



West Australian
Symphony Orchestra

THE EMPEROR

BEETHOVEN: THE PIANO CONCERTOS

Sunday 30 November 2025, 5pm

Winthrop Hall, The University of Western Australia




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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.

CLASSICAL SPECIAL EVENT

Beethoven: The Emperor

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN *Zur Namensfeier*: Overture (8 mins)

Maestoso – Allegro assai vivace

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN Symphony No.1 (25 mins)

Adagio molto–Allegro con brio

Andante cantabile con moto

Menuetto (Allegro molto e vivace)

Finale (Adagio–Allegro molto e vivace)

Interval (25 mins)

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No.5 *Emperor* (38 mins)

Allegro

Adagio un poco mosso –

Rondo (Allegro)

Asher Fisch conductor

Lukáš Vondráček piano

Asher Fisch appears courtesy of Wesfarmers Arts.

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

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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

Principal Conductor & Artistic Adviser

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 Kapellmeister 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.

About the Artists

Lukáš Vondráček

Piano

In a career spanning over two decades, the indisputable winner of the Grand Prix at the 2016 International Queen Elisabeth Piano Competition, Lukáš Vondráček has travelled the world and performed with the foremost orchestras such as The Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony, West Australian Symphony, Tokyo Metropolitan, Czech Philharmonic, Warsaw Philharmonic, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Dresden Philharmonic, Bamberg Symphony, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Symphony, and Oslo Philharmonic.

He is a frequent collaborator of conductors such as Jakub Hrůša, Marin Alsop, Paavo Järvi, Gianandrea Noseda, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Christoph Eschenbach, Klaus Mäkelä, Michael Tilson Thomas, Giancarlo Guerrero, Manfred Honeck, Xian Zhang, Pietari Inkinen, Vasily Petrenko, and Stéphane Denève, among many others.

In recitals, Lukáš has performed at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, the Flagey in Brussels, Leipzig's Gewandhaus, Wiener Konzerthaus, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and to renowned festivals such as Menuhin Festival Gstaad, Edinburgh International Festival, Chopin and his Europe, Le Piano Symphonique at KKL, PianoEspoo in Finland, Prague Spring Festival, and Lille Piano Festival.

Lukáš Vondráček's 2025/26 distinguished season highlights include collaborations with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under Elim Chan, Belgian National



Image credit: Irene Kim.

Orchestra under Antony Hermus, Brussels Philharmonic under Kazushi Ono, National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop, West Australian Symphony Orchestra under Asher Fisch performing the full cycle of Beethoven's Piano Concertos. Further collaborations with the orchestras this season include the Malmo Opera Orchestra, Slovenian RTVE Symphony Orchestra, Romanian National Radio Orchestra, and Janáček Philharmonic. This season, recital appearances, among others, include Lukáš returning to Carnegie's Zankel Hall in New York.

At the age of four, Lukáš Vondráček made his first public appearance. As a fifteen-year-old in 2002, he made his debut with Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and Vladimir Ashkenazy, which was followed by a major US tour in 2003. His natural and assured musicality and remarkable technique have long marked him out as a gifted and mature musician. He has achieved worldwide recognition by receiving many international awards, foremost first prizes at the Hilton Head and San Marino International Piano Competitions and Unisa International Piano Competition in Pretoria, South Africa, as well as the Raymond E. Buck Jury Discretionary Award at the 2009 International Van Cliburn Piano Competition.

Lukáš Vondráček obtained an Artist Diploma from Boston's New England Conservatory under the tutelage of Hung-Kuan Chen, graduating with honours in 2012.

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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

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770–1827)

Overture in C, Op.115, 'Namensfeier'

Maestoso – Allegro assai vivace

Even great composers suffer from the tides of fashion and around 1812 this was Beethoven's bitter experience. It was, further, not helped by the composer's depressed state: after completing the Seventh and Eighth symphonies and the G major Violin Sonata in mid-1812, he effectively stopped composing, and may, according to Maynard Solomon, have attempted suicide. Things improved for Beethoven during the Congress of Vienna (1814-15). Beethoven was fêted by various crowned heads for works like the jingoistic *Wellington's Victory*; he responded with more patriotic music like the cantata *Der glorreiche Augenblick* (The Glorious Moment).

The enthusiasm was a bubble that soon burst; the dignitaries loved the cantata but the paying public was sparse. Nevertheless, Beethoven tried to regain popularity by, as Solomon puts it, 'pursuing musical formulas that had worked so well during the preceding years'. A result of this was the Overture dedicated to Prince Anton Heinrich Radziwiłł, completed in 1815, but using some material that Beethoven had sketched for a setting of Schiller's poem, *An die Freude*. Performed at Christmas 1815, around the name-day of the Emperor, it acquired the nickname 'Namensfeier'.



In the form of a French Overture, the work opens with a stately introductory section, in which fully scored chords march slowly to a ceremonial **dotted rhythm**. The body of the overture, however, is an energetic dance that has some of the vitality of the Seventh Symphony. Beethoven recognised it as a minor work; sadly it failed to lift his popularity or his income.

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FIRST PERFORMANCE:

25 December 1815, Vienna.

FIRST WASO PERFORMANCE:

27–28 May 1955.

John Farnsworth Hall, conductor.

MOST RECENT WASO PERFORMANCE:

15–17 March 2018. Asher Fisch, conductor.

INSTRUMENTATION:

two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings.

Glossary

Dotted rhythm – a pattern of alternating long and short notes.

About the Music

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

Symphony No.1 in C, Op.21

Adagio molto–Allegro con brio
Andante cantabile con moto
Menuetto (Allegro molto e vivace)
Finale (Adagio–Allegro molto e vivace)

When Beethoven presented his first symphony amid the gilt elegance of the Royal and Imperial Court Theatre (Burgtheater) in Vienna on 2 April 1800, he was already in his thirtieth year. Having lived in Vienna more than seven years, he was well established as the city's foremost piano virtuoso, with his first two piano concertos already behind him – one of them repeated in this, his first personal benefit concert. His program cannily included excerpts from the great success of the previous year, Haydn's new oratorio *The Creation*. But in choosing a Mozart symphony to open a program which would lead to his own symphonic debut, Beethoven was declaring himself more than ready to stand comparison with past masters.

And he invites comparison provocatively in the very opening chord of the symphony, which is not the expected C major but a discord. Though he shifts key in the third bar, it still is not the home key. Beethoven's audience would have been bemused by this groping for tonality. The unexpected modulations build tension throughout the slow introduction until the *Allegro* arrives, and with it the proper key of C major, which is hammered emphatically.

With an anchor in C major, Beethoven is able to switch from one key to another without losing sense of direction.



Harmonic innovation is already a distinctive characteristic of Beethoven's symphonic style. He allows oboes and flutes, alternately, to lead the contrasting second subject, and crowns the movement with an extended and brilliant coda.

Beethoven begins the slow movement apparently intending to treat his winsome melody fugally, as if it were a **counterpoint** exercise for Albrechtsberger. But the graceful theme becomes a basis for inventive elaboration, fragments of rhythm or melody developed sturdily or ornamented affectionately with already confident command of the orchestra. In a foretaste of the remarkably individual use he would make of his kettledrums in works to come, Beethoven here has the timpani tuned as if for a movement in the key of C, rather than F, as it actually is. Thrice during the movement the 'wrongly-tuned' timpani delightedly provide soft bouncing support for a flowing, delicately-scored melody above.

Beethoven makes his first great contribution to symphonic form in the third movement, which he labels a minuet, though to all intents and purposes it is his first trademark symphonic scherzo. This is no longer dance music. But Beethoven resists the term *scherzo* (implying a joke); for the young tiger is in no particularly jocular mood. Under Beethoven, *scherzo* was to take on a new meaning, with its vigorous one-in-a-bar beat and totally new driving force.

Again outlandish to some in the conservative musical establishment was the apparent frivolity with which Beethoven opens his finale – violins fooling over several false starts before they eventually hit on the tune and then whirl away with great *brio*. One respected German conductor is said to have habitually cut the introduction lest it evoke laughter in the audience. The light-hearted finale culminates, like the first movement, in a coda already stamped with true Beethovenian power and authority.

Anthony Cane © 1978/2011

FIRST PERFORMANCE:

2 April 1800, Vienna.

Ludwig van Beethoven conducting.

MOST RECENT WASO PERFORMANCE:

24 August 2014. Asher Fisch, conductor.

INSTRUMENTATION:

two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; two horns, two trumpets; timpani and strings.

Glossary

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.

About the Music

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770–1827)

Piano Concerto No.5 in E flat,
Op.73 *Emperor*

Allegro

Adagio un poco mosso –

Rondo (Allegro)

In May 1809 Napoleon's armies occupied Vienna for the second time and with considerable violence. Beethoven took shelter with his brother Carl and his wife Johanna and to protect his failing hearing spent the bombardment of 11 and 12 May with pillows over his ears in the cellar.

Despite his misery, Beethoven managed to work. He composed the Op.70 piano trios and three piano sonatas including Op.81a, *Das Lebewohl* (Les Adieux) which reflects Beethoven's sorrow at seeing his patron Archduke Rudolf leaving Vienna, as did so many of the aristocracy during the invasion. He also composed the String Quartet Op.74, popularly known as the *Harp* Quartet, and completed the Fifth Piano Concerto (also dedicated to Rudolf). Curiously, most of these are in the key of E flat – the key of *The Magic Flute* and other music where Mozart sought to create a sense of solemnity, and one that Beethoven used at his most Promethean in works like the *Eroica* Symphony. These works don't bear any obvious resemblance to one another: the transcendent serenity of the *Harp* Quartet seems miles away from the high style of the outer movements of the concerto. But all of these works break new ground in some way.

By this time Beethoven's deafness made it impossible for him to perform with an orchestra, so the concerto's first performance in Leipzig in 1811 was given



by a young organist, Friedrich Schneider. At the Viennese premiere in 1812, Carl Czerny was soloist. Given the political circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the concerto is, in Alfred Einstein's word, the 'apotheosis of the military concept' in Beethoven's music. Biographer Maynard Solomon quotes Einstein as saying that the audience 'expected a first movement in four-four time of a military character; and they reacted with unmixed pleasure when Beethoven not only fulfilled but far surpassed their expectations'.

In the Fifth Concerto, Beethoven solved the problem of how to exploit the soloist's virtuosity without downgrading the role of the orchestra, while constructing the kind of musical argument and drama which was so crucial to the Classical style. This is achieved partly through masterstrokes like the very opening gesture: a single chord is sounded by the orchestra, to which the piano responds in such flamboyant style, creating a sense of uncertainty about how and when the orchestra will rejoin the music, and what form the actual thematic material will take.

A standard practice in much Classical music was to get louder and more agitated in the lead-up to a point of structural significance, but Beethoven made those moments even more dramatic. The overwhelming impression left by the first movement of the Fifth Concerto is of ceremonial grandeur and pomp – hence the nickname (not authorised by Beethoven) of ‘Emperor’. But the movement’s massive scale is made possible by the frequent contrast of the ‘military’, with its characteristic march rhythms, and the reflective. Beethoven prepares the movement’s climactic moments with what scholar William Kinderman calls ‘the withdrawal of the music into a mysterious stillness’. To prepare the moment of recapitulation, where the opening material returns, Beethoven allows the music to become rarified and serene: a passage of ever-quieter scales and trills gives way to a pastoral dialogue between the winds and the bell-tones of the piano.

The short *Adagio* movement, rightly described as dreamlike by one writer, is in B major, which in terms of Classical tonal logic is a fair way away from the ‘home’ key of E flat. And its mood couldn’t be further from the military episodes, despite its material being dominated by the scales and trills that featured in the first movement.

A justly celebrated instance of ‘the withdrawal of the music into a mysterious stillness’ occurs at the transition from the slow movement into the finale. The transition is almost imperceptible – Beethoven changes a note here or there to subtly change the direction of the music as it seems to fade, and the piano begins ruminating on a common chord which will ultimately flower as the final movement’s bounding theme, which again is contrasted with moments of deep calm.

Whatever the misery in which Beethoven wrote this work, or its immediate political context, it turns out to be another ode to joy.

Gordon Kerry © 2003

FIRST PERFORMANCE:

28 November 1811, Leipzig.

Friedrich Schneider, piano.

Johann Philipp Christian Schulz,
conductor.

MOST RECENT WASO PERFORMANCE:

27–29 November 2020; Shuan Hern

Lee, piano. Peter Moore, conductor.

INSTRUMENTATION:

two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets,
two bassoons, two horns, two
trumpets, timpani, strings.

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 Irving Lane
 Dr Oon Teik Lee
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Moira Westmore and
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Mrs Vimala Whitaker
Barbara Wilcox
David & Anne Williams
Janet Williams
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Jim & Gill Williams
Dr Simon &
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David Turner
Hilary &
Peter Winterton AM
Peter Wreford
Mary Ann Wright
Nancy York
Andrew & Marie Yuncken
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Dr Jim Rhoads
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E & G Bourgault in
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Diane Brennan OAM
Phil Burrows
Ann Butcher &
Dean R Kubank

Jennifer Butement in
memory of
Margaret Butement
Michelle Candy
R & R Cant
Jill Clarke
Ian Collins
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Pru Cowan
Carole & John Cox
Ann Darby
Adrian De Graaf
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Daniel Parker
Simon Douglas
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Richard Philip Eaton
Mary Ellen in memory of
Kerensa
Stuart Evans
Gregory Fitzpatrick
Sue & David Forster
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Marion Funke
Jennifer &
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Unnamed (46)

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Margaret & Rod Marston – Bass Clarinet

Peggy & Tom Stacy – Cor Anglais and Piccolo

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

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We acknowledge the generous support of our Trusts and Foundations, whose philanthropic partnership enables significant impact within our community through their key support of these transformative initiatives.

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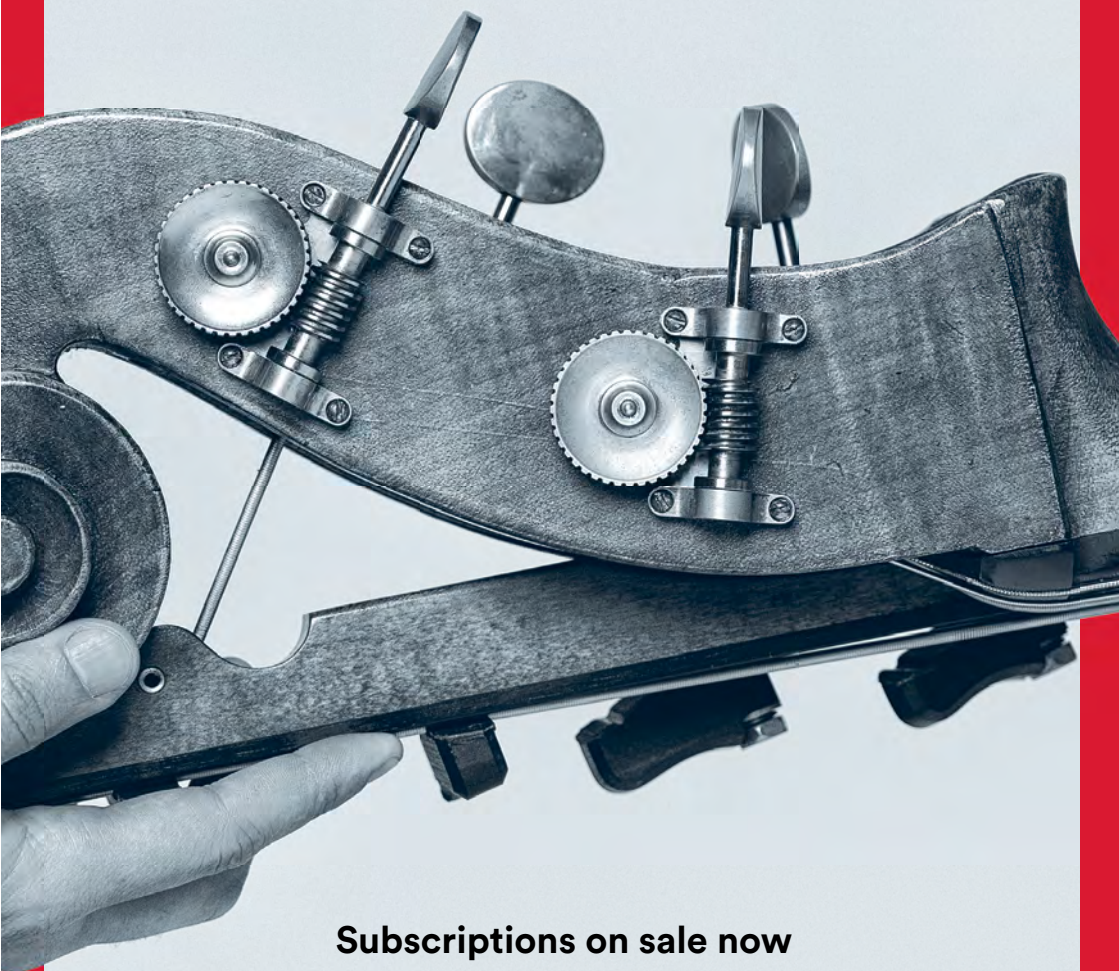


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West Australian
Symphony Orchestra

2026



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