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## REVIEW

### Opera to musical theatre: West Coast Philharmonic, Chelsea Burns and Lainey O’Sullivan at Perth Concert Hall



**David Cusworth** The West Australian  
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David Cusworth



Sam Parry conducts soprano Chelsea Burns and West Coast Philharmonic Orchestra in Carmen to Phantom at Perth Concert Hall. Credit: Supplied



Opera and musical theatre played out a battle of the brands when WA soprano Chelsea Burns and Irish vocalist Lainey O’Sullivan fronted West Coast Philharmonic Orchestra’s Carmen to Phantom pastiche at Perth Concert Hall.

Opera came first, with Bizet’s Carmen Overture in a frenzied start before violins settled into the Toreador’s Song with aplomb, building to a resounding cadence on

Burns then filled the stage, emotionally and musically, with *O mio babbino caro* from Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, a forlorn girl's plea for love.

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Ethereal strings, woodwind and harp (Sophie Vo) were a fitting foil for Burns' colourful tones; a mature reading full of drama and pathos with sustained intonation through barely-there pianissimo in the climax.

Lehar's *Meine Lippen sie kuessen so heiss* (My lips they kiss so hot) from the operetta *Giuditta* flipped from Italy to North Africa in a tale of betrayal and exile.



Sam Parry conducts West Coast Philharmonic Orchestra in *Carmen* to *Phantom* at Perth Concert Hall

Adult drama seemed to draw deeper expression from the orchestra and Burns did not disappoint; a passionate and nuanced delivery again reaching the heights of the hall, this time in assurance not supplication.

Brisk rhythm in ensemble playing complemented bright vocal verve, especially in duet with flute (Megan Barbetti), building to a soaring conclusion.

Borodin's Polovtsian Dances, from Prince Igor, again leaned on harp then woodwind to set a scene of intrigue bubbling up in oboe (Dion Gampfer) and cor anglais (Anne Phillips) to draw in full orchestra.

Conductor Sam Parry had the luxury of time, as did clarinettist Jack Claeys, picking up pace to summon brass and percussion unleashing jagged offbeats and melodic cascades.

Strings and brass found a delicate balance in irregular rhythms segueing to lush rhapsodic phrases as the young ensemble met a stern symphonic challenge, down to a tightly rumbustious conclusion.

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Burns returned for Czardas, from Strauss's Die Fledermaus, adjusting her delivery again to lavish Slavonic timbre.


Fresh pastoral strains in woodwind set the scene for another vocal duet with flute as Burns intoned a florid folkloric ballad full of sentiment, soaring seamlessly to a stratospheric send off.

Gershwin's American in Paris closed out the first half; a tone poem bridging eras to the jazz age, drawing on saxophones for a change of palette.

A light touch in the opening conjured the energy of the Paris street, complete with

Concert master Rene Kuan and Phillips' cor anglais set a standard in exposed playing, matched by low brass and trumpet soloist Chris Zappa.



 Sam Parry conducts soprano Chelsea Burns and West Coast Philharmonic Orchestra in Carmen to Phantom at Perth Concert Hall. Credit: Supplied

Dynamics frayed in denser orchestration but pulsating energy carried all through to a bustling conclusion.

After the break, O'Sullivan's trilogy of show numbers completed the transition to Broadway.

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Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered, from Rodgers' Pal Joey, opened in silky strings as the singer leaned into the lyric, amped for a sure and steady delivery.

Losing My Mind, from Sondheim's Follies, paired sonorous voice and saxophone

Dramatic brass heralded O’Sullivan’s swansong, Don’t Rain on my Parade, from Styne’s Funny Girl, drawing in a recitative soliloquy; plaintively rhetorical in contrast to the fanfare.

Breaking into song over offbeat accompaniment, O’Sullivan turned to full-on sass before vamping through to a brassy conclusion.

For a thoroughly “cheesy” finale, Parry introduced Lloyd Webber’s Phantom of the Opera Suite as “a musical set in an opera house”, tying up the elements of the program.

A clarion blast from organ (Daniel Van der Mozel) let loose low brass and timpani in time-honoured bombast summoning full orchestral effects. Fading suddenly to strings, the West End-flavoured songbook rolled out in familiar themes.

Flute and harp again excelled and the ensemble seemed better settled in more recent idiom, though many on stage would be too young to remember Phantom’s 1980s origins.

Celeste (Kristy Leong) lent a magical air, ushering in schmaltz then more brass salvos; ebbing and flowing to rock out with evident relish.

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