

the movements according to their keys and instrumentations, creating three shorter suites—in F major, in D major, and in G major. The groupings contain 5 to 10 movements of varying musical character, and, in some cases, distinct national provenance and social association. For example, the lilting waltz-time minuet and the lively duple-time bourrée were historically French dances; the minuet, however, was an aristocratic form, while the bourrée was known in both folk and courtly circles. The bouncy duple-time hornpipe, with its intricate, often syncopated rhythms, was a dance of the British Isles. Other dance movements featured in Water Music include the sarabande, the gigue, and the rigaudon. Each of the three subsuites opens with a stately overture and concludes with a festive movement that, indeed, is reminiscent of the original performance context.

# Handel Water Music

Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

August Wenzinger, conductor



Handel (left) and King George I on the River Thames, 17 July 1717  
painting by Edouard Hamman

Water Music, suite of short pieces for small orchestra by German-born English composer George Frideric Handel, known particularly for its highly spirited movements in dance form. Most of the pieces were originally intended for outdoor performance, and the work premiered on a barge on the River Thames, where it provided entertainment for a royal cruise hosted by King George I of Great Britain on July 17, 1717. Selections from the suite were published during Handel's lifetime, but the entire collection did not come into print until 1788, nearly three decades after the composer's death.

When George I planned his barge party, he asked Handel to provide music in the form of an orchestral composition for about 50 musi-

cians. Handel responded with Water Music, which, according to one eyewitness, engaged an ensemble of flutes, recorders, oboes, bassoons, trumpets, horns, violins, and basses. (The observer made no mention of the timpani that are customarily included in contemporary performances, but percussion may have been added after the limiting factor of a barge-borne performance was eliminated.) The king was so delighted with the new work that he asked to hear it over and over—for a total of four performances, lasting about an hour apiece.

Because Water Music was assembled and published posthumously as a complete collection, the order in which the composer wished the various movements to be played remains uncertain. It is customary, however, to group

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- |                                     |                         |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Overture (Largo) - Allegro 3:48  | 11. Alla Hornpipe 3:23  |
| 2. Adagio E Staccato 2:00           | 12. Minuet 1:13         |
| 3. Allegro - Andante - Allegro 7:58 | 13. Lentement 2:24      |
| 4. (Minuet) 3:27                    | 14. Bourrée :48         |
| 5. Air 2:55                         | 15. (Minuet) 2:51       |
| 6. Minuet 3:13                      | 16. Aria 2:44           |
| 7. Bourrée 1:35                     | 17. Minuet 1:11         |
| 8. Hornpipe 1:56                    | 18. (Minuet) 2:02       |
| 9. (Andante) 3:18                   | 19. Country Dance :30   |
| 10. (Allegro) 2:22                  | 20. (Country Dance) :33 |

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