

# CATHEDRAL SERIES

*CONCERT 1* • WATER MUSIC

MARCH 19 & 20 • 2026

# WATER MUSIC

## Pisendel

*Imitation of the Characters of the Dance*

[7']

*I. Loure*

*II. Rigaudon*

*III. Canarie*

*IV. Bourrée*

*V. Musette: Lentement*

*VI. Passepied: Gay, accelerando poco a poco*

*VII. Polonaise: Majesteusement*

*VIII. Concertino: Presto*

**St Peter's Cathedral**

MARCH THU 19 & FRI 20

**Erin Helyard**

Conductor/Harpsichord



**Duration**

1hr 10min (no interval)

## Handel

*Water Music, HWV 348-350*

[50']

*I. Overture*

*II. Adagio e staccato*

*III. [Allegro]*

*IV. Andante*

*V. Allegro*

*VI. Air*

*VII. Minuet*

*VIII. Bourrée*

*IX. Hornpipe*

*X. [Andante]*

*XI. [Allegro - 'Overture']*

*XII. [Alla hornpipe]*

*XIII. [Andante]*

*XIV. [Rigaudon I]*

*XV. [Rigaudon II]*

*[da capo Rigaudon I]*

*XVI. Lentement*

*XVII. [Bourrée]*

*XVIII. Minuet I*

*XIX. [Minuet II]*

*XX. [Allegro]*

*XXI. [Alternativement]*

*XXII. 'Trumpet' Minuet*

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## Listen Later

ABC Classic is recording this concert for later broadcast. You can hear it again on Thursday 9 April 2026 at 12:00pm.

# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

What are the characteristics that come to mind when you think of baroque music? It's a broad question – the period in question spanned 150 years, and of course the label 'baroque' was only applied retrospectively. With that being said, the two pieces being performed tonight both possess a sprightly and elegant character and an emphasis on dance forms, hallmarks of the time.

You may not have heard of Johann Georg Pisendel. But in the early 1700s Pisendel cultivated a very successful career and many close relationships with esteemed composers of the day. He was an accomplished violinist who played in the Dresden Hofkapelle for over forty years, many of those as the concertmaster. The orchestra was one of the most renowned in Europe at the time, and Pisendel had a great influence over the ensemble's repertoire and styling choices.

Pisendel was particularly close to Antonio Vivaldi and Georg Philipp Telemann – both composers wrote him violin concertos. Pisendel's own compositional output is quite small, which is understandable in the context of his performance commitments. His surviving works include ten violin concertos, four concertos for orchestra and two violin sonatas.

Pisendel's *Imitation of the Characters of the Dance* is a little gem at six and a half minutes. Dance halls were particularly popular in France in the 18th century, and Pisendel weaves seven different dance forms into the fantasie.

The piece opens with a stately and refined *loure* before the tempo quickens with a *rigaudon*, *canarie* and *bourée*. This is followed by a more leisurely *musette*, a form which takes its name from a kind

of baroque bagpipe. This fragment is underpinned by a bass drone from the instrument. The fantasie concludes with a *passepied*, which comes from the French word for 'passing feet', a Polish *polonaise*, and a robust *concertino*.

George Frideric Handel is one of the most beloved baroque composers in history. Throughout his career he skilfully navigated various aristocratic employers, often under generous contracts. *Water Music* was written at the beginning of a new chapter for the composer.

Handel first visited England in 1710 while on temporary leave from the court of the Elector of Hanover. This trip was a great success, and led to Handel's eventual employment by Queen Anne in 1712 after he settled permanently in England. However, the tides of politics were constantly shifting. Queen Anne passed away in 1714, and she was succeeded on the throne by none other than Handel's previous employer, the Elector of Hanover. (What makes this even stranger is there were 56 people with higher claims, who were all disqualified on the basis of being Roman Catholic.) Fortunately for Handel, his old boss was not resentful. In fact, he lured him back to his court with even better conditions.

King George I's transition was not particularly smooth – he did not speak English and showed little interest in royal ceremony or engaging with his subjects. But eventually the King decided to try and win back public opinion. And what better way to do that, than with lavish boat parties!

*Water Music* provided the soundtrack to one of these parties in 1717. A local newspaper described the event, which saw attendees travel from



●  
**Erin Helyard**

Conductor/Harpsichord

Whitehall to Chelsea, and back again: “At about eight in the evening the King repaired to his barge. Next to the King’s barge was that of the musicians, about 50 in number – trumpets, horns, oboes, German [i.e. transverse] flutes, French flutes [i.e. recorders], violins, and basses, but no singers. His Majesty’s approval [of the music] was so great that he caused it to be played three times in all, twice before and once after supper, even though each performance lasted an hour. The evening was as fine as could be desired for this occasion and the number of barges and boats full of people wanting to listen was beyond counting.”

It’s easy to hear why *Water Music* was such an instant hit: Handel moves effortlessly from toe-tapping dance forms to graceful, flowing melodies, while using a full palette of orchestral colour.

We don’t know the exact configuration or order of the movements played during this original performance as no score survives. It was only years later that the movements began to be grouped into three suites: Suite No.1 in F major, Suite No.2 in D major, and Suite No.3 in G major.

The instrumentation also varies between the suites. Suite No.1 has the unique identifier of being one of the first pieces to use horns in an orchestral context, rather than purely as a hunting instrument. It’s also the longest of the three, beginning with a grand two-part overture and moving through various dance forms, including the English country dance the *hornpipe*. Suite No.2 turns the spotlight onto the trumpet forces while Suite No.3 features sparkling writing for the flutes.

© Stella Joseph-Jarecki

Erin Helyard has been acclaimed as an inspiring conductor and a virtuosic, expressive performer of the harpsichord and fortepiano. He graduated in harpsichord from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music with first-class honours and the University Medal, later completing a Masters in fortepiano and a PhD in musicology at McGill University, Montreal. His monograph *Clementi and the woman at the piano: virtuosity and the market for music in eighteenth-century London* was published by Oxford University Studies in Enlightenment in 2022.

From 2006–2012, Erin was a core member of the award-winning Ensemble Caprice in Montreal. Since returning to Australia in 2014, he has appeared with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Musica Viva, and the Australian String Quartet, and conducted major symphony orchestras across the country, as well as Opera Australia, ACO Collective, ANAM, and the Australian Haydn Ensemble. He has also collaborated in major recitals and recordings with Avi Avital, Nicola Boud, Melissa Farrow, David Greco, Stephanie McCallum, James Morley, and Richard Tognetti.

As Artistic Director and co-founder of Pinchgut Opera and the Orchestra of the Antipodes, Erin has forged a distinctive vision for baroque and classical opera in Australia. His productions have been praised for their vitality and scholarship, winning multiple Helpmann Awards, an International Opera Award, an ARIA, an AIR Award, and Limelight’s 2023 Australian Artist of the Year.

He is Associate Professor at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and appears courtesy of Pinchgut Opera.

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## PERCUSSION

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Principal

\*\* denotes Section Principal

~ denotes Associate Principal

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