

Les Délices (Debra Nagy, director)
Quire Cleveland (Jay White, director)
Eric Milnes, guest conductor

December 21, 2018 at 7:30pm
Holy Trinity Lutheran, Akron

December 22, 2018 at 8:00pm
Lakewood Congregational Church, Lakewood

December 23, 2018 at 4:00pm
Our Lady of Peace, Cleveland

Charpentier's Midnight Mass

Michel Corrette: Noels sur les instruments

À la venue de Noel
Le Roy des cieux vient de naître
Adam fut un pauvre homme

Marc-Antoine Charpentier: Dialogus inter angelos et Pastores Judeae, H. 420

Traditional *Noëls* (arranged by Ross Duffin)

Une jeune pucelle
Tous les bourgeois de Châtre
Voici le jour solennel

Charpentier: Messe de Minuit, H. 9

Tonight's program is generously sponsored by Drs. Joseph Sopko & Elizabeth Macintyre and Grete Anderson.

Les Délices and Quire Cleveland are grateful for funding from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, the George Gund Foundation, and the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, which makes our programs possible.

Notes on the program:

Writing in 1571, the historian Etienne Pasquier recalled hearing every family sing *noels* nightly during his childhood. These songs and dances whose strophic lyrics honored the Lord (frequently telling the story of the Nativity) permeated popular culture. Great church sanctuaries resounded with the strains of *noels* during the offertory of the Midnight Mass and children and adults sang them in the streets throughout Advent.

Though the music by Marc-Antoine Charpentier and Michel Corrette on tonight's program was composed in the late-17th and early-18th centuries, the beloved French carols on which these compositions are based can be traced back at least as far as the early 16th century when printed collections of simple, tuneful *noels* proliferated. Writing in his 1768 *Dictionnaire de Musique*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau even noted that the *noels* "should have a rustic and pastoral character

consistent with the simplicity of the words and of the shepherds who were supposed to have sung them while paying homage to Christ in the crib.”

Traditional French *noels* thoroughly infuse tonight’s program. We begin with three *noels* given virtuosic instrumental treatment by Michel Corrette (1707-1795). The joyous *A la venue de Noël* (at the coming of Christmas) sparkles with energy, while shepherds drones are clearly heard in the pastoral *Le Roy des cieux vient de naître* (the heavenly King has just been born). Brilliant variations also spring forth from the jig-like *Adam fut un pauvre homme* (Adam was a poor man).

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704) wrote extraordinarily beautiful music in nearly every genre from sacred music to opera. Despite his extensive output (preserved in a large collection of autograph manuscripts), frustratingly little is known about him. We do know, however, that he completed formative studies in Rome under the tutelage of Giacomo Carissimi, whose Italianate influence would permeate his future compositions.

Though he never secured permanent employment at the royal court, Charpentier sang tenor and composed much small-scale religious music while engaged by the aristocrat Marie de Lorraine (better known as Mademoiselle de Guise). This was excellent preparation for his appointment as music director of the great Jesuit church of Saint-Louis. Called “l’église de l’opéra” (the church of the opera), the post gave Charpentier access to the finest instrumentalists and singers in Paris. Both Charpentier’s *Dialogus inter angelos et pastores Judeae in nativitate Domini* (Dialogue between the angel and shepherds at the birth of the Lord) and the famous *Messe de Minuit* (Midnight Mass) date from his time at St. Louis.

Not quite an oratorio and not really a motet, the *Dialogus* was probably performed in a liturgical context. The first part (loosely based on Psalm 12:1) is full of vivid text-painting such as the flowing melismas of “fluent lac et mel” (flowing with milk and honey) and the excited anticipation for the coming of the Lord in the chorus “Utinam dirumperes caelos.” The Second half tells the story of the angels and the shepherds from Luke 2:8-20 in a more theatrical manner. To begin, muted strings, and mumuring, meandering melodic lines evoke perfect stillness for the night Christ was born (Nuit) – only to be interrupted by a brilliant instrumental flourish (Reveil des bergers) as the shepherds are awakened the next morning. A dialogue between the angel (represented by a solo soprano) and the shepherds ensues as she urges them to rush to Bethlehem to behold the miracle. Time then seems to stop for the Adoration during the ethereal “O infans, O deus, O salvator noster,” and the piece ends in a tuneful celebration with the chorus “Pastores undique sertant concentibus.”

Charpentier’s justly famous *Messe de Minuit* represents a “perfect synthesis” between the secular and liturgical, and between the popular and learned. Adapting the vast majority of the Latin mass to French *noels* (including the three *noels* sung in French by Quire Cleveland in four-voice arrangements by Ross Duffin), the *Messe de Minuit*’s freshness and joyful spirit perfectly represent Advent. While Charpentier used eleven different noel tunes through the course of the work, the most serious moment of the mass – the statements of Christ’s incarnation, his mortal existence, and his death under Pontius Pilate – is given wholly original, appropriately sober music.

– Debra Nagy