

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL 2026



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AF26 DIGITAL DAYBILL

Orfeo by Luigi Rossi

Wednesday 4 March 2026, 7pm

Friday 6 March 2026, 7pm

Adelaide Town Hall

Duration: 2hrs 40mins, including interval

Pygmalion Choir and Orchestra

Raphaël Pichon Conductor

The presentation of *Orfeo* has been made possible by the Adelaide Festival Opera Donor Circle and MM Electrical Merchandising.



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Luigi Rossi – *Orfeo* (1647)

Rediscover a forgotten masterpiece

The myth of Orpheus and his lost wife Eurydice grapples with the inescapable forces of love and death that define our existence, and has captured the imagination of composers, writers and audiences for millennia.

Premiered in Paris in 1647, Luigi Rossi's *Orfeo* stands as one of the earliest operas created expressly for the French court. Commissioned by Cardinal Mazarin to introduce Italian musical theatre to Paris, it combines Roman *tragicomedia per musica* with French theatrical spectacle, and played a formative role in shaping emerging French operatic culture. Rossi composed *Orfeo* amid personal grief following the death of his wife Costanza, a loss widely thought to have intensified the score's expressive depth. Unlike later, more consoling tellings of the Orpheus myth, Rossi's opera ends in darkness: Orpheus, broken by loss and rejecting earthly pleasures, is ultimately destroyed by the forces he dares to resist. The work is a powerful meditation on love and art, and the cost of human weakness.

The opera's premiere featured Giacomo Torelli's groundbreaking stage machinery and an expanded ensemble that included the *24 Violons du Roi*, the royal orchestra of the French court, renowned as one of the earliest permanent orchestras in Europe. It was a six-hour extravaganza that astonished audiences. After this triumph, however, *Orfeo* effectively disappeared from the stage for nearly 300 years, receiving its first modern revival only in 1982 at La Scala.

Today, Rossi's *Orfeo* is recognised as a landmark in Baroque theatre, a crucial bridge between Italian and French operatic traditions, and a poignant blend of tragedy and comedy. In this Australian premiere, rediscover this forgotten masterpiece brought to life with tenderness and passion in a concert staging.

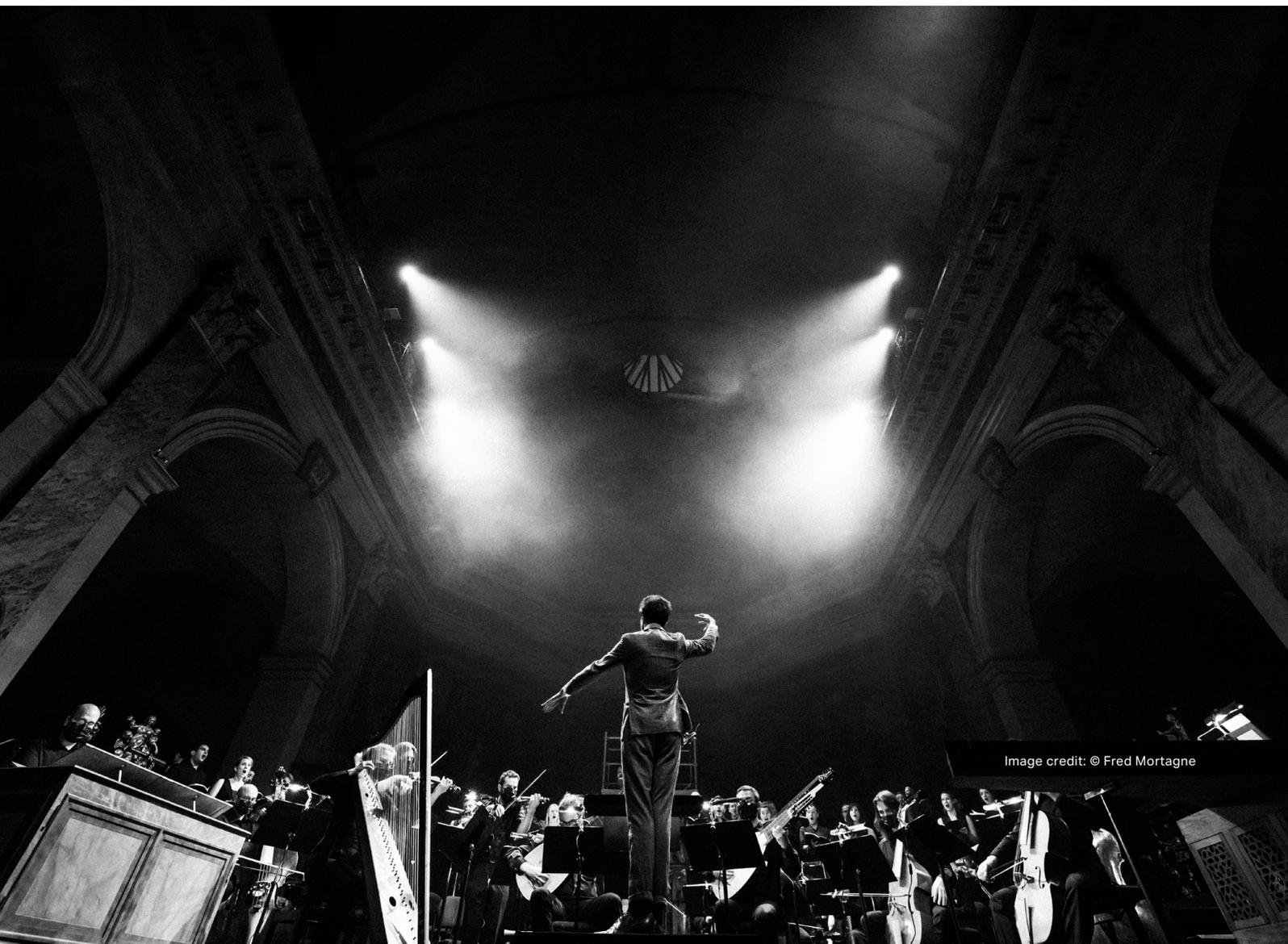


Image credit: © Fred Mortagne

Pygmalion Choir and Orchestra

Raphaël Pichon Conductor

Orpheus Xenia Puskarz Thomas

Eurydice Julie Roset

Aristaeus Blandine de Sansal

Pluto / Augur Alex Rosen

Venus / Proserpina Camille Chopin

Nurse / Cupid William Shelton

Vecchia (Old Woman) Dominique Visse

Endymion / Charon Tomáš Král

Momo Samuel Boden

Apollo Laurence Kilsby

1st Grace Maïlys de Villoutreys

2nd Grace Perrine Devillers

3rd Grace Corinne Bahuaud

1st Fate Laurence Kilsby

2nd Fate René Ramos Premier

3rd Fate Renaud Brès

CHOIR

Sopranos: Camille Allérat, Adèle Carlier, Anne-Emmanuelle Davy, Perrine Devillers, Alice Focroulle, Eugénie de Padirac, Maïlys de Villoutreys

Altos: Corinne Bahuaud, Lewis Alexander Hammond, Marie Pouchelon, Yann Rolland

Tenors: Davy Cornillot, Constantin Goubet, Guillaume Gutierrez, Randol Rodriguez

Bass: Renaud Brès, Frédéric Bourreau, Guillaume Olry, René Ramos Premier, Emmanuel Vistorky

ORCHESTRA (* continuo)

Violins: Sophie Gent, Louis Creac'h

Violoncello: Antoine Touche(*)

Violas da gamba: Hyérine Lassalle(*), Garance Boizot(*), Sarah Van Oudenhove(*), Julien Léonard(*)

Double bass: Chloé Lucas(*)

Flutes: Julien Martin, Evolène Kiener

Fagotto: Evolène Kiener

Cornetts: Emmanuel Mure, Lambert Colson

Sackbuts: Bart Vroomen

Harp: Angélique Mauillon(*)

Theorbos: Thibaut Roussel(*), Gabrielle Rubio(*)

Guitar: Gabrielle Rubio

Organ: Pierre Gallon(*)

Harpichords: Pierre Gallon(*), Ronan Khalil(*)

Italian Harpsichord after Grimaldi by Carey Beebe, Sydney 1990
Neapolitan Harpsichord after Bocalari 1685 by Carey Beebe, Sydney 2002
Ruckers Double Harpsichord by Carey Beebe, Sydney 2003
Continuo organ by Kenneth Tickell & Company Ltd, Wellingborough UK, Opus 71, courtesy of Pilgrim Uniting Church
Early keyboards prepared for performance by Carey Beebe

Orfeo

Luigi Rossi (c.1597–1653)

Libretto by **Francesco Buti**

Synopsis

Luigi Rossi's *Orfeo* retells the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in an expansive and deeply human form, combining lyric intimacy with Baroque courtly spectacle. Unlike earlier treatments of the story, Rossi and librettist Francesco Buti enlarge the drama with secondary characters, comic relief, and psychological complexity, creating one of the most ambitious operas of the seventeenth century.

The opera opens on the day of Orpheus and Eurydice's wedding. Despite ominous prophecies, Eurydice's unwavering faith in love contrasts with the jealousy of Aristaeus, who secretly desires her and is driven to desperation by jealousy. Venus, bound by fate yet unwilling to relinquish passion, intervenes through deception, setting the tragedy in motion.

During a pastoral dance Eurydice is bitten by a serpent. Though Aristaeus could save her life, Eurydice rejects help from one whose desire threatens her honour and dies professing loyalty to Orpheus.

In Act III, Orpheus's grief becomes the emotional core of the opera. Devastated, Orpheus confronts destiny itself. His lament moves the Fates, who allow him to descend to the Underworld. There, armed only with music, Orpheus softens Pluto and Proserpina and is permitted to lead Eurydice back to the world of the living, on the condition that he not look at her before they emerge.

Yet human doubt prevails, and at the threshold of freedom, doubt overcomes him. Orpheus turns back. Eurydice is lost forever.

The opera ends without consolation: Orpheus alone, calling on death itself to reunite him with the beloved he has lost.



Image credit: © Fred Mortagne

Character Relationships & Dramatic Map

Primary Characters

- **Orpheus** – Poet and musician; husband of Eurydice; his love and grief drive the drama
- **Eurydice** – Bride of Orpheus; steadfast in loyalty and honour
- **Aristaeus** – Rejected suitor; consumed by jealousy that pushes him toward ruin
- **Venus** – Goddess of Love; manipulates events through deception
- **Cupid** – Spirit of Love; playful observer and commentator

Family / Authority Figures

- **Endymion** – Eurydice's father; anxious guardian of her happiness
- **Apollo** – God of music and healing; Orpheus's divine father
- **Pluto** – Ruler of the Underworld; stern judge of the dead
- **Proserpina** – Queen of the Underworld; advocates mercy

Symbolic / Allegorical Figures

- **Le Parche (The Fates)** – Embodiments of destiny; unyielding yet momentarily moved
- **Momo** – God of mockery; speaks uncomfortable truths
- **Charon** – Ferryman of the dead; gatekeeper to the Underworld
- **Choruses (Graces, Augurs, Furies, Nymphs)** – provide moral, emotional, and atmospheric commentary

Supporting Figures

- **Nurse** – Confidante and companion to Eurydice
- **Old Woman (Venus in disguise)** – Instrument of deception

Themes

Fate and Human Choice

Though gods intervene and lovers struggle, fate remains inexorable. Even Venus cannot overturn destiny, but only disguise its path.

Love and Fidelity

Eurydice's loyalty is absolute. Her refusal to accept help from Aristaeus and compromise honour, even to save her life, gives the opera its moral and emotional centre, framing fidelity as a moral choice with tragic consequences.

The Power and Limits of Music

Orpheus's music moves nature, fate, and hell itself, yet it cannot conquer human doubt, the one human weakness that destroys everything. It is doubt – not death – that finally undoes him.

Jealousy and Madness

Aristaeus' jealousy evolves into guilt, then insanity. His arc mirrors Orpheus's grief but without transcendence, a negative reflection of love corrupted.

Comic Irony vs. Tragic Truth

Momo's mockery exposes truths the noble characters refuse to see. Comedy becomes a form of cruel clarity rather than relief.

Tragedy without Consolation

Unlike many early operas, Orpheus offers no apotheosis or redemption. Grief is not resolved but endured.

Synopsis

ACT I

Scene 1

Eurydice and her father Endymion prepare for her wedding to Orpheus. An augur performs divinations; ominous signs appear, suggesting danger. Eurydice dismisses the bad omens, confident in love and faith. Despite unease, preparations continue.

Scene 2

Orpheus joins Eurydice. The lovers celebrate their union and affirm their mutual devotion. Endymion, though uneasy, blesses the marriage. Happiness appears complete.

Scene 3

Aristaeus laments that Eurydice has married Orpheus instead of him. Consumed by jealousy and despair, he calls on Venus for help.

Scene 4

Venus resolves to aid Aristaeus. Since fate decrees Eurydice must wed Orpheus, Venus devises a deceitful plan: she will disguise herself as an old woman to manipulate Eurydice.

Scene 5

The wedding celebration unfolds with dances and comic relief from Momo. Joy reigns, yet the earlier omens linger unresolved beneath the festivity.

ACT II

Scene 1

Venus, now disguised, rehearses her plan with Aristaeus to persuade Eurydice to abandon fidelity for self-preservation.

Scene 2

The disguised Venus attempts to convince Eurydice that changing lovers will avert fate's threats. Eurydice firmly rejects the idea, proclaiming absolute loyalty to Orpheus.

Scene 3

The plan has failed. In frustration, Aristaeus resolves to abduct Eurydice during the forthcoming pastoral dance.

Scene 4

Orpheus, troubled by vague foreboding, is urged to sing. His music charms nature but cannot dispel impending doom.

Scene 5

During a dance, Eurydice is bitten by a snake. Aristaeus tries to save her, but Eurydice refuses help from someone who desires her dishonourably. She dies, still faithful to Orpheus. Apollo and the Chorus lament her death.

ACT III

Scene 1

Orpheus mourns Eurydice. The Fates declare her death irreversible, but Orpheus's impassioned singing moves them. They permit him to seek Eurydice in the Underworld.

Scene 2

Aristaeus, tormented by guilt and madness, encounters Eurydice's spirit, who curses him for causing her death. He descends into insanity.

Scene 3

Aristaeus' madness becomes grotesquely comic. Mocked and unhinged, he ultimately rushes toward death.

Scene 4

Charon ferries Orpheus to the Underworld. Proserpina urges Pluto to hear his plea.

Scene 5

Orpheus sings before Pluto and Proserpina, softening even Hell's rulers. Eurydice is returned on the condition that Orpheus not look at her until reaching the upper world. Near the exit, Orpheus turns back in doubt. Eurydice vanishes.

Scene 6

Orpheus laments his final loss. Rejecting life and comfort, he calls upon death to reunite him with Eurydice, ending the opera in profound tragedy.

Raphaël Pichon

Conductor

'Pichon, in a short time has become *one of the most interesting conductors* in classical music.'
(*New York Times*)

A leader of his generation, Raphaël Pichon develops original and highly personal projects, while drawing on a rich tradition.

Raphaël Pichon began his musical training with the violin, piano, and singing. As a young professional singer, he performed under the direction of Jordi Savall, Gustav Leonhardt, and Ton Koopman, as well as with Geoffroy Jourdain's Les Cris de Paris.

In 2006, he founded Pygmalion, a choir and orchestra performing on period instruments. Notable projects in recent years include: the creation of *Trauernacht*, based on music of Bach and directed by Katie Mitchell (2014); the rediscovery and staging of Rossi's *Orfeo* at the Opéra National de Lorraine and the Opéra Royal de Versailles (2016); the *Vespers* with Pierre Audi (Holland Festival, BBC Proms, Royal Chapel of Versailles, Leipzig Bach Festival); a staged version of *A German Requiem* by Jochen Sandig at the submarine base in Bordeaux; stage productions of *The Magic Flute* by Simon McBurney (2018); Mozart's *Requiem* with Romeo Castellucci (2019); *Samson*, a loose recreation of Rameau's lost opera, with Claus Guth (2024) at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence; and *Lakmé* (2022) and *L'Autre Voyage* with music by Schubert (2024) at the Opéra-Comique.

In 2020, he created the Pulsations festival in Bordeaux. In 2024, in partnership with Arte and France Musique, he embarked on the Les Chemins de Bach project with Pygmalion, a grand journey on foot and by bicycle between Arnstadt and Lübeck.

As a guest conductor, Raphaël Pichon has conducted the Freiburger Barockorchester, Musicaeterna, the Scintilla of the Zurich Opera, the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston, the Mozarteum Orchester, and most recently the Orchestra of St. Luke's at Carnegie Hall. The 2025–2026 season marks his debut at the Paris Opera, as well as with the Berliner Philharmoniker and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra.

His recordings are released on the harmonia mundi label: the imaginary opera *Enfers* with baritone Stéphane Degout (2018), *Libertà!* featuring little-known masterpieces by Mozart, Bach's *Motets* (2020) and *St Matthew Passion* (2022), *Mein Traum* (Schubert, Schumann, Weber—2022), Monteverdi's *Vespers of the Virgin* (2023), Mozart's *Requiem* (2024), Bach's *Mass in B minor* (2025), and Brahms' *A German Requiem* (2025). On 20 March 2026, *St John Passion* will be released.

Raphaël Pichon is an Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters.

Pygmalion

Pygmalion, a choir and period-instrument orchestra founded in 2006 by Raphaël Pichon, explores the filiations that link Bach to Mendelssohn, Schütz to Brahms, Rameau to Gluck and Berlioz.

Alongside the canonical works explored by Pygmalion (Bach's *Passions*, Rameau's lyrical tragedies, Mozart's *Great Mass in C minor*, Mendelssohn's *Elias*, Monteverdi's *Vespers*), the ensemble creates original programs that highlight the links between works while incorporating the spirit of their creation: *Mozart & the Weber Sisters*, *Miranda* (music by Purcell), *Stravaganza d'Amore!* (evoking the birth of opera at the Medici court), *Enfers* (with Stéphane Degout), the cycle *Bach en 7 paroles* (at the Philharmonie de Paris), and *Libertà!* (retracing the beginnings of Mozart's *dramma giocoso*).

Pygmalion has created for itself a singular identity within the international musical landscape, thanks to its critical and popular success with challenging projects that often blend the old and the new.

When performing operas, Pygmalion has collaborated with such directors as Katie Mitchell, Romeo Castellucci, Simon McBurney, Aurélien Bory, Jetske Mijnsen, Pierre Audi, Valérie Lesort and Christian Hecq, Cyril Teste, Clément Cogitore, and Michel Fau.

As the artist-in-residence at the Opéra National de Bordeaux, Pygmalion has for several years offered Kiosque Pygmalion, a season of chamber music concerts and free educational workshops open to all. In 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, Pygmalion launched the Pulsations festival in Bordeaux.

Pygmalion performs regularly on the biggest stages in France (Philharmonie de Paris, Opéra royal de Versailles, Opéra-Comique, Opéra de Paris, Aix-en-Provence, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Toulouse, among others) and internationally (Vienna, Salzburg, Amsterdam, Brussels, London, Hamburg, Dortmund, Berlin, Frankfurt, Essen, Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Milan, Naples, Beijing, Hong Kong, and other cities).

Pygmalion has been recording for harmonia mundi since 2014.

Among the awards the ensemble has received: Gramophone Classical Music Awards (United Kingdom), OPER! Awards 2025 and Preis der Schallplattenkritik (Germany), Edison Klassiek Award (Netherlands), Diapason d'Or of the Year, Choc de Classica and Victoire de la Musique Classique (France).

Pygmalion is artist-in-residence at the Opéra National de Bordeaux. It enjoys the support of the Direction régionale des affaires culturelles de Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Ville de Bordeaux, Département de la Gironde, région Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Centre national de la musique. Ensemble associated with the Opéra-Comique (2023–2027), Pygmalion receives support from Château Haut-Bailly, the ensemble's honorary patron. Pygmalion is artist-in-residence at Fondation Singer-Polignac as an associate artist and is a member of the Fédération des Ensembles Vocaux et Instrumentaux Spécialisés (FEVIS), Scène Ensemble, and Rézo MUSA. Fondation d'entreprise Société Générale and Eren Groupe are patrons of Pygmalion.

An impressionistic painting of a rocky coastline. The scene is dominated by large, textured rock formations in shades of purple, blue, and brown. In the foreground, two people are swimming in the water, which is rendered in vibrant, swirling colors of teal, blue, and green. The overall style is expressive and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a rich, saturated color palette.

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