



West Australian
Symphony Orchestra

THE MASTER

BEETHOVEN: THE PIANO CONCERTOS

Friday 28 November 2025, 7.30pm

Winthrop Hall, The University of Western Australia




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CLASSICAL SPECIAL EVENT

BEETHOVEN: THE MASTER

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN *Egmont*: Overture (8 mins)

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No.2 (28 mins)

Allegro con brio

Adagio

Rondo: Molto allegro

Interval (25 mins)

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No.4 (34 mins)

Allegro moderato

Andante con moto –

Rondo: Vivace

Asher Fisch conductor

Lukáš Vondráček piano

Asher Fisch appears courtesy of Wesfarmers Arts.

This concert is supported by the McCusker Charitable Foundation.

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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)

Egmont, Op.84: Overture

When new music was required for a revival of Goethe's drama *Egmont* at the Burgtheater in Vienna in 1810, Beethoven wrote not just an overture but nine incidental movements – his major contribution to the dramatic stage after his opera, *Fidelio*. Like *Fidelio*, *Egmont* is a drama of political oppression and the struggle for liberty. Although Beethoven wrote warmly to Goethe of 'this wonderful *Egmont*' it was clearly the political aspect that inspired him rather than any human drama such as in *Coriolan*.

Egmont, historical hero of the Low Countries' deliverance from French invasion in the 16th century, subsequently leads the people in resistance to Spanish domination, resistance which ends in his own tragedy and ultimate death at the instigation of his enemy, the Spanish Duke of Alba. For Beethoven it is the principle of liberation and martyrdom that fires his genius rather than any depth of individual character as portrayed by Goethe.

A portentous introduction presages impending doom. The overture's stately **sarabande** rhythm is possibly intended to represent the implacable Spanish duke. The main **allegro** theme evokes the Flemish drive for liberty, but the Spanish theme reappears in a **codetta** where the death of Egmont by public execution is portrayed over sustained soft chords.



The flame of open uprising is kindled by the hero's death. Within a few bars the music swells into a powerful outburst as the 'Victory Symphony' (which ends the drama as well as the overture) graphically portrays a nation in revolt.

© Anthony Cane

FIRST PERFORMANCE:

15 June 1810, Burgtheater, Vienna.

FIRST WASO PERFORMANCE:

1 November 1938; Malcolm Sargent, conductor.

MOST RECENT WASO PERFORMANCE:

28–29 April 2017; Asher Fisch, conductor.

INSTRUMENTATION:

two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

Glossary

Allegro – fast and lively.

Codetta – a small coda, i.e. a concluding section added to the basic structure of a piece or movement to emphasise the sense of finality.

Sarabande – stately Spanish dance in triple time, often with an emphasis on the second beat of the bar.

About the Music

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

Piano Concerto No.2 in B flat, Op.19

Allegro con brio

Adagio

Rondo: Molto allegro

Predating Beethoven's Symphony No.1 (by many years), and even Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.1, the Second Piano Concerto is fascinating for all sorts of reasons; among them, the glimpse it offers of Beethoven before he became Beethoven-the-robust-trailblazer. This is as close as we get to Beethoven in a powdered wig. The orchestra, for instance, doesn't sound like the orchestra we typically associate with Beethoven's music. It is small by the standards of Haydn's symphonies from around the same time: no timpani, no trumpets and no clarinets. Even Mozart, in his piano concertos of the mid-1780s, used larger orchestral forces. Although the Piano Concerto No.2 was premiered in 1795 – most likely in March of that year at Beethoven's first public appearance in Vienna as a pianist-composer – it would seem that Beethoven had been preoccupied with the work for quite some time, with jottings for it dating from the late 1780s, long before he arrived in Vienna from Bonn.

The spirit of Haydn and Mozart is evident from the start of the concerto, which commences with two brief, contrasting phrases: the first summons gestures of the hunt, with its bouncy, dotted rhythms; the second, which is smooth and expressive, is in the singing style. Both were part of the stock-in-trade of Classical music and both permeate the entire movement (when the second subject arrives, for instance, we discover it is an extension of the singing-



style phrase). The piano enters with a variant of the hunt theme. Added to the transparency of the orchestration is the pellucid piano writing throughout. Right and left hand tend to lie close together, with the left frequently migrating into the right's territory, sitting in the register around and above middle C. If Beethoven's treatment of the piano sounds delicate, bear in mind that the instrument at this time was delicate. The Viennese piano had a light, responsive action and was far more compact than the concert grand that we know today. Beethoven arrived in Vienna in 1792 as a pianist renowned for his skills in improvisation. Accordingly, the cadenza which appears at the end of the first movement would have been an opportunity for him to extemporise. Many years later, in 1809, he wrote out a cadenza for the first movement in full.

The second movement, *Adagio*, presents us with a very early example of what would become one of Beethoven's signature achievements – the ability to write music which invites the listener to

turn inwards and to contemplate human subjectivity through the medium of pure sound. Beethoven doesn't need to resort to complex 'tricks' to achieve this. In fact, quite the opposite. In the closing bars of the *Adagio* the piano soloist dispenses with the left hand entirely and, using the right hand alone, presents us with soft, shadowy phrases (marked 'con gran espressione', with great expression) which are as poignant as they are enigmatic. The spell is broken straightaway with the energetic, syncopated *Rondo*, but this is a useful reminder that concertos were as much about entertainment as anything else.

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FIRST PERFORMANCE:

29 March 1795, Vienna.

Ludwig van Beethoven, piano.

MOST RECENT WASO PERFORMANCE:

20–21 August 1999. Ian Munro, piano.

Ola Rudner, conductor.

INSTRUMENTATION:

one flute, two oboes, two bassoons;

two horns; timpani; strings.

About the Music

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

Piano Concerto No.4 in G, Op.58

Allegro moderato
Andante con moto –
Rondo: Vivace

Of Beethoven's five piano concertos, the Concerto No.4, which was completed in 1806, is the most experimental. It is as though Beethoven had decided to take the concerto apart and put it back together a different way. Conventions are overturned. Expectations are thwarted.

Take, for instance, the way it opens – with a brief meditation for the solo instrument. This was a first. Seemingly simple, the opening five bars offer rich interpretative possibilities. A full G major chord in the piano's middle register (marked soft and 'dolce', sweetly) is followed by a further series of chords which harmonise a stepwise melody (which will soon be given fuller treatment in the orchestra) leading to a rhythmic 'bump' (an unexpected accent on the second beat of the bar) which in turn leads to a decorated, but unemphatic, **cadence** on the **dominant**. Thus ends the brief opening solo, and the piano now disappears for the better part of 70 bars. But the opening solo with its odd, five-bar shape and rhythmic quirks proves to be the geminating seed of the movement's principal theme, and one of the **motifs** derived from it – a two-note falling figure, traditionally held to be a musical 'sigh' – pervades much of the musical argument.

The piano makes its second entry almost as an aside. It arrives with none of the fanfare and dramatic preparation traditionally afforded the solo instrument but, rather, softly makes its presence



known with some gentle musings on the principal theme. In fact, the piano exerts a light touch throughout much of the movement and partakes in a remarkable amount of surface decoration.

This is *not* a concerto where the soloist seeks to bend the orchestra to its will; on the contrary, the solo piano cajoles, caresses and teases out the seemingly endless decorative possibilities of the thematic material. A word has to be said on Beethoven's tonal adventurousness. His key choices are often surprising, beginning with B major in bar six (the orchestra's initial entry). Elsewhere, we encounter important themes presented in keys some distance from our home base of G: B flat major, E flat major and, strangest of all, C sharp minor.

Beethoven's experimental quest reaches its apotheosis in the middle movement. The mood is operatic. Specifically, the high drama of *recitative obligé*, where voice and accompaniment stand in sharp contrast – the string accompaniment severe and emphatic, the voice (or, in this case, the piano) **cantabile** and expressive.

To accentuate further the difference between the two, Beethoven instructs the

pianist to utilise the **soft pedal** (*una corda*) throughout.

The middle movement segues into the very fast **rondo** finale, *Vivace*, which opens with a soft, drumming gesture on the strings building to a ten-bar theme. Taken up and elaborated by the piano, the theme then assumes its full military colours when trumpets and timpani (silent in the first two movements) ring out in the **fortissimo** orchestral **tutti**. A secondary theme offers a moment of hymn-like stasis but the mood is overwhelmingly joyous with scintillating piano figuration and a race to the finish for soloist and orchestra.

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FIRST PERFORMANCE:

22 December 1808, Theater and der Wien, Vienna (public premiere).
Composer as soloist.

FIRST WASO PERFORMANCE:

15 July 1944. Bernard Heinze, conductor; Alice Carrard, soloist.

MOST RECENT WASO PERFORMANCE:

2–3 August 2019. Javier Perianes, piano.
Simone Young, conductor.

INSTRUMENTATION:

one flute, two oboes, two clarinets and two bassoons; two horns and two trumpets; timpani; strings.

Glossary

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

Cantabile – in a singing style.

Dominant – the fifth note of a diatonic scale, and the chord built upon this note. In Western classical harmony, the dominant chord ranks second in importance to the tonic (first degree of the scale). For example, in the key of C, C is the tonic and G is the dominant.

Fortissimo – performance instruction meaning very loud. *f* stands for *forte*, which means ‘loud’; increased degrees of loudness are denoted by *ff* (*fortissimo*) and *fff* (*fortississimo*).

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

Rondo – a musical form where a main idea (refrain) alternates with a series of musical episodes. Classical composers often wrote the final movement of their symphonic works in rondo form.

Soft pedal – *una corda* (‘one string’) is an instruction to depress the left, or ‘soft’ pedal of a piano. This shifts the piano’s mechanism sideways, causing the hammer to strike fewer strings for each note (one string where there are two, two where there are three) in order to produce a softer, less resonant sound. The corresponding term *tre corde* (three strings) is an instruction to release the soft pedal.

Tutti – all the instruments of the orchestra playing at the same time.

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