CONCERTS AND RECORDINGS BY LES DÉLICES ARE JOURNEYS OF DISCOVERY.

— NEW YORK TIMES

www.lesdelices.org | 216.302.8404
Les Délices (pronounced Lay day-lease) explores the dramatic potential and emotional resonance of long-forgotten music. Founded by baroque oboist Debra Nagy in 2009, Les Délices has established a reputation for their unique programs that are “thematically concise, richly expressive, and featuring composers few people have heard of” (NYTimes). The group’s debut CD was named one of the "Top Ten Early Music Discoveries of 2009" (NPR's Harmonia), and their performances have been called "a beguiling experience" (Cleveland Plain Dealer), "astonishing" (ClevelandClassical.com), and "first class" (Early Music America Magazine). Since their sold-out New York debut at the Frick Collection, highlights of Les Délices’ touring activities include Music Before 1800, Boston’s Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, San Francisco Early Music Society, the Yale Collection of Musical Instruments, and Columbia University’s Miller Theater. Les Délices also presents its own annual four-concert series in Cleveland art galleries and at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights, OH, where the group is Artist in Residence. Les Délices has been featured on WCPN, WCLV and WKSU in Ohio, WQXR in New York, NPR’s syndicated Harmonia and Sunday Baroque, and had their debut CD featured as part of the Audio-guide for a special exhibit at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art (Watteau, Music, and Theater).
2019-2020
Programs Offered

Songs without Words – TORCHSONGS TRANSFORMED

*Fee Estimates include artist fees plus travel, but not accommodations. Fees may be discounted up to 30% if they can be coordinated with additional performances en route.

Songs without Words takes the adaptation of 17th Century songs for instruments as its point of departure and brings the concept into the 20th Century with torch songs and jazz standards arranged and improvised by the ensemble. Music by baroque composers Lambert, Lully, and Marais is heard alongside tunes by Nina Simone, Errol Garner, Edith Piaf, and others in this program of timeless melodies and inspired improvisations.

Cleveland’s Plain Dealer commented, “Missing old and new numbers freely, the ensemble liberated the music of both eras, creating a kind of conversation across the centuries.” Scheduled for release on PARMA recordings November 2018.

3 musicians: oboe, viola da gamba & pardessus de viole, harpsichord

Age of Indulgence – ROCOCO CHAMBER WORKS

Age of Indulgence presents daring, experimental works from the French Rococo – music from the eve of an aesthetic revolution. These works from the 1740s and 1750s don’t conform to our expectations about Baroque music, but they’re not quite Classical either. Rather, they mix the humor and wit of early Haydn and Gluck, a little of CPE Bach’s sturm und drang, and characteristically lush French harmonies together to create a truly unique sound. Works by François-André Philidor, Jean-Philippe Rameau, and more. Released by PARMA recordings June 2017.

5 musicians: oboe, 2 violins, viola da gamba, harpsichord

Intoxicating – NEW MEDIEVAL PROGRAM

Wondering what to do on those long, cold nights in your 14th-Century castle? Les Délices is inspired by heady perfumes and strong elixirs for their new program of strange and wonderful Medieval music, Intoxicating.

Singers Elena Mullins and Jason McStoots perform songs by 14th-Century masters Machaut, Solage, Caserta, and others, accompanied by an ensemble of harps, lute, recorder and medieval fiddle. Performers include Jason McStoots (tenor), Elena Mullins (soprano), Debra Nagy (voice, medieval winds), Scott Metcalfe (harp, fiddle), and Charles Weaver (lute).

5 musicians: soprano, tenor, vielle/harp, lute, medieval winds

Fated Lovers – BEGUILING & ROMANTIC

Just as in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, true love sometimes ends with the ultimate sacrifice. Two evocative cantatas by Louis-Nicolas Clérambault (Pyrame et Thisbé and Héro et Leandre) and excerpts from Rameau’s groundbreaking opera Hippolyte et Aricie relate the timeless tales of star-crossed lovers in this new program featuring acclaimed soprano Clara Rotsolk (“supple and stylish...unflaggingly attractive” - Gramophone) and tenor Jason McStoots (“an exquisite singer and a fine actor, rounding out heartfelt performances with meaningful gestures and facial expressions” - Cleveland Plain Dealer). Opera News exclaimed, “a brilliantly conceived and masterfully executed program of truly delightful rarities.”

7 musicians: soprano, tenor, oboe/recorder, 2 violins, viola da gamba, harpsichord

*additional programs on reverse*
The Elements – NEW!
Les Délices celebrated their 10th Anniversary with ground-breaking music from the 18th and 21st centuries that depicts the chaos of creation and the four elements of water, fire, earth, and wind. The program pairs Les Délices’ own arrangement of Jean-Féry Rebel’s The Elements with a newly commissioned, nature-inspired work for period instruments by rising-star composer Theo Chandler. Evocative works by Rameau, Royer, and others complete the program.

8 musicians: oboe, flute, 2 violins, 2 violas da gamba, bassoon, harpsichord

Myths & Allegories – MUSIC INSPIRED BY HOMER’S ODYSSEY
Acclaimed soprano Clara Rottsolk is featured in this program, which was released as Les Délices’ second CD recording in November 2012. Myths & Allegories weaves dramatic depictions of tales from Homer’s Odyssey together with instrumental chamber music inspired by Greek mythology, and features cantatas by Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (Le Sommeil d’Ulisse) and Thomas-Louis Bourgeois (Les Sirènes). The hero Ulysses confronts storms at sea, shipwrecks, the tantalizing allure of siren songs, and encounters with the Cyclopes – all set to music – in the course of this colorful, fantastic program. Even Ulysses’ long-faithful wife pines from afar as symbolized by Jean-Féry Rebel’s violin sonata La Fidèle.

5 musicians: soprano, oboe/recorder, violin, viola da gamba, harpsichord

The Musketeers – OBOE BAND EXTRAVAGANZA
“The Musketeers” is inspired by Louis XIV’s oboe band, Les Mousquetaires. As one of the original marching bands, this ensemble including baroque oboes, bassoon, guitar, and percussion played outdoors on the fields, for processions, dancing, as well as in the theater – they even served as the King’s personal alarm clock in the mornings! This program explores the boundaries between functional and art music with marches, theater music, and intimate chamber music by Lully, Hotteterre, Philidor, and Chauvon. ClevelandClassical.com raved, “You won’t hear finer baroque wind playing anywhere — or another program like this one anytime soon.”

6 musicians: 3 oboes, bassoon, baroque guitar/theorbo, percussion

Caractères de la danse – COLORFUL & LIVELY
An essential element in the ballroom and on the theater stage, music for dancing is at the heart of French baroque style. Les Délices’ program includes Rebel’s brilliant Caractères de la Danse (a fantasia choreographed for a single virtuoso dancer), a scene from Rameau’s Pigmaleon, solo suites for oboe and viol by Philidor and Marais, and the earthy, rollicking dances of Boismortier’s Ballets de Village. Plus, the Muse of dance herself inspires Rebel’s own trio, La Terpsichore.

4 musicians: oboe/recorder, violin, viola da gamba, baroque guitar/theorbo or harpsichord

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**Les Délices** (pronounced Lay day-lease) explores the dramatic potential and emotional resonance of long-forgotten music. Founded Debra Nagy in 2009, Les Délices has established its reputation for unique programs that are “thematically concise, richly expressive, and featuring composers few people have heard of.” The New York Times added, “Concerts and recordings by Les Délices are journeys of discovery.” The ensemble’s debut CD was named one of the "Top Ten Early Music Discoveries of 2009" (NPR's Harmonia), and the group's performances have been called "a beguiling experience" (Cleveland Plain Dealer), "astonishing" (ClevelandClassical.com), and "first class" (Early Music America Magazine). Since Les Délices’ sold-out New York debut at the Frick Collection, touring highlights have included Music Before 1800, Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, San Francisco Early Music Society, the Yale Collection of Musical Instruments, and Columbia University's Miller Theater. Les Délices also presents its own annual four-concert series in Cleveland, Lakewood, and at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights, OH, where the group is Artist in Residence. Les Délices’ 3rd CD, "Age of Indulgence," was released by PARMA Recordings in June 2017 to critical acclaim.

“A baroque oboist of consummate taste and expressivity” (Cleveland Plain Dealer) with a musical approach that’s “distinctly sensual…pliant, warm, and sweet,” (New York Times), Debra Nagy, director, is one of North America’s leading performers on the baroque oboe. In addition to her work with Les Délices, Debra plays principal oboe with Boston's Handel & Haydn Society, American Bach Soloists, Apollo's Fire, and many other ensembles. She also indulges her love of late-medieval music as a regular collaborator with Boston's Blue Heron and Chicago's Newberry Consort. Inspired by a creative process that brings together research, composition in historical styles, improvisation, and artistic collaboration, highlights of Debra's recent projects include a critically-acclaimed multimedia production of Machaut's medieval masterpiece *Remede de Fortune* and a Baroque-Jazz crossover program called *Songs without Words*. She has received many awards for her creative and scholarly pursuits and her discography includes over 30 CDs with repertoire ranging from 1300-1800. Debra is also an unabashed foodie and loves commuting by bike from her home in the heart of Cleveland's historic Ohio City neighborhood.

Lauded for her "invigorating verve and imagination" by the Washington Post, Julie Andrijeski is among the leading baroque violinists in the U.S. Her unique musical performance style is greatly influenced by her knowledge and skilled performance of baroque dance, and she often combines these two mediums in the classroom, on stage, and at workshops. Ms. Andrijeski is a Senior Instructor in the Music Department at Case Western Reserve University where she teaches early music performance practices and directs the Baroque Dance and Music Ensembles. In addition to her teaching, Ms. Andrijeski regularly appears with the Atlanta Baroque Orchestra (Artistic Director), Quicksilver (Co-Director), the New York State Baroque Orchestra (Concertmaster), Apollo's Fire (Principal Player), and the Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra, among others. She also teaches and performs at the Oberlin Conservatory's Baroque Performance Institute, Madison Early Music Festival, and the Vancouver Early Music Festival.

Scott Metcalfe is musical and artistic director of Blue Heron, acclaimed by The Boston Globe as "one of the Boston music community's indispensables," and music director of New York City's Green Mountain Project (Jolle Greenleaf, artistic director), whose performances of music by Monteverdi and others have been hailed by The New York Times as "quite simply terrific." Metcalfe has been guest director of TENET (New York), the Handel & Haydn Society (Boston), Emmanuel Music (Boston), the Tudor Choir and Seattle Baroque, Pacific Baroque Orchestra (Vancouver, BC), Quire Cleveland, the Dryden Ensemble (Princeton, NJ), and Early Music America's 2011 Young Performers Festival Ensemble. He also enjoys a career as a baroque violinist, playing with Les Délices (dir. Debra Nagy) and other ensembles. When not playing or directing, he is at work on a new edition of the songs of Gilles Binchois and teaches vocal ensemble repertoire and performance practice at Boston University. Metcalfe received a bachelor's degree
from Brown University, where he majored in biology, and a master’s degree in historical performance practice from Harvard.

Steuart Pincombe, viola da gamba can be heard regularly as a soloist and chamber musician in leading European and American venues and quite possibly around the corner in your local brewery or cafe. The Philadelphia Inquirer has called Steuart “a gorgeous player with perfect intonation [and] imaginative phrasing.” In addition to numerous chamber engagements, he has appeared as soloist with ensembles such as Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop (DE), Holland Baroque (NL), Wallfisch Band (UK), Symphonie Atlantique (NL), Apollo’s Fire, and the Springfield (MO) Symphony. With the aim of equipping other leading artists to engage with new audiences Steuart and his wife Michelle started the Music in Familiar Spaces Artist Collective, which is made up of some of the leading performers of our time. Steuart holds a BM in modern cello and a MM in viola da gamba and baroque cello from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music where he studied with Darrett Adkins and Catharina Meints.

First prize winner in the 2012 Musica Antiqua Bruges International Harpsichord Competition, Canadian harpsichordist and organist Mark Edwards is recognized for his captivating performances, bringing the listener “to new and unpredictable regions, using all of the resources of his instrument, […] of his virtuosity, and of his imagination” (La Libre Belgique). An active chamber musician, he is the artistic director of Poiesis, collaborates regularly with Les Boréades de Montréal, and has performed with Il Pomo d’Oro, Pallade Musica, and Flûtes Alors!. He has also given solo recitals at the Utrecht Early Music Festival and Brussels’ Bozar and performed concertos with a number of award-winning ensembles, including Il Gardellino (Belgium), Neobarock (Germany), and Ensemble Caprice (Canada). He is currently a PhD student at Leiden University and the Orpheus Instituut, Ghent, where his research examines the intersection of memory, improvisation, and the musical work in seventeenth-century France. Since 2016, he is Assistant Professor of Harpsichord at Oberlin Conservatory.

Guest Artists

Program: Mozart in Paris

Cellist Elinor Frey is fascinated by her instrument’s origins as well as the creative process of new music. Playing both period and modern instruments, her debut album, Dialoghi, is titled for the solo piece written for her by Steven Stucky. Her recent release on the Belgian label Passacaille, Berlin Sonatas with Lorenzo Ghielmi on fortepiano, was nominated for a Juno award for Best Classical CD, Solo & Chamber Music, and won the 2015 Québec Opus Prize for Early Music CD of the year. Frey’s honours include a US-Italy Fulbright Fellowship where she studied baroque cello with Paolo Beschi, the SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship, American Musicological Society, and Canada Council for the Arts grants facilitating her work on Italian cello music. In recent seasons she has performed with Les Idées heureuses, Il Gardellino, Ensemble Caprice, Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal, and with her quartet, Pallade Musica. Frey holds degrees from McGill, Mannes, and Juilliard.

Program: Myths & Allegories

“Pure and shining” (Cleveland Plain Dealer) soprano Clara Rottsolk has been lauded by The New York Times for her “clear, appealing voice and expressive conviction” and by The Philadelphia Inquirer for the “opulent tone [with which] every phrase has such a communicative emotional presence.” In a repertoire extending from the Renaissance to the contemporary, her solo appearances with orchestras and chamber ensembles have taken her across the United States, the Middle East, Japan and South America. In collaboration with pianists Sylvia Berry and Byron Schenkman, and guitarist-lutenist Daniel Swenberg, Ms. Rottsolk has given recitals of song from the 17th to 21st centuries in venues including the Goethe-Institut Boston, Town Hall Seattle, St. Mark’s Church Philadelphia, and Swarthmore College. Her recordings are Myths and Allegories, French Baroque cantatas with Les Délices and “supple and stylish… and unflaggingly attractive” (Gramophone Magazine) Scarlatti Cantatas with Tempesta di Mare on the Chandos-Chaconne label.
Critical Acclaim

Live Performances:

“The program [Myths & Allegories] is emblematic of Les Délices, a Cleveland-based ensemble led by the oboist Debra Nagy: thematically concise, richly expressive, and featuring composers few people have heard of and even fewer have performed. Concerts and recordings by Les Délices are journeys of discovery.” – The New York Times, March 2015


“daring programming, presented both with conviction and mastery.” – ClevelandClassical.com, March 2015

“Debra Nagy’s clever programming and her rolodex of superb musicians produced yet another splendid concert...You won’t hear finer baroque wind playing anywhere — or another program like this one anytime soon.” – ClevelandClassical.com, October 2014

“The program was exciting in part because of its freshness...Nagy is daring to feature such unknown works, but the dare pays off: the musicians perform as if they know that every phrase is a new adventure for the audience.” – ClevelandClassical.com, October 2013

“Somehow, Nagy and friends never have trouble maintaining concentration or keeping an audience mesmerized, a testament to the freshness of repertoire, insight and joie de vivre that pervade the ensemble’s contributions to the region’s musical life.” – Plain Dealer, Feb 2013

“Les Délices’ performance was a model of chamber music playing, producing rich focused sound and impeccable ensemble and intonation...Whether you are a young string quartet, woodwind or brass quintet or even a jazz combo, you can learn a lot about ensemble playing from listening to Les Délices. It really doesn’t get much better than this.” – ClevelandClassical.com May 2010

Recording Reviews:

“The members of Les Délices are first class musicians, the ensemble playing is irreproachable, and the quality of the pieces is the very finest.” – Early Music America Magazine, Spring 2010

“The centuries roll away when the members of Les Délices bring this long-existing music to communicative and sparkling life.” – Classical Source (UK), July 2010

“Their performance is chamber music at its finest.” – NPR Harmonia, August, 2009
Songs without Words

_Songs without Words_ takes the adaptation of 17th Century airs for instruments as its point of departure and brings the concept into the 20th Century with torch songs and jazz standards arranged and improvised by the ensemble. Music by baroque composers Lambert, Lully, and Marais is heard alongside tunes by Nina Simone, Edith Piaf, Billy Strayhorn, and others in this program of timeless melodies and inspired improvisations for oboe, viola da gamba, and harpsichord. **Scheduled for CD release November 2018.**

**Praise for Songs without Words:**

**From Presenters:**

"Les Delices is the real deal….superb and engaging artistry, with fabulously creative programming." – Kristen Linfoote, Executive Director for Chamber Music Pittsburgh

"This unusual program is new, innovative, and exploratory...with aspects of improvisation and creativity that is sometimes missing from stage." – Laura SanBoeuf, Renaissance & Baroque Society Pittsburgh

**From the Cleveland Plain Dealer:**

“Mixing old and new numbers freely, the ensemble liberated the music of both eras, creating a kind of conversation across the centuries.”

“Nagy’s Baroque oboe, with its rounder and fuller tone, was the perfect stand-in for the human voice. She took full advantage of the instrument’s flexibility with elaborate embellishments, especially in the upbeat treatment of Mercer’s “Autumn Leaves,” where she cut loose with a well-thought-out solo that would have done any seasoned jazz artist proud.”

**From ClevelandClassical.com:**

“Summoning their R&B souls, the Trio played with flair...a forward-thinking program.”

**CD Reviews:**

“The program is totally seamless. Les Délices has taken care to assemble a program that makes musical sense, and that follows a sensible emotional progression, _This CD simply asks us to lean back and enjoy it, and enjoy it I did!_” – Fanfare Magazine

“Turning it all out in a sincere and authentic style, they found music that is right for any part of the century to be given their touch. _A delightful chamber recital that doesn’t require you to know anything about baroque or pop to fully enjoy that wonderful chops on display. Well done._” – Midwest Record
Les Delices kicked off its 2016-17 season last weekend with an unusual program titled “Songs Without Words,” which drew links between music of the 17th and 18th centuries and popular music of the 20th. (Steven Mastroianni)

By Zachary Lewis, The Plain Dealer

Email the author

on October 17, 2016 at 3:00 PM

By MARK SATOLA

SHAKER HEIGHTS, Ohio -- In the 1960s, the harpsichord had an unexpected renaissance in popular music, appearing in songs all over the map.

Its sudden ubiquity (usually in the form of a Baldwin electric harpsichord, the real thing being perhaps a little less accessible) was partly the result of an interest in sonic novelty, partly a nod toward the fad for all things Edwardian.
Here in 2016, the Baroque ensemble Les Delices accomplished a very different aim with the opening concert of its eighth season, by finding an unexpected connection between the love songs of 17th- and 18th-century French music and songs from the mid-20th century, by such stalwarts as Johnny Mandel, Billy Strayhorn, Charles Aznavour, Johnny Mercer and, yes, Aretha Franklin, all performed on Baroque instruments.

The incomparable Baroque oboist Debra Nagy shared the stage Sunday afternoon at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights with two equally adept and imaginative artists, Emily Walhout, viola da gamba, and Eric Milnes, harpsichord. Mixing old and new numbers freely, the ensemble liberated the music of both eras, creating a kind of conversation across the centuries.

The program opened with a semi-improvised Prelude by harpsichordist Milnes, which presaged the course of the program, evoking a 17th-century keyboard toccata, but with the unexpected appearance of some dissonant harmonies and a series of tone clusters that were definitely not from the Baroque era.

The French Baroque selections were what we've come to expect from Les Delices: chosen with taste and rendered with an alertness of style that demonstrates a deep understanding of the music.

As always, there was an element of exploration too, with Marin Marais and Jean-Baptiste Lully being the best known among a lineup of composers that also included Michel Lambert, Joseph Chabanceau de la Barre and Jean-Baptiste de Bousset, all played with intelligence and spirit.

But it was in the modern pieces that the players notched it up by quite a few degrees. Without any shift in technique, they undertook such classics as Mandel's "Emily" (with a beautiful solo by gambist Walhout), Strayhorn's "A Flower is a Loversome Thing," and the Aznavour-Nina Simone chestnut "Tomorrow is My Turn," in such a way that it was sometimes difficult to detect the shift from old to new till you were well into the song.

Nagy's Baroque oboe, with its rounder and fuller tone, was the perfect stand-in for the human voice in songs from both eras, and she took full advantage of the instrument's flexibility with elaborate embellishments, especially in the upbeat treatment of Mercer's "Autumn Leaves," with pizzicato viola da gamba standing in for jazz bass and fine jazzy comping from the harpsichord. Nagy cut loose with a well-thought-out solo that would have done any seasoned jazz artist proud.

Harpsichordist Milnes played his own arrangement of Queen Aretha's mega-hit "Chain of Fools," leading into it with a spare, toccata-like intro that set up the minor-key soul sound. The funky arpeggios in the left hand played nicely against the big chords in the right until, at the end of the tune, Milnes swirled back into the 18th-century style toccata, delightfully (and instructively) blurring the decades between the Baroque years and the pinnacle of American R&B.
Music for Fated Lovers | Clara Rottsolk, Jason McStoots, Les Délices

NEW YORK CITY
Miller Theatre at Columbia University
4/7/18

On Saturday, April 7, the chamber ensemble Les Délices presented a concert of French Baroque rarities titled Music for Fated Lovers at the Miller Theatre at Columbia University. Anchored by selections from Rameau’s groundbreaking opera Hippolyte et Aricie, Music for Fated Lovers explored the tales of three pairs of star-crossed lovers and included a pair of obscure and thrilling solo cantatas by the nearly forgotten eighteenth-century French composer Louis-Nicolas Clérambeaut.

The program began with Jean-Féry Rebel’s early eighteenth-century Trio Sonata L’Immortelle, which set the tone for the concert with its brooding foreshadowing and energetic passion effectively played by Les Délices members Julie Andrijeski on baroque violin, Emily Walhout on viola da gamba, and Debra Nagy, the ensemble’s founder, on baroque oboe and recorder.

Throughout the evening, Nagy narrated the program’s vocal selections, giving important context to the scenes from Rameau’s 1733 opera Hippolyte et Aricie. As Aricie, soprano Clara Rottsolk at first sang timidly in Aricie’s Act I air, “Temple sacré, séjour tranquille,” but gained confidence and authority in the succeeding scene, in which Aricie and Hippolyte, sung by tenor Jason McStoots, argue passionately over her decision to dedicate herself to the chaste goddess Diana. McStoots, like Rottsolk, found his footing slowly, though both singers may have been saving their resources for the cantatas they each sang later in the program.

The two other instrumental works tied together the vocal selections smartly. Andrijeski was simply hypnotizing in the virtuosic violin part of Jean-Baptiste Senaillé’s Sonata Op. 1, No. 6, a compact yet dramatic and compelling work that deserves to be heard more frequently. On the second half of the program, harpsichordist Mark Edwards displayed a similar passionate virtuosity in Antoine Forqueray’s Jupiter for harpsichord.

Louis-Nicolas Clérambeaut’s Italian-style cantatas Léandre et Hero and Pirame et Tisbé, both written in 1713, are virtually unknown today. Simply by programming these works, and allowing them to be heard, Les Délices argues for their artistic merit, of which there is much to be celebrated. Both cantatas boast rich musical storytelling, expertly realized by Les Délices and the playing of Debra Nagy in particular, who alternates calmly and expertly between her baroque oboe and two baroque recorders. In Léandre et Héro, Rottsolk’s delicate and focused soprano brought much subtle nuance to the third-person retelling of the tragedy of Hero and Leander, channeling exciting reserves of energy and drama for the Tempest section when Leander is drowned in a sudden storm while swimming to meet his love.

McStoots gave a strong and arresting performance of Clérambeaut’s Pirame et Tisbé. Like Léandre et Hero, the cantata is told mostly in the third-person, with the exception of Pirame’s exquisite plainte, “Quoi, Tisbé? Tu n’êtes plus?” McSoots sang the cantata as if he were giving a dramatic reading of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe for the first time ever, moving between airs and recitatives seamlessly.

By the final set of the program, selections from Acts IV and V of Hippolyte et Aricie, Rottsolk and McStoots were secure and prepared to give impassioned performances, full of abandon and, at its conclusion, whimsical joy. The core members of Les Délices joined in the celebration with the opera’s chaconne finale, a fitting end to a brilliantly conceived and masterfully executed program of truly delightful rarities. —Steven Jude Tietjen
Reveling in the Unfamiliar

Les Délaces experiments with overlooked gems of music.

FOR YEARS, ULYSSES has roamed the campus of Columbia University. The hero of Homer’s “The Odyssey” is an annual spec-
test for students here: The epic is manda-
tory reading for every freshman. This year, they’ve been able to encounter him up close in the vibrant classes of Romare Bearden’s “Black Odyssey,” part of an ex-
hibition at the Wallach Art Gallery that closed this month. “The Odyssey” is also
the subject of a program of French ba-
roque music titled “Myths and Allegories,”
which the period-instrument ensemble Les Délaces is scheduled to present at the uni-
versity’s Miller Theater on March 28 with the soprano Clara Rottschild.

But here, the epic’s female characters come to the fore: the guiding goddess Mi-
nerwa, the wise Circe, and Penelope, Ullysees’ faithful wife. The program is em-
blematic of Les Délaces, a Cleveland-based ensemble led by the oboist Debra Nagy—
thematically concise, richly expressive, and featuring composers few people have heard of and even fewer have performed.

Concerts and recordings by Les Délaces are journeys of discovery. Melissa Smey, Miller Theater’s executive director, lists the ensemble as an early-music group with an avant-garde appetite. Ms. Nagy, she said in a phone interview, “has a kind of spirit of adventure that’s very similar to a lot of the contemporary music ensembles that we work with at Miller.”

The program includes selections from Jean-Féry Rebel’s opera “Ulysse,” which traces the love triangle between Circe, Ulysses and Penelope as set in one act. “La Fidelité,” which here evokes the patient love of Penelope. The lure of the sirens is in the subject of a cantata, “Les Sirènes,” by Thomas-Louis Bourgeois (1786-1792). the chanson of war is revealed in a suite by Mi-
ichel Pignolet de Montéclair (1667-1737). Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (1667-1729), a child prodigy and protege of King Louis XIV, is represented with the cantata “Le Sommel d’Ulysse.”

None of these composers are household names, and Ms. Nagy likes it that way. A scholar-performer, she sits through the greatest collections of music manuscripts made available online by French libraries for overlooked gems, which she edits and arranges. She said she takes pride in present-
ing “music that people haven’t heard before. Our core audience has come to ex-
pect that they’re not going to recognize the names on the program. It’s ideas and themes and concepts—and of course very high artistic standards.”

Ms. Nagy said that part of her mission is to dispel preconceived notions of French baroque music as “regimented or just lit-
tified with ornaments.” “I’m trying to em-
phasize the complexity and a great range of expression,” she said.

For this recent program, Les Délaces presented in the Cleveland area consisted of music for Lent by Charpentier and Coep-
pern. “You might think of this as a pro-
gram of sacred music but it shouldn’t sound spiritual,” Ms. Nagy said. Much of this music was written for singers from the opera, she explained, and well-heeled pa-
trons. “And others hold their seats two weeks in advance” to hear them.

What gives performances of Les Délaces a distinctly personal feel is the sound of Ms. Nagy’s oboe, which is pliable, warm and sweet. The instrument is a copy of a 17th-century model, and the primary instrument made of box-
wood that is tuned to an extraordinarily

low pitch, a full step below a modern con-
cert A. With a row of recorder-like open finger holes, supplemented by two keys at the bottom, it allows Ms. Nagy to sculpt sustained notes with a subtle finger vibra-
to that is impossible on a modern oboe.

In Montéclair’s instrumental suite “La Guerre” (“War”), part of the Miller Thea-
ter program as well as on the album, “Myths and Allegories,” Ms. Nagy uses it to create startlingly human-sounding sounds in a passage designed to evoke the cries of the wounded. One of the most de-
lightful aspects of any performance by Les Délaces is this exploration of the dramatic potential of pitch—how to curve, stretch or wilt a note in a way that’s emotionally resonant.

For Ms. Nagy, that flexibility is the ba-
roque oboe’s main advantage. The modern oboe, she said, built to “cut through 80 string players” and fitted with metal keys, doesn’t allow quite the same fluidity of ar-
iculation in baroque ornaments that are meant to sound spontaneous and free. She said she loves to work with great baroque string players—in Les Délaces she part-
ners with the violinsts Scott Metcalfe and Julie Andrijeski—because it inspires her to emulate their command of variable bow speed. “With a baroque oboe I can do that, I can play with this wind speed that has its own expressive capabilities.”

Another source of inspiration are sing-
ers. In the late 17th century, wind players looked to airs and other vocal material for solo repertory, she said, setting them-
selves the challenge of imitating not only the quality of a human voice but also the sound of certain consonants and vowels.

No wonder French composers integrated the oboe into their operas as soon after its reinvention as an orchestral, indoor instru-
ment in the 1690s. Before that, double-reed instruments like the shawms were played mostly outdoors and carried either pata-
rnal or martial connotations.

Those military overtones may also have influenced the composers of the Ulysse-
themened pieces on Les Délaces’s program to reach for the oboe. In the preface to the first book of studies published for the in-
strument in 1695, the English oboist John Banister invoked the “inimitable charming sweetness” of its sound, which, “when well
played upon,” could be every bit as majes-
tic and stately as a trumpet—apt, then, as he put it with a refreshing lack of tact, for “the greatest heroes of the age who some-
times despise string-instruments.”
The truism holds that French aristocrats before the Revolution danced time away in utter complacency, refusing to change in the face of the inevitable. The image is probably true with respect to most things that would have mattered to those who stormed the Bastille.

But in the world of music, things were changing decades before the Revolution. Writing within a framework of courtly elegance that would have pleased Marie Antoinette, composers were also pushing the boundaries of their music with wit, irony, turmoil, and glimmers of Romantic self-consciousness.

In its recent program of innovative French chamber music from the late 18th century, Les Délices, spearheaded by founder, music director, and oboist Debra Nagy, has once again brought us lovely and barely-known gems from this age of transition. The music was presented with virtuosity and enthusiasm, making for a thoroughly gratifying Sunday afternoon in Herr Chapel at Plymouth Church.

In recent concerts, Nagy has presented several pieces by François-André Philidor, better known in his time as a master of the game of chess, but now being rediscovered as a composer of startling innovation. This program began and ended with substantive “sinfonias” by Philidor, multi-movement pieces that brought together the virtuosity of Italianate music, the ornamental sparkle of the French, and the innovations of the Austrian (surely, Philidor had heard some early Haydn). Chromaticisms and surprising modulations led us on eyebrow-raising excursions far from the home key, though we never were left in doubt that order would be gracefully restored before the end.
In the Philidor pieces, the three treble lines were played by Nagy (oboe) and Julie Andrijeski and Karina Schmitz (violins). The basso continuo was handled with consummate flair by gambist Emily Walhout and harpsichordist Michael Sponseller, both regulars with Les Délices. The ensemble throughout the concert was lithe, flexible, responsive, and utterly secure. The program felt so well-rehearsed in part because the group had already spent several days recording the material for a CD, hopefully to be released next year.

A sonata from 1743 by Louis-Gabriel Guillaume came to us from his publication entitled, appropriately, *Conversations Galantes* — the name evoking the kind of back-and-forth that might have occurred at the aristocratic and intellectual salons of the mid-century. In the sprightly, amused interchanges amongst the instruments, we could imagine a kind of knowing and elegant banter. ("What a pleasant ride we had this morning! … Oh, that silk waistcoat looks so chic on you! … Wasn’t it fun to play blind-man’s-buff in the twilight?") We might well have been in one of Fragonard’s paintings, with their combination of courtly pleasure and melancholy awareness of the incipient ending of privilege.

Two pieces for harpsichord by Jacques Duphly (who died in the very year of the Revolution) combined the elegant ornamentation of earlier French keyboard music with an intensity that prefigured Mozart and even (dare I say it?) Beethoven. The second of these was a sketch which, though called “Le Félix,” seemed far from merely “happy” — played low in the register with all the stops out and the manuals doubled, it evoked a curmudgeonly character with a magnetic energy. Michael Sponseller delivered the Duphly solos with stunning expressivity.

One of the principal instruments of the French 18th century was the flute, so it is understandable that Nagy would borrow flute pieces and adapt them for the oboe. This one was a work by flutist Michel Blavet (Op. 2, No. 2). Full of intricate passages and lovely melodies, this five-movement piece showed Nagy’s musical sensitivity as well as her sheer technical skill. Throughout the performance, though, I found myself wishing for the more nuanced and intimate sounds of the flute for which it was originally intended.

One of the most popular tunes of the day was “Les Sauvages,” a politically-incorrect but highly memorable dance from Jean-Phillipe Rameau’s opera *Les Indes Galantes*. Here violinists Andrijeski and Schmitz teamed up without accompaniment for a splendid set of variations by Jean-Pierre Guignon on themes from the opera. The original tune was manic enough, but this duet, with its duelling scale passages and sudden shifts of affect, took the piece’s inherent energy to new heights — and with virtuoso playing by both violinists.
The little-known music that Nagy brings to Les Délices is a joy to listen to. That said, it is telling in the midst of such an exploratory program to encounter once again the masterful music of a canonical figure like Rameau. From his opera Les Boréades, we heard the hauntingly beautiful “Entrée de Polymnie,” with its languishing descending scales and poignant touches of melancholy. In a very different vein, the ensemble played the Chaconne from another Rameau opera, Dardanus — full of grand gestures, sudden variations of tone, and an assertive and highly public rhetoric — as if admonishing its jaded aristocratic audience to sit up and take notice!

Three more inventive programs from Les Délices await us this season, in January, February, and May, as well as a free family-oriented “petting-zoo” concert at the Bop Stop in February.

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