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Review: Latitude New Music Festival (WASO)

by [Lisa MacKinney](#) on October 9, 2014 (October 9, 2014) filed under [Classical Music](#) | [Orchestral](#) | [Comment Now](#)



Accessible and thoughtfully selected program delivered with warmth and gusto.

Astor Theatre, Perth

October 1-4, 2014

For the annual Latitude New Music Festival, WASO temporarily relocates from the early 1970s magnificence of the Perth Concert Hall to the more intimate Deco surrounds of the Astor Theatre, across town in Mt Lawley. Only the percussion section can fit on the small stage, so the barrier between orchestra and audience is dissolved as both jostle for space at the front of the theatre, adding to the immediacy and excitement of this program of modern repertoire.

Eight contemporary works were performed over two nights, including one world premiere and five Australian premieres. The first night featured two Australian works bookended by Scandinavian composers, which is not an immediately obvious complementary combination. However, as Swiss conductor Baldur Brönnimann noted, Nordic countries share with Australia a musical culture not strictly bound by tradition, which creates “a wide open field to create new repertoire.”

The program opened with Swedish composer Anders Hillborg’s *Cold Heat* (2010), an eerie evocation of icy glacial landscapes. Wavering string undercurrents and beautiful dissonant glissandi concluded with a sojourn into deep melancholy. A lush, poised performance of Peter Sculthorpe’s *Mangrove* (1979) followed, which similarly took inspiration from expansive spaces and natural landscapes. At times, the score called for various instrument sections (notably cellos and brass) to play “out of step with each other,” which created a mesmerising echo effect. Nature was present in a more oblique manner in *Act* (2004) by Rolf Wallin (Norway), a propulsive, rhythmic meditation on collaboration, human cooperation and the “enormous resounding organism” that is the symphony orchestra.

For many members of this Perth audience, the program highlight was the world premiere of local composer Lachlan Skipworth’s *Clarinet Concerto* (2014), which is the result of his Australia Council Early

Career Residency with WASO. Its inspiration was exciting Perth clarinettist Ashley Smith, currently a Churchill fellow and deserved recipient of the rave reviews he is consistently receiving. Resplendent in silver sequined pants, Smith was on hand to perform as soloist, drawing sinewy lines with great sensitivity and nuance, especially during the lengthy cadenza.

The second concert featured orchestral works that incorporate electronics, opening and closing with two important works from the 1980s. Introducing Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho's *Verblendungen* (1984), Brönnimann likened her experimentation with different densities to an impressionist painting, "which goes from thicker surfaces, to lighter surfaces, and at the end, dissolves into air." This beautiful piece of textural exploration required a carefully-sustained subtlety which was not realised with total success. *Double Up* (2010) by Danish composer Simon Steen-Andersen was a rollicking contrast in which the orchestra imitated everyday sounds, including radio static, telephones, and late-night bars. There were echoes Carl Stalling's wild cartoon music, and it was an absolute hit with the audience.

Hidden Love Song (2005) by Mark-Anthony Turnage (England) brought another detour, this time into sumptuous romantic lyricism, with soprano saxophone by another internationally renowned wind player, Matt Styles. The program concluded with *Fearful Symmetries* (1988), a relentlessly energetic study of constant motion that composer John Adams (USA) described himself as "maddeningly symmetrical." Its rhythmic fluttering brass and synthesised electronics took inspiration from four-on-the-floor beats of 1980s pop music, and urban rather than natural landscapes.

Throughout both concerts, there was a very deliberate attempt to demystify the compositional process and make the music on the program accessible. Both Brönnimann and Evan Kennea (Executive Manager of Artistic Planning at WASO) gave warm, chatty introductions to all the works, even having the orchestra play excerpts to illustrate particular points. Not that anyone seemed to need it, especially – it was an appreciative and enthusiastic audience that embraced the thoughtfully selected and sensitively delivered program with warmth and gusto.

Keywords

WASO , West Australian Symphony Orchestra , Latitude New Music Festival



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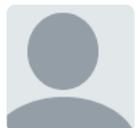
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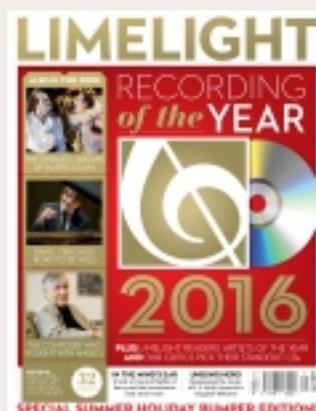
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