and woodwind, weaving a gentle magic as trumpets danced attendance from the wings of the stage. Kircher-Lindner seemed to draw in and combine melodic lines to infill the harmonics of her own tone in a pleasing, organic mix.



Composer Andrew Schultz, soloist Jane Kircher-Lindner and conductor Asher Fisch take a bow for the world premiere of Schultz's bassoon concerto. Credit: Daniel James Grant

Percussion set up tribal rhythms for the finale, Sable Island Gallop; bassoon writhing sinuously amid the drama as horns, trumpets, low brass and woodwind rent the air with furtive flourishes, each outburst adding to the energy of the soloist.

Schultz loaded a smorgasbord of genres into this robust romp, with jazz and Hollywood ever present, powering through to a firecracker climax and a shower of hometown cheers.

The premiere was bracketed by the Symphonic Titans of the title.

Mozart's Masonic Funeral Music opened the bill with solitary oboe (Liz Chee) then woodwind choir in a solemn dirge, almost Baroque in timbre; an elaborate tribute to musical patrons and masonic brothers played with studied intent.

Conductor Asher Fisch maintained a measured gravity throughout, barely rising in volume or expression above a formal statement of respect.

At the interval, punters were prompted to load an app offering a piano score of Mahler's First Symphony, plus Fisch's critical notes; an experiment, he said, in bending the inevitable cell phone to the service of music.

With or without the tech, crystalline chords opened a world of folklore and fantasy, double reeds summoning a nascent fanfare in clarinet (Allan Meyer), answered by offstage trumpets, muted for mystical effect. Clarinet channelled a cuckoo call and horns the stirring of dawn, again to distant fanfares and a rumbling in timpani (Alex Timcke).

Warm sun seemed to suffuse strings as trumpets returned to the stage and a full-voiced solo (Jenna Smith) beckoned flute (Andrew Nicholson) as if to a dance.

Fisch caught the lyricism of this massive movement, carried with grace in cellos then high strings, building to full ensemble then dying to the opening reverie, bolstered now by bass drum and tuba. A horn chorus picked up the lead, quietly powerful, before throwing to strings again to develop the familiar figure; erupting across the back row like a summer storm and closing in a cascade of colour.



Brass firepower bolsters WA Symphony Orchestra's Symphonic Titans program. Credit: Daniel James Grant

Raw power in bass and cello stated the bucolic "Laendler" dance theme of the second stanza, spurring echoes in horns, woodwind, and brass, urged on by timpani then falling back to violins before reviving in full orchestra over offbeat, driving basses.

David Evans' horn reset the mood amid a jaunty ambience emanating from Fisch's baton, fading then returning to the strident mode of the opening; ever more florid, with fluttering trills in the cadence.

A ghostly charm settled on stage for the solemn lament of the third movement, ringing out in round form through bass (Andrew Sinclair) then all shades of woodwind with timpani tolling out a funeral beat.

Trumpet and oboe subtly lifted energy and tempo to a gentle dance measure, shared across the ensemble before fading and refreshing, dying and reviving as a pastoral paean. All hues of nature broke through in turn before falling to a fateful gong and reprising the funeral march with a tango-like trumpet countermelody.

Klezmer-style woodwind briefly led in another lament before . . . massive attack from every section announced the finale, recalling the full effects of the opening movement in an overt invocation of a storm; stern trumpet and horn infusing high drama over thundering timpani.

Where the opening held a sense of landscape revealed, the scene now was altogether more liquid, captured in shimmering strings and languid horns. Rubato calmed the room like lapping waves, with sweeping gestures from Fisch coaxing and caressing sound.

A stirring in clarinet, picked up in brass, reawoke the tempest to subside then recoil in stentorian tones.

Long passages of Mahler can feel like navigating vast spaces, with unseen waypoints marked only on the conductor's chart. Here Fisch proved a master mariner, delivering all safely through turmoil back to the mystic meanderings that began the work.

Flaring at last in an afterglow, furious fanfares triggered a triumphal firestorm and memorable dismount.

WASO returns to Perth Concert Hall on June 9 and 10 with Last Night of the Proms.