



West Australian
Symphony Orchestra

RUTHLESS ROMANCE

MATINEE SYMPHONY SERIES

Thursday 14 August 2025, 10.30am & 1.30pm

Heath Ledger Theatre, State Theatre Centre of WA



Wesfarmers Arts
Principal Partner

West Australian Symphony Orchestra respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and Elders of Country throughout Western Australia, and the Whadjuk Noongar people on whose lands we work and share music.

MATINEE SYMPHONY SERIES

Ruthless Romance

Richard STRAUSS *Macbeth* (18 mins)

Robert SCHUMANN Symphony No.4 (29 mins)

Ziemlich langsam [Rather slow] – Lebhaft [Lively] –

Romanze (Ziemlich langsam)[Rather slow] –

Scherzo (Lebhaft) [Lively] –

Langsam [Slow] – Lebhaft [Lively]

Asher Fisch conductor

Asher Fisch appears courtesy of Wesfarmers Arts.

This concert does not contain an interval.

Digital Concert Program & Wesfarmers Arts Pre-concert Talk

In 2025, pre-concert talks will be delivered digitally, allowing you to listen to the talk before and after the concert — as many times as you like!

Access exclusive content, learn about the music from our digital pre-concert talk with speaker Ashley Smith, and get our concert program at your fingertips.

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Riley Skevington

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Assistant Concertmaster

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Kylie Liang

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Giovanni Vinci

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Andrew Nicholson

Mary-Anne Blades

PICCOLO

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OBOE

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Jonathan Ryan

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Som Howie

BASS CLARINET

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Principal 3rd Horn

Julia Brooke

Dorée Dixon^

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Jenna Smith

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Chloe Higgins

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Alex Timcke

PERCUSSION

Brian Maloney

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Assoc Principal

Percussion & Timpani

KEY

Principal

Associate Principal

Assistant Principal

Contract Musician°

Guest Musician^

Correct at time of printing. * Instruments used by these musicians are on loan from Janet Holmes à Court AC. We greatly appreciate the support of our musicians' Duet partners, acknowledged on page 14.

About the Artists

Asher Fisch Conductor

Asher Fisch is a renowned conductor celebrated for his interpretative mastery of the core German and Italian repertoire of the Romantic and post-Romantic eras. Equally accomplished in both the operatic and symphonic realms, his repertoire spans from Haydn to contemporary works by living composers. Since 2014, he has been the Principal Conductor & Artistic Adviser of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (WASO), making him the orchestra's longest-serving Principal Conductor. His previous positions include Principal Guest Conductor of the Seattle Opera (2007–2013), Music Director of the New Israeli Opera (1998–2008), and Music Director of the Wiener Volksoper (1995–2000).

Born in Israel, Fisch began his career as Daniel Barenboim's assistant and Kappellmeister at the Berlin Staatsoper. He has since conducted at major opera houses worldwide, including the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Vienna Staatsoper, Teatro alla Scala, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, and Semperoper Dresden. His symphonic engagements have included leading prestigious orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, and Orchestre National de France, as well as top American orchestras in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia.

In 2023, Asher Fisch was appointed Music Director of the Tiroler Festspiele in Erl, Austria, where he collaborates with the festival's General Manager, celebrated tenor Jonas Kaufmann. Their inaugural season premiered in December 2024. The festival, held three times annually,



features a diverse program of orchestral and operatic performances, chamber music, and Lied. Known for its dedication to the works of Richard Wagner, the Tiroler Festspiele will present *Parsifal* during Easter 2025, with Fisch conducting and Kaufmann in the title role. Each year will see the addition of a new Wagner opera production.

In 2025, Fisch's engagements include *La Bohème*, Wagner's *Parsifal*, and three Verdi operas at the Tiroler Festspiele, Verdi's *Il Trovatore* with the West Australian Opera, Britten's *War Requiem* in Düsseldorf, among other performances. Recent highlights include Reimann's *Lear* at Teatro Real de Madrid, *Carmen* at the Vienna Staatsoper, and *Dialogues des Carmélites* at the Israeli Opera.

Fisch's award-winning discography includes Bruckner's Symphony No.8, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, and tenor Stuart Skelton's debut solo album *Shining Knight*, all recorded with WASO. His critically acclaimed releases also feature Ravel's *L'Heure Espagnole* with the Munich Radio Orchestra and the complete Brahms symphonies with WASO, released on ABC Classic. His two recordings of Wagner's *Ring* cycle — with the Seattle Opera and the State Opera of South Australia — garnered widespread acclaim, with the latter winning ten Helpmann Awards, including Best Opera and Best Music Direction.

In addition to his conducting achievements, Fisch is an accomplished pianist. His solo recording of Wagner piano transcriptions for the Melba label showcases his versatility and artistry.

Asher Fisch appears courtesy of Wesfarmers Arts.

West Australian Symphony Orchestra

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As the State Orchestra, Perth's first and finest, WASO is the largest employer of performing artists in Western Australia and reaches two million people with musical experiences each year on stage, in our community, and online.

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The Orchestra collaborates widely with major arts companies and independent artists, performing opera to ballet, movies to musicals, jazz to rock.

Asher Fisch is Principal Conductor and Artistic Adviser of our Orchestra. We champion the diversity of music in all its forms, with a team of talented and passionate people who create unforgettable experiences for all West Australians to enjoy.

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About the Music

Richard Strauss

(1864-1949)

Macbeth, Op.23 TrV 163

In the early 19th century, the Romantic movement saw a renewed interest in the work of Shakespeare in continental Europe. Among the leading German writers of the movement was August Wilhelm Schlegel, who set to work on performable verse translations of Shakespeare. The young Mendelssohn, who had a family connection with the Schlegels, was of course fascinated by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and as the century wore on artists across Europe continued to be drawn to those plays which touched on Romantic staples like 'Gothic' settings and supernatural events; composers as diverse as Berlioz, Thomas, and Verdi made Shakespearean operas, while Liszt embodied Hamlet in a symphonic poem.

In 1887, the young Richard Straus (a recent convert to the music of Liszt and Wagner) set to work on his first official tone-poem, *Macbeth*. For various reasons, however, he put the finished work in a drawer while he worked on *Tod und Verklärung* and *Don Juan*, so that *Macbeth* only received its first performance after the two other works. Strauss was dissatisfied with the piece – having enjoyed the luxury of having the Meiningen Orchestra run through it for his benefit four times one afternoon – and, after its official premiere in Weimar in 1890, revised it heavily. The final version was given its premiere in Berlin in 1892.

Shakespeare's tale of a brave man whose ambitious fantasies (and those of his wife) lead him to murder a king, usurp the crown, and become a corrupt and



brutal tyrant consumed by guilt, pushes numerous Romantic buttons with its witches, woods and medieval castles. Strauss, however, chose not to depict the action of the play in sequential detail; only two characters, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, are specifically identified. Formally, the piece is an extended sonata design.

It opens in a way that would become familiar in many later works, with what is sometimes called a 'nature theme', featuring intervals of the perfect fourth and fifth. As well as immediately evoking an imaginary ancient world, this ringing, tonally stable music, in the view of Strauss scholar Norman Del Mar, represents 'kingliness'. It might also offer us a glimpse of the uncorrupted Macbeth that we meet at the start of the play, though Macbeth himself is depicted, according to Strauss, in the two themes that follow on from the fanfare: one a striving melody that quickly mounts over two **octaves**, and a rhythmically emphatic melody heard first in the bass. An energetic bridge passage using these three elements might suggest the memory of the recent battle. When Lady Macbeth appears, Strauss inscribes her speech from Act I, Scene v ('Hie thee hither/ that I might pour my spirits

in thine ear') above her first theme, a luminous quiet passage in simple chords from the winds, which is then contrasted with a syncopated agitato theme accompanied by whirling sextuplets.

Strauss develops these themes in a **counterpoint** that he learned from his study of Wagner (he conducted *Tristan und Isolde* for the first time in 1892, and 'it was the happiest day of my life'); Del Mar likens this to a conversation between the couple that begins amicably but becomes more agitated as Lady Macbeth pours her spirits in her husband's ear. Three powerful statements of the 'kingly' fanfare interrupt the section and from this critical moment the music becomes ever more turbulent, suggesting bloody violence, the knocking on the gate and the corruption of Macbeth. But as Del Mar argues, Strauss is less interested in Macbeth's deeds than in his psychological state as his idealism is degraded, leaving him with only his courage.

The original version concluded with a march of triumph, representing Macduff holding 'the usurper's cursed head', but Strauss was prevailed upon by his mentor

Hans von Bülow (who found the piece 'maddening and numbing but in the end a work of genius') to remove it. Instead, once the tumult and the shouting dies, a mournful cor anglais introduces a quiet, introspective coda, with the hint of a distant march (the advancing army, perhaps), a brief melodic swell and a final statement of Macbeth's first theme before a sudden simple **cadence**.

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FIRST PERFORMANCE:

13 October 1891, Weimar. Composer conducting. The final version was given its premiere in Berlin in 1892.

FIRST WASO PERFORMANCE:

This is the first performance by the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

INSTRUMENTATION:

three flutes (3rd also piccolo), two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns, three trumpets, bass trumpet, three trombones and tuba; timpani, tam-tam, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum and strings.

Glossary

Cadence – a series of chords which gives a sense of the end of a piece or phrase.

Counterpoint – two or more lines of music or melodies that are played at the same time. Music which uses counterpoint is said to be 'contrapuntal'. 'Imitative' counterpoint is when the various parts are playing similar or identical melodies one after the other – canons and fugues are examples.

Octave – a particular interval. For example, in the scale 'do re mi fa so la ti do', the interval between the first and last 'do's is an octave.

About the Music

Robert Schumann

(1810-1856)

Symphony No.4 in D minor, Op.120

Ziemlich langsam [Rather slow] – Lebhaft [Lively] – Romanze (Ziemlich langsam) [Rather slow] – Scherzo (Lebhaft) [Lively] – Langsam [Slow] – Lebhaft [Lively]

This symphony was composed during the happy first year of Schumann's marriage to Clara Wieck, which had been resisted with almost legendary fierceness by her father, Friedrich. By September 1841 (less than two weeks after the birth of their first child, Marie), Clara was able to write in her diary, 'My birthday was a day filled from morning to night with enjoyment and happiness. Robert surprised me with so many things, his completed Symphony in D minor...'

The music cannot have come as a complete surprise to her, however: as Clara wrote in her diary some four months earlier, 'Yesterday [Robert] started another symphony...[I can hear] D minor sounding wildly in the distance, so I already know in advance that it is again a work created out of the deepest soul.'

Nor had this 'completed symphony' yet achieved its final form. Schumann was unsatisfied at its first performance in Leipzig in 1841, and put it aside. A revised version was presented ten years later, and it is this which is generally played today.

The work succeeds primarily on the basis of its structural brilliance. As Hans Gál says, 'The Fourth Symphony is [Schumann's] most ingenious experiment in form, an amazingly successful attempt at unifying the four movements of a cyclic work without altering their individual character and structure.'



A precedent for a large-scale unified cyclic work existed in Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy*. Schumann was no doubt at one stage sufficiently conscious of the *Wanderer's* precedent to call this work a 'Symphonic Fantasy'. Schumann's Fourth Symphony, says Gál, is:

...music of irresistible momentum, a marvellous union of continuous improvisation and close construction, and its four movements, linked by thematic threads, are in ideal balance and magnificently contrasted...In Schumann's symphony, the thematic lay-out progresses from one movement to another, new inventions emerging while the former ones reappear in variation as if it were an act of spontaneous recollection.

The work begins with a slow introduction, a strongly phrased **motif** which extends to a 28-bar paragraph, one of the main pillars of the structure. This introduction segues into the main fast section, having anticipated the fast section's opening material.

The continuous semiquaver movement of the *Lebhaft (Allegro)* motif is hard to stop and therefore Schumann draws his subsidiary motif from the same material. With a limited pool of themes to expound upon, Schumann leaves

till later, to the development section, a genuinely contrasting lyrical melody, and the responsibility for providing an impressive climax. Because the opening material has been sufficiently presented in the **exposition**, a customary recapitulation is unnecessary. There is a pause on a held note and we almost slip into the slow movement.

The main feature of the *Romanze* is an elegiac oboe melody. With the return of triple metre and a tempo similar to the opening of the symphony, the opening motif from the first movement sees the opportunity to re-enter, providing an **interlude**-like passage. A contrasting middle section extends this opening motif into a soft, expressive tune while a solo violin elegantly paraphrases it. The elegiac oboe returns, the music pauses, and without more ado, the **Scherzo** is launched.

This is vigorously scored with driving imitation in the lower strings. The **trio** turns out to be an old acquaintance: the graceful figuration that the solo violin had added to a motif in the *Romanze*.

The *Scherzo* returns and then Schumann, following the example of Beethoven in his Fourth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, lets the trio come back once more, but this time slowed down so that we may move without interruption into the opening section of the finale (*Langsam*).

With the striking **fortissimos** of the final *allegro* section, we have another moment of recognition, for here again is the climactic music from the first movement, capping off the gradual build-up of tension and effect. It is this sense of inevitable momentum and intense accumulation that provides the listener with so much enjoyment. Critics may praise unity and balance – the work's skilful links put one in mind of Wagner's observation that all composing is, at the base of it, the art of transition – but it is this symphony's sense of inevitable progress and triumphant release that really draws the listener in.

Adapted from a note by Gordon Williams
Symphony Australia © 2002

FIRST PERFORMANCE:

6 December 1841, Leipzig.
Gewandhaus Orchestra conducted by Ferdinand David.

FIRST WASO PERFORMANCE:

9 September 1944. Percy Code, conductor.

MOST RECENT WASO PERFORMANCE:

17-18 November 2017. Asher Fisch, conductor.

INSTRUMENTATION:

two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, strings.

Glossary

Exposition/development/recapitulation – sections of sonata form during which the principal themes are presented (exposition), worked out (development) and restated (recapitulation).

Fortissimo – very loud.

Interlude – piece of music played between two others.

Motif – a short, distinctive melodic or rhythmic figure, often part of or derived from a theme.

Scherzo – a movement in a fast triple time which may involve playful elements and which, as the second or third movement in a symphony, replaced the minuet.

Trio – in a minuet or scherzo, the trio is the contrasting middle section of the movement.

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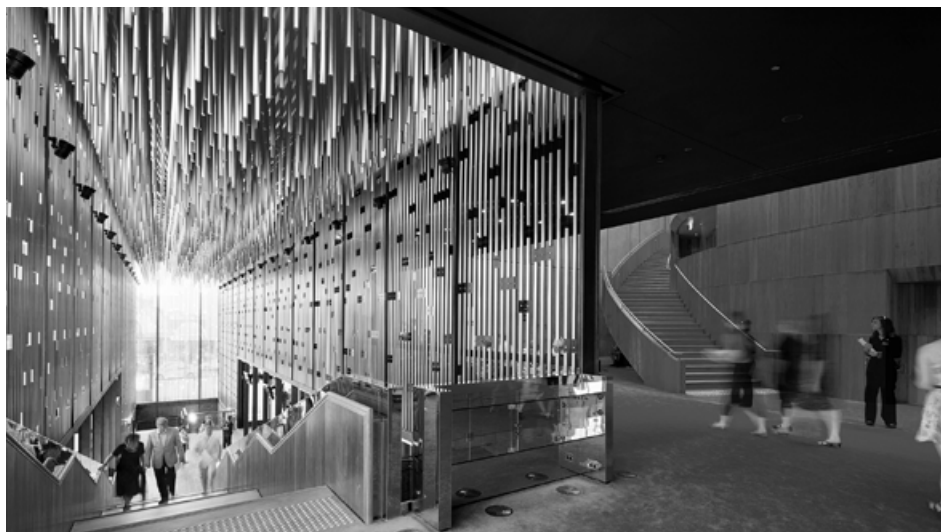
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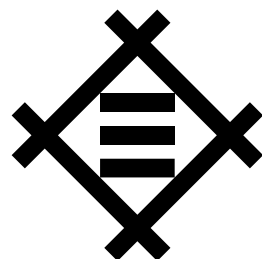
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Education Concerts



A Guide to Film Music: The Music of John Williams

What movie soundtracks can transcend generations and remain beloved in today's pop culture? The music of John Williams, of course!

In June, the Riverside Theatre came alive with the energy of over 1,000 enthusiastic students and teachers attending a special education performance of *The Music of John Williams*. Conducted by Nicholas Buc and presented by *Art of the Score* podcast host Dan Golding, the concert showcased some of the most iconic film scores spanning decades of Williams' legendary career.

The concert opened with a triumphant fanfare, *March from Superman*, setting an exhilarating tone. From there, students were immersed in live musical explorations of the *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* soundtracks, gaining real-time

insights into how music shapes character development and builds cinematic worlds. The sweeping adventure of *Indiana Jones* and the magical moment of *E.T.* soaring through the sky on a bicycle captured imaginations, highlighting the power of music to bring stories to life.

A particularly captivating moment came with the musical storytelling of Anakin Skywalker's transformation from hero to villain, using interwoven motifs that culminated in the iconic *Imperial March*. This inspired many students to start imagining their own character themes worthy of the big screen.

The encore, *Cantina Band* from *Star Wars*, had everyone dancing in their seats, leaving the theatre with grins, toe-taps, and the melody still playing in their heads. Returning to a regular afternoon of classes after that? Not so easy!

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Join our Symphony Circle

Earlier this year, Symphony Circle members joined Patron of Private Giving, Janet Holmes à Court AC, and musicians at WASO's Legacy Celebration breakfast; an annual event held to thank those who have included a gift to WASO in their Will.

The Celebration took place at the Duxton Hotel, with an ensemble led by Assistant Concertmaster, Semra Lee, peppering the morning with music. Leaving a gift to WASO in your Will helps to ensure the music doesn't end when the concert does. It lives on, reaching new audiences, nurturing talent, and inspiring the next generation.

Every legacy gift is a gesture of belief. Belief in music's power to move us, to bring people together, and to endure far beyond one concert, one season, or one venue.

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Jean & Peter Stokes – Cello, Tuba, Tenor Trombone, Bass Trombone, Wooden Trumpet, French Horn and Music Score Folders

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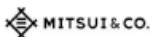


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West Australian
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LI-WEI QIN PLAYS TCHAIKOVSKY

Our final morning concert of the year

MATINEE SYMPHONY SERIES

Thursday 20 November, 10.30am
Winthrop Hall, The University
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Richard WAGNER *Parsifal*: Prelude (Act III) and Good Friday Music
Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY *Variations on a Rococo Theme*
Richard WAGNER *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* – Suite

Asher Fisch conductor | Li-Wei Qin cello (pictured)



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