

# ANTIQUE SHARDS

11:30 AM  
SATURDAY 11 OCTOBER 2025  
ST JOHN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH



## NEW MUSIC

**Nicholas POLLOCK (b. 1993)**  
Prelude in C major

**Johann Caspar Ferdinand FISCHER (1656 – 1746)**  
Allemande “Le Clio” (arr. Pollock)

**Nicholas POLLOCK (b. 1993)**  
Chaconne “Après les maîtres anciens”

## STYLUS FANTASTICUS

**Giovanni Girolamo KAPSPERGER (1580 – 1651)**  
Prelude No. 16 (Book IV)  
Toccata No. 6 (Book IV)  
Prelude No. 8 (Book IV)  
Toccata No. 3 (Book III)

## STOLEN ROSES

**Johann Caspar Ferdinand FISCHER (1656 – 1746)**  
Prelude, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande (arr. Pollock)

**Jean-Baptiste LULLY (1632 – 1687)**  
*Entrée d’Apollon* (arr. de Visée)

(continued)

## VIRTUOSO

**Alessandro PICCININI (1566 – 1638)**  
*Tenore detto il Mercatello*  
*Corrente detto Nasazzo fatta sopra il Mercatello*  
Galliard No. 3

## THE KING’S TEACHER

**Robert de VISÉE (1652 – 1725)**  
Suite in E minor: Prelude, Allemande, Courante, Gigue and Double

## UNTOUCHED CHARMS

**Johann Sebastian BACH (1685 – 1750)**  
Prelude from Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007 (arr. Pollock)

**Philipp Heinrich ERLEBACH (1657 – 1714)**  
*Ich sei auch wo ich sei, Bleibt mein Andenken treu* (arr. Pollock)

**Carl Friedrich ABEL (1723 – 1787)**  
Allegro in D major from the Drexel manuscript (arr. Pollock)

Nicholas Pollock, *Theorbo*

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## Nicholas Pollock – Biography

Nicholas Pollock is an Australian multi-instrumentalist specialising in early plucked strings. Starting out on electric guitar, he then progressed to the Renaissance lute, theorbo, Baroque guitar, Baroque lute, archlute, cittern and most recently the gallichon. Nicholas commenced his early instrument studies with Andrew Byrne (Sydney) and has performed in masterclasses with leading international plucked-string specialists such as Hopkinson Smith, Nigel North, Eduardo Egüez and Xavier Diaz-Lattore.

A dynamic and versatile performer, Nicholas is equally at home playing guitar in a punk band as performing the intimate lute works of John Dowland on the concert stage. He has a particular interest in the lute and theorbo music of 17<sup>th</sup> century France. Since 2021 Nicholas has dedicated himself to the study of historical composition and solfeggio in the 17<sup>th</sup> century style. He composes and arranges for the theorbo as well as other small early music ensembles, and for the Baroque triple harp.

Nicholas is in demand as a continuo player, and regularly performs in Australia and abroad with leading Australian early music and contemporary ensembles, such as Pinchgut Opera, the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, the Australian Haydn Ensemble, the Orchestra of the Antipodes, the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and the Australian Chamber Orchestra. He has recorded for Decca and ABC Classics, and has appeared in concert at the Urbino Musica Antica Festival, the Brisbane Baroque Festival, the Peninsula Summer Music Festival, and other festivals across Australia.

## Solo Theorbo – Virtuoso Farrago

For most of the theorbo's lifetime, the very concept of a concert didn't exist. The chance of an evening such as this, where a room full of strangers meet to listen to an hour of solo instrumental music played only for the sake of appreciating its beauty, is nil. In the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, theorbo players would primarily perform their own music or specific pieces at the request of their patron.

Instead of championing a composer or style, I have assembled a small handful of moments in the life of the theorbo from across the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, each one featuring different styles and compositional forms a player would have been expected to call forth at a moment's notice.

Despite being enormously popular across Europe for almost 200 years, hardly any music from professional theorbo players survives. Even the most famous pieces performed today are an unrepresentative sample of composers mainly from the nobility. This program showcases the work of these great surviving compositions, as well as speculations about the works that haven't come down to us, and even a few new compositions in the spirit of the old masters whose names we don't know.

### NEW MUSIC

New music opens the concert with a brand-new composition written especially for this performance. Preludes are an often-improvised, free composition regularly introducing dance suites and sonatas across Europe from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. To introduce this concert, I have composed a prelude for the theorbo in a style which is largely untouched on the instrument – that of the 18<sup>th</sup> century partimentists. The theorbo is an instrument severely limited by its tuning and range; as such, arranging is an essential step in understanding how historical composition might fit.

“**Le Clio**” is a sonata by Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer (1656-1746), a Bohemian Francophile who travelled to Paris to study the French style which had become enormously popular at French-speaking courts in the German speaking lands during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Allemande is a perfect example of a movement tailored to the harpsichord, and therefore perfectly antagonistic to the theorbo. The piece comes from Fischer's final publication *Musickalischer Parnassus* (1738) and is named after Clio, the muse of history and lyre playing.

Every composer of Baroque music should write a chaconne, and as I couldn't choose one style, I have fashioned mine “**Après les maîtres anciens**” (“After the ancient masters”). The chaconne is a dance taken from either the Americas or perhaps the Canary Islands by the Spanish, which, after decades of ‘refinement’ and added chastity, was allowed into European courts, where it became one of the most popular dances both for social dancing and for listening.

### STYLUS FANTASTICUS

The *stylus fantasticus* is a form of music unshackled by dance rhythms, words or strict compositional devices. In his *Musurgia Universalis* (1650), Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680) tells us that the *stylus fantasticus* is a style for exploring the “hidden designs of harmony” and showing the composer's genius. Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger (1580-1651) was hugely admired by Kircher, but during his lifetime Kapsperger was known as a much more competent performer than a composer. Even in the present day, much of Kapsperger's music is known for its outlandish rhythms and motifs that are abandoned as quickly as they are stated. In opposition to that, I have picked two toccatas and appropriate preludes to demonstrate Kapsperger's absolute mastery of the subtleties found in this “hidden design”.

In the **Prelude No. 16** and **Toccata No. 6** (1640), Kapsperger explores the farthest reaches of tonality accessible to the theorbo. To our modern ears, these pieces sound in F minor, but in the 17<sup>th</sup> century such ‘flattened’ modes were usually only theoretical or achieved through transposition. Here, however, Kapsperger addresses these dark corners with uncharacteristic simplicity. The **Prelude No. 8** (1640) and **Toccata No. 3** (1626) are in many ways the opposite to our foray into the darkness. F major is a tonality filled with charm and elegance. As it represents the first step into the flat side of the gamut, it retains the softness of the register without the harsh difficulties of F minor's brutal fingerings.

### STOLEN ROSES

The theorbo has always borrowed the music of its collegiate instruments the same way as I have borrowed the title Stolen Roses. We return to Fischer, this time taking music from the first sonata for the harpsichord in his *Musicalisches Blumen-Büschlein* (1698). These pieces have never been performed on the theorbo, but with some creative licence have been made to fit almost comfortably. In the early years of his life, Fischer was composing in imitation of the French masters from the generation before his own. We hear the clear influence of Jacques Chambonnières (1601-1672) and Louis Couperin (1626-1661). It's undeniable that the French harpsichord masters were directly influenced by the lutenists of their day, but the application of the lute's broken style to the harpsichord led to developments that bring us directly to the most famous musical stylings of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750).

Flanking this sonata is a historical transcription made by the singer, guitarist, viola da gambist, lutenist, and, for our purposes today, theorbist, Robert de Visée (1652-1725). Visée made many transcriptions during his lifetime, most of which are contained in the Vaudry de Saizenay Manuscript (late 17<sup>th</sup> century). This **Entrée d'Apollon** is a transcription of a dance from Jean-Baptiste Lully's (1632-1687) opera *Le triomphe de l'amour* (1681), originally danced by Louis XIV. Its upright rigidity is exemplary of Louis XIV's absolute domination of his court and his kingdom.

## VIRTUOSO

If one were to pick the virtuoso of the Italian theorbo school, it would be Alessandro Piccinini (1566-1638). Despite being one of the first theorbo players, Piccinini has one of the most developed and mature styles on the instrument. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the mark of a virtuoso was not only their ability to dazzle with fast tempi and impossible technical feats, but also the ability to restrain oneself, showing only glimpses of the true ability and genius lurking beneath the surface.

The **Tenore detto il Mercatello** from Piccinini's *Intavolatura di liuto et di chitarrone* (1623) and its following **Corrente detto Nasazzo** perfectly demonstrate this disguised ability. Both pieces are elaborations on a *tenore*, a simple melody now lost to time, called *il Mercatello*. No details on the subject of the *tenore* survive, but one can easily imagine the hustle and bustle of a small market during which flashes of Piccinini's virtuosity emerge and subside effortlessly. The **Galliard No. 3** is a dance in three parts, each more intense and demanding of the player than the last, while never letting slip the veil of facility.

## THE KING'S TEACHER

The largest surviving body of French theorbo music belongs to Robert de Visée (1652-1725), but despite this, he was never employed as a theorbist even during his time as the king's teacher. The king in question was Louis XV, and Visée spent several years as his guitar teacher. During his long career, Visée served in Louis XIV's private chambers as a singer and viola da gambist. He became exceptionally well known as a guitarist, and he must have had a reputation on the theorbo, as a significant number of his dance suites are preserved in multiple manuscripts from France.

As a singer, he would have regularly accompanied himself on the theorbo in the king's bedchambers, and his **Suite in E minor** would have made the perfect intermezzo for a drowsy king. Suites like this were never meant for dancing, but instead employed exceptionally well-known forms to allow the composer to weave their capricious effects into every step, without having to embrace freer forms such as an eccentric toccata or meandering sonata. Despite the minor key, the suite is far from melancholic, instead favouring passionate and seductive themes all dripping with the theorbo's baritone intensity.

## UNTOUCHED CHARMS

Despite being an instrument used throughout German-speaking lands, almost no Germanic music for the theorbo survives. Most courtly music was kept secret by its players and patrons, and so we can only speculate on the nature of these untouched charms. In honour of these lost treasures, I have elected to take the contemporary approach of playing music from other significant composers with whom German theorbists must have interacted. The first is the most famous work of the most famous composer of the Baroque era: Johann Sebastian Bach's **Prelude** to the First Cello Suite in G major. The Cello Suites were obscure until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but any theorbist that came across them would immediately note their sympathetic range and incredible craftsmanship.

Philipp Heinrich Erlebach (1657-1714) is a shamefully little-known composer whose short life gifted us with a few of the most magnificent collections of music from any era, despite the vast majority of his works having been burnt in a fire. I have chosen **Ich sei auch wo ich sei, Bleibt mein Andenken treu**, whose text declares, "Remember pleasure, and you can defeat all pain."

Carl Freidrich Abel (1723-1787) is the second youngest composer in this program after me, and so his style has more in common with Haydn and Mozart than any of the other composers here. This **Allegro** from a suite in D major in the Drexel 5871 manuscript (mid-18<sup>th</sup> century) can be played in its entirety on the theorbo; however, its leaps and speed make it fiendishly difficult.