



**LES
DÉLICES**
DEBRA NAGY, DIRECTOR

March 31-April 1, 2022
Akron Public Library Auditorium
April 2-3, 2022
The Breen Center, Cleveland

THE WHITE CAT

a Baroque Opera Pastiche
after the story *La Chatte Blanche*
by Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy

Libretto by Larry Rosenwald

Score by Debra Nagy
from works by François Couperin, Jean-Baptiste Lully, and others

Starring

Elena Mullins as *The White Cat*
Jason McStoots as *The Prince*
Samara Steele, puppets
Ian Petroni, puppets

Prologue: Into the Labyrinth

Act I: Introducing the White Cat
Fable: The Ant and the Grasshopper

Act II: In the White Cat's Palace
Fable: The Lion and the Rat

Act III: The Perfect Companion
Fable: The Tortoise and the Eagle

Act IV: A Final Quest
Fable: The Swallow and the Nightingale

Act V: The Spell is Broken

Ensemble

Julie Andrijeski & Shelby Yamin, violins
Debra Nagy & Kathryn Montoya, oboes & recorders
Rebecca Reed, viola da gamba
Mark Edwards, harpsichord

Production

Debra Nagy, Producer
Jason McStoots, Stage Director
Ian Petroni, Set & Puppet Design
Camilla Tassi, Projection Design
David Stoughton, Lighting Design

Nina Vivian Huryn, Puppet & Set Painter
Sarah Lynne Bailey, Stage Manager

This program is made possible with generous support from

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Synopsis:

Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's *The White Cat* is a feminist re-write of *Puss in Boots*. We all remember the story of the youngest son whose inheritance seems slight when he is gifted a wily tomcat. *Puss in Boots* goes on to achieve fame and fortune on behalf of his unwitting young master through manipulation, lying, and trickery. In *The White Cat*, however, we learn that one can exert influence through generosity and kindness instead of trickery or manipulation, looks can be deceiving, bigger is not always better, and that true love can win the day.

In d'Aulnoy's *The White Cat*, we meet a sweet but unsuspecting young Prince whose father, the King, sets his three sons a series of challenges. Hesitant to give over his throne, the King's series of impossible tasks not only serves as a delay tactic in anticipating his retirement, but also shows the King's true nature: jealous, competitive, and petty.

Feeling a bit lost and hopeless in his initial quest, the Prince finds himself outside an extraordinary palace. Magical floating hands usher him through jewel-crusted gates, the walls are painted with scenes from

fairytale, a cat orchestra serenades him, and, in time, he meets the palace's extraordinary owner – the White Cat. She can sing, dance, recite poetry – and she offers to help the Prince to the best of her limited abilities.

Time passes in delightful entertainments as true affection builds between the Prince and the White Cat yet the Prince must return to his father's kingdom and meet the King's judgment. The White Cat gives the Prince a small package whose contents are only to be revealed before the King, which is when the magic truly begins to happen.

Two years and two quests later, the King challenges his sons to return home with the perfect wife with whom they can rule the kingdom. Preferring the White Cat's company above all others, the Prince goes off to see her. When a year has passed, the White Cat says that she can help him but only if he agrees to follow her instructions. The Prince could never hurt her, but she insists that sacrifice is the only way.

The Prince returns to his father's kingdom carrying a glowing crystal. When presented to the King, the crystal shatters and the White Cat appears for the first time in human form as the princess she's always been. The White Cat assuages the King's fears about giving over his kingdom by telling him that she has six kingdoms(!) - enough for everyone to share - and everyone lives happily ever after.

Director's Note

"Remember, cats are people too!"
-Rose Nylund, *The Golden Girls*

The quote from one of my favorite tv sitcoms is in jest, but also not. Pet related products and services generate \$221 Billion dollars a year in the USA. It's clear that to most of us our pets are so much more than animals. They are our companions, friends, families...and one of my favorite expressions 'fur babies.' I have always had cats in my life, the current pair of Bellante and Calisto, cry bitterly anytime I drag out the suitcase to go on another gig. Any pet parent also knows how deep and heavy the loss of a pet is. All that is to say, we LOVE our animals and they love us back. Yes, even notoriously aloof and standoffish cats. So, in a universal sense, we understand the basic gist of the relationship portrayed in today's performance; but, perhaps not. The connection of the prince and the white cat feels different, more intense even than our love for our own pets. One way it is different is that it is a relationship of equals. The white cat does not depend on the prince for food or shelter, in fact vice versa. It is she who takes him in when lost. It is she who provides the magical objects for his ridiculous quests. She doesn't even need his royal titles as she is a queen in her own right. What they share is a genuine love for each other... held at a distance by the difference in their species, until she solves even that conundrum. She offers everything she has, freely, to the prince and in return he offers her loyal friendship; love; and profound, unwavering trust.

Aside from the question of why this is an interesting story to tell; you may ask, "Why tell this story in the musical language of French Baroque opera?" The sassy and obvious answer is "We love it," but reading deeper into that I hope you will also see that we fervently hope that you will come to love it as much as we do. In this particular instance, the original fairy tale being French helps, as does some of the visual content of today's production. But to return to the idea that we love it, it is part of the mission of Les Délices to bring this music and music like it to a wider audience. Among my colleagues, we often lament the lack of opportunity for or interest in French Baroque music. Our audience all know Bach, Handel, Monteverdi, even more obscure names like Buxtehude or Schütz but for whatever reason French music, especially baroque French music seems not to connect with the American music industry. Les Délices' mission is one that I share as an individual artist as well, having performed in eight French Baroque operas myself. I feel it is a kind of

specialty of mine. Far from being frivolous or jejune, this music is deep, rich, meaningful and expressive. So perhaps in the face of so many troubles in the world we can follow the useful advice of Albert Schweitzer –

"There are two means of refuge from the miseries of life: music and cats."

– Jason McStoots

Notes on the Program:

It was at least ten years ago that I first learned about musical versions of Aesop's Fables from eighteenth-century France. These musical settings paired rhyming couplets with popular songs from the era to make a delightful light entertainment. I subsequently learned about a fanciful Labyrinth at Versailles that included 29 brilliant, technicolor fountains, each of which depicted one of Aesop's fables. Though torn down in the 1770s, the Labyrinth had been a major tourist attraction that was not just impressive but clearly had a magical quality: the fountains were said to be so realistic that it was as though the animals were singing their own tales as the water jets issued forth from their mouths. The combination of sung fables and the Labyrinth's magical environment captured my imagination. But, how to translate this to a concert in the 21st century??

As a perpetual student of 17th and 18th century music and culture, I'd also long thought about how I could bring attention to women writers and intellectuals whose contributions and histories are underappreciated today. In particular, women had an important role in establishing the fairy tale genre - but how could I bring focus to this from my position as a performer?

It took a while for all the ideas to coalesce, but I ultimately landed on the idea of creating a musical version of Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy's story *The White Cat*. The story's themes of generosity and not judging appearances were appealing and details in the story seemed to invite a musical setting. After all, the main character sings, recites poetry, and even has her own cat orchestra! What's more, significant time is given over to entertainment – besides ballets, feasting, and hunts, the original tale even describes a mock naval battle between the cats and the rats! So *The White Cat* offered an episodic fairy tale with magical moments during which three years pass in the course of delightful entertainment. And what about those musical versions of Aesop's Fables? As we were developing ideas for *The White Cat*, my collaborator Ian Petroni suggested that Aesop's fables could stand in for the year-long "entertainments" and suddenly I realized that we had all the elements to create a true Baroque "opera" for a 21st century audience.

In music, a *pasticcio* or pastiche is a musical patchwork or collage that combines existing music by one or more composers with new words to create a new entertainment. *The White Cat* is thus a pastiche with every element – from the 17th century fairytale, to the set pieces, ornaments, and projections – taking some inspiration from the Baroque era.

The newly-created score is no exception. For *The White Cat*, I decided to borrow the structure of a traditional 17th-century French opera known as a *Tragédie Lyrique*. A *Tragédie Lyrique* generally comprises a Prologue and five Acts, often concluding with an extended Passacaille or Chaconne (we've adapted one of the very best – Jean-Baptiste Lully's great Passacaille from his opera *Armide* – closes our show).

French Baroque operas were also unique for incorporating dance and other sorts of spectacular entertainments (known as *divertissements*) in each act. In the case of *The White Cat*, *divertissements* fit neatly into the story: the Prince encounters the White Cat three times and each time he spends a year enjoying "entertainments" before he must return to his father. Enabling the White Cat and the Prince to entertain each other with stories from Aesop's Fables provided a very natural conceit for time to pass for the couple and

brings variety and an additional sense of fun to the production (the musical settings by Louis-Nicolas Clérambault were translated in rhyming couplets by our librettist Larry Rosenwald).

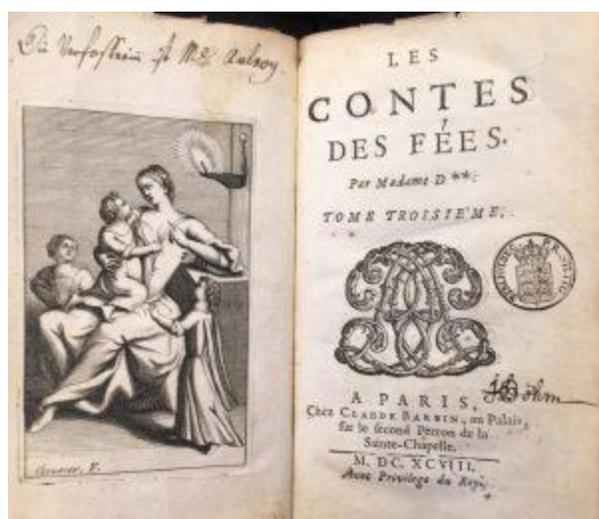
In addition to sung airs from Lully's operas, and ground-bass tunes by Michel Lambert and Marc-Antoine Charpentier, the music for *The White Cat* draws from a repertory of 18th-century popular songs. It was common practice for the French comic theaters to adapt well-known tunes with new lyrics when creating their shows so following that Baroque practice seemed perfectly apt for *The White Cat* as well.

For incidental music, I drew from a diverse repertory of keyboard solos and chamber music by Francois Couperin, Marin Marais and others to propel the narrative, create emotional connections, and depict magical moments. While a lot of French Baroque instrumental music is dance-based, I felt that character pieces and other evocative tidbits would be more appropriate for our theatrical setting. In fact, quite a lot of the incidental music comes from **Couperin's Apotheosis of Lully** (which is an oddly theatrical extended piece of chamber music that imagines an encounter between the composers Lully and Antonio Corelli in heaven), and I've also adapted several of Couperin's harpsichord solos for ensemble performance.

– Debra Nagy

About the Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy

Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy is probably the most important writer of fairy tales whose name is seldom heard today. She literally invented the term fairy tale with her 1697 publication of *Contes des fées*, which includes stories like Cinderella, Blue Bird, Goldilocks, and others that were made more famous by later male writers. Altogether, d'Aulnoy published twelve books including three pseudo-memoirs, two fairy tale collections and three "historical" novels.



While d'Aulnoy failed to gain full recognition or popularity among English readers, she played an important role in establishing the literary fairy tale as an art form that could be practiced by serious scholars, women, and those who fit both categories. In 17th century France, fairy tales weren't merely considered children's entertainment. When recounted and embellished by women in salons, these stories took on additional meanings – for instance, offering subtle critiques about rulers and society or commenting on arranged marriages. Long and richly-detailed stories put the considerable intellects and imaginations of these women authors on full display. Sadly, fairy tales penned by men – which tended to be much shorter – were the ones that stuck in our cultural imagination.

Image Credits

Jacques Bailly's *Le Labyrinthe de Versailles*. Labyrinth Illustration. Alamy.

Jacques Rigaud, *View of the Bosquet des Dômes (Grove of Domes), in the Gardens of the Palace of Versailles*.

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Oxfordshire animals, 18th century artwork. Science Photo Library.

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About the Performers

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." *The New York Times* added, "Concerts and recordings by Les Délices are journeys of discovery." Les Délices' 12th season, Embracing Change, marked an important evolutionary period for the organization: they reconceived concerts for the virtual space and created a webseries variety show for early music called SalonEra. Critics called the concerts "sensational," and "a cultural gift" while SalonEra opened a world of music to audiences at home as 16 original episodes and 60 remote musical collaborations created feature opportunities for over 40 artists. Highlights of their 2021-22 season include a new global streaming partnership with Marquee.TV, two newly commissioned works by composers Jonathan Woody and Sydney Guillaume, 12 new episodes of SalonEra, and the premiere of their fairytale-based chamber opera, *The White Cat*. Their critically-acclaimed 4th CD, "Songs without Words," was released in November 2018. Visit www.lesdelices.org for more information.

Jason McStoots (*The Prince*) has been praised for his "alluring tenor voice" (ArtsFuse) and as "the consummate artist, wielding not just a sweet tone but also incredible technique and impeccable pronunciation." (Cleveland Plain Dealer) A respected interpreter of early music, his recent appearances include *Le Jeu* in Charpentier's *Les plaisirs de Versailles* (BEMF), *King Belshazzar* in *The Play of Daniel* (Boston Camerata), evangelist in Bach's *St. Mark Passion* (Emmanuel Music), soloist for Purcell's *King Arthur* (Bach Collegium San Diego), and soloist for Monteverdi's *1610 Vespers* (TENET). He is a core member of Blue Heron and can be heard on all their recordings. In addition, he is an experienced stage director and dedicated educator. He has directed operas with the Connecticut Early Music Festival, Amherst Early Music Festival, and Brandeis University. Since 2017 he has been the Associate Director of the Boston Early Music Festival Young Artist Training Program, where he is a stage director, coach and mentor to young performers.

Elena Mullins (*The White Cat*), praised for her "alluring" performances and "easy virtuosity," has wide-ranging interests in the field of early music. As a performer of period chamber music she has appeared with The Newberry Consort, Three Notch'd Road, Les Délices, and Apollo's Fire. She takes a scholarly interest in the performance practices of early repertoires, and co-founded the medieval music ensembles Alkemie and Trobár. She holds a DMA in Historical Performance Practice and a BA in Musical Arts from The Eastman School of Music. She returned to CWRU in 2016, where she directs the Early Music Singers and the Baroque Dance Ensemble, and teaches medieval music history and notation.

[Samara Steele](#) (puppeteer) is from Cleveland, OH, where she began her formal dance training at the age of four training in modern, contemporary, hip hop, tap and jazz. She began performing at the age of nine when she was cast in the Nutcracker with Cincinnati Ballet, performing at the Playhouse Square in Cleveland. At the age of 15, she began training in the Vaganova technique in pointe, ballet, and character at the Ohio Conservatory of Ballet, under the direction of Inna Stabrova and Dmitry Tuboltsev. In 2015, Samara was honored to become the inaugural recipient of the Ballet in Cleveland Misty Copeland Scholarship. She has attended summer programs and workshops with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Columbus City Ballet School, and the Radio City Rockettes. She has also performed works by Robert Battle, Alvin Ailey, Crystal Pite, Henning Rubsam, and Martin Lofsnes. Samara graduated with honors from the Ailey/Fordham BFA program in May 2020.

[Ian Petroni](#) (Puppet & Set Design, puppeteer) grew up in Berkeley, California and graduated from Vassar College, Poughkeepsie NY, with a degree in Drama and Philosophy. Living in Cleveland with his wife and two children, Ian has pursued a career building creatively with his hands. He has worked for many area theaters including Cleveland Public Theater, Groundworks Dance Theater, Inlet Dance Theater, and Playhouse Square. He designs and builds sculptural, site specific sets and props that solve unique problems. In 2016 he created an installation of 40 dandelion puffs, twelve feet tall, made from plastic bottles, to celebrate the Cleveland Museum of Art's centennial. At the museum, he has worked for several years on the staff of Parade the Circle, creating his own ensemble pieces and working with the public to help people realize their own designs. Another creative vein is his work in the decorative arts— Ian builds custom furniture and lamps, often using found objects and simple materials. These works can be found in homes and galleries around the country. In 2017 Ian was awarded an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award for his work as a creative designer and builder. Special thanks to Sardine, Dracula, and Midnight, the Petroni family cats, for being (mostly) patient models during his work on this project.

Instrumentalists:

[Julie Andrijeski](#) (violin) is celebrated as a performer, scholar, and teacher of early music and dance. She has been recognized for her "invigorating verve and imagination" (*Washington Post*), "fiery and poetic depth" (*Cleveland Plain Dealer*), and "velvety, consistently attractive sound" (*New York Times*). Julie is Artistic Director of the Atlanta Baroque Orchestra, founding member of Apollo's Fire, Creator and Director of the Wonder Chamber Project, and a frequent guest with various ensembles nationwide.

[Mark Edwards](#) (harpsichord) is recognized for his captivating performances. 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 given solo recitals at the Utrecht Early Music Festival and Brussels' Bozar and performed concertos with a number of award-winning ensembles. Since 2016, he is Assistant Professor of Harpsichord at Oberlin Conservatory.

[Kathryn Montoya](#) (oboes & recorders) appears with a variety of orchestral and chamber music ensembles including the Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra, Tafelmusik, the Wiener Akademie, Pacific Musicworks, and Apollo's Fire among others. She received her degrees at Oberlin Conservatory and Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington. Recent projects include the Globe's Tony award-winning productions of Twelfth Night on Broadway, concerts and master classes in Shanghai, and tour and Grammy award-winning recording with the Boston Early Music Festival.

[Debra Nagy](#) (Producer, Music Director, oboe & recorders) has acquired a reputation for creating fascinating and inviting concert experiences through her work with Les Délices. Recent project highlights include critically-acclaimed multimedia productions of Machaut's medieval masterpiece Remede de Fortune and music from the recently-discovered Leuven Songbook (c. 1470), a Baroque-Jazz crossover program called Songs without Words ("successful, risk-taking music!" – The Whole Note), and - during the pandemic - creating the webseries SalonEra plus eight, visually-sumptuous original video concerts. Recognized as "A baroque oboist of consummate taste and expressivity" (*Cleveland Plain Dealer*), Nagy plays principal oboe with the Handel & Haydn Society and Apollo's Fire and is a regular guest with other ensembles around the country. Debra shares her home with two incredibly smart and strong tomcats Coco and Sinatra, who enjoy naps at the top of the kitchen cabinets and regularly leave the fridge door open.

[Rebecca Landell Reed's](#) (viola da gamba) "luminous" (Cleveland.com) sound elicits a range of expression "from classically evocative to Hitchcock horrifying" (Washingtonian). Her solo appearances include performances with Apollo's Fire, Atlanta Baroque Orchestra, Les Délices, Three Notch'd Road, and Batzdorfer Hofkapelle. Other credits include performing and acting in Studio Theatre's *An Iliad*, working with composer Eric Shimelonis on NPR children's show *Circle Round*, and developing educational programs with the Crumhorn Collective. She is currently on faculty at Oberlin Conservatory.

[Shelby Yamin](#) (violin) brings signature vivacity to performances across the globe, from George Washington's Mount Vernon to Versailles. Equally adept on modern and baroque violin, Shelby has appeared as a soloist with Philharmonia Baroque Chamber Players, the San Francisco Academy Orchestra, Tafelmusik Winter Institute, and as guest concertmaster of the 2019 Berwick Academy of the Oregon Bach Festival. An active chamber musician, she regularly collaborates with many New York ensembles and Cleveland's Les Délices.

Production Team:

[Sarah Lynne Bailey](#) (Stage Manager) has a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and Arts Management from Baldwin-Wallace College. She has worked as a theatre artist across Northeast Ohio, having previously served as Resident Stage Manager for Dobama Theatre and Cleveland Public Theatre. Recently, Sarah Lynne has been bringing a long-time dream to life: she and her partner/husband Doug have co-founded Theatre Agápe, an inclusive community devoted to putting our service where our art is.

[Larry Rosenwald](#) is the Anne Pierce Rogers Professor of English at Wellesley College, where he has been teaching since 1980. He has published work on diaries, translation, literary multilingualism, and the relations between literature and war resistance; his current large project is an attempt to define pacifist criticism, and his most recent large publication is *War No More*, an anthology of American antiwar and peace writing for the Library of America. He has written and performed some fifty verse scripts for early music theater, often for the Amherst Early Music Festival but also for such ensembles as Artek, Les Délices, the Texas Early Music Project, and Voices of Music. He is thrilled to see *The White Cat* come to life.

[David Stoughton](#) (Lighting Designer) has designed the lighting for a diverse array of projects in both professional and academic venues across the country. He currently serves as Resident Lighting Designer and Assistant Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance at Baldwin Wallace University. In addition to his design work, David teaches courses in production design and technology.

[Camilla Tassi](#) (Projection Designer) is a projection designer and musician from Florence, Italy. Her design credits include Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (Apollo's Fire), Pollock's *Stinney* (PROTOTYPE), Scarlatti's *Il Primo Omicidio* (Yale Voxtet) and Mozart's *Magic Flute* (Berlin Opera Academy). Tassi enjoys bringing design to traditionally unstaged compositions (choral, art song, recital, oratorio), recontextualizing the repertoire with today's audiences. For video, she had designed, filmed, and edited programs for groups such as the Yale Camerata, *Silent Fire* exhibit, and Washington Chorus (DC).
