

GAMES & GROUNDS

Jean-Baptiste Lully: Chaconne from Phaeton
17th Century choreography danced by Elena Mullins

Jean-Philippe Rameau arr. Nagy: Pantomime from *Pigmalion* (1748)

The Ant and the Grasshopper

Elena Mullins, soprano

François Chauvon: 5eme Suite in d minor

The Lion and the Rat

Elena Mullins, soprano

Jean-Féry Rebel: Caprice from *Deuxième Suite*

The Tortoise and the Eagle

Jason McStoots, tenor

Marin Marais: Folies d'espagne, arr. Les Délices

The Hare and the Tortoise

Jason McStoots, tenor

Rebel: Caractères de la danse
Choreographed and danced by Elena Mullins

Performers

Elena Mullins, soprano & dancer

Jason McStoots, tenor

Debra Nagy, oboe

Julie Andrijeski, violin

Rebecca Reed, viola da gamba

Mark Edwards, harpsichord

Notes on the Program:

Games & Grounds is all about fantasy and flashes of inspiration. Infused with brilliant ground bass variations, our program begins with Jean-Baptiste Lully's chaconne from his opera Phaeton and continues with works by François Chauvon, Marin Marais, Jean-Féry Rebel. Meanwhile, we interleave musical versions of Aesop's timeless fables and present

through-composed fantasias from Rameau's *Pygmalion* and Rebel's *Caractères de la danse* that have their own stories to tell.

Rameau's Pygmalion is based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which the eponymous sculptor is commissioned by Venus to create a special statue. When the sculpture is complete, Pygmalion finds himself completely enraptured by its beauty while lamenting that his passion for a block of marble is naturally in vain. But the statue miraculously comes alive and Cupid appears who (together with the Graces) educates the statue. In the pantomime scene, you can imagine the statue's first halting, tentative steps during as she is taught, little by little, how to move. She's a fast learner(!) and we witness her progress through a small suite of dances including gavottes, minuets, a sarabande, and a rollicking *tambourin* to end.

Relatively little is known about **François Chauvon** except that he once studied with the great organist and composer François Couperin. We get a sense of Chauvon mostly from his surviving music, which shows him to be a quirky character with an excellent sense of humor. Even the name *Tibiades* (the collection from which our suite is drawn) is something of a joke. It's a made-up word! With it, Chauvon is making a winking reference to Tibia (the bone) and, by extension, bone flutes, and then claims to have "invented" a whole new genre of pieces for woodwinds.

In all seriousness, Chauvon's music is full of surprises. Instead of a normal prelude, he begins this suite with a Caprice that crackles with energy and non-stop syncopation. The brief sicilienne could not be more different - it has the evocative title "La Rêveuse," the dreamer. The suite closes with a languid Chaconne en rondeau that pulls at the heartstrings.

Aesop's fables exploded in popularity in France in the late 17th Century with the publication of [La Fontaine's Fables](#). Plays were adapted from La Fontaine's versions, sculpted fountains adorned a special Fable-themed labyrinth at Louis XIV's Versailles, and musical versions were even published to be sung at home.

The fables you'll hear in this program were originally published in French in the early 1730s and are set to simple airs and popular tunes. For maximum accessibility and enjoyment for English-speaking audiences, our friend Larry Rosenwald translated the lyrics into rhyming couplets that exactly matches the tunes of the originals.

Our program includes **The Ant and the Grasshopper**, where we're encouraged to follow the ant's example to save in anticipation of leaner times so that, unlike the grasshopper, we don't get left out in the cold. Well known, too, is the tale of The Tortoise and the Hare - he who steadily stays the course may well make it to the end before the distracted sprinter.

The Lion and the Rat is perhaps less-well known, but it speaks to the usefulness of all creatures - no matter how smaller or large. - and how maintaining good relations benefits us all so that we may depend on one another in times of need. However, the tale of **The Tortoise and the Eagle** contains a message we may not always want to hear: wanting something badly cannot always make it so. While a tortoise might be able to beat a hare in a

race by being true to their nature, that doesn't mean that the tortoise is well disposed to fulfill their dream of flying. No amount of help from the eagle, "the master of the skies," could make this dream a reality.

Jean-Féry Rebel's ***Les Caractères de la danse*** – a fantasia in which music and dance turn on a dime – survives with an extensive performance history. Rebel's music for *Caractères* survives in both a "short" score, and in a full, orchestral five-voice scoring. Les Délices has created a fusion of these two versions for this weekend's performances that brings both richness and color to our "trio" forces.

As Elena Mullins explains:

"Caractères de la danse by Rebel is a wonderful piece to choreograph because it's a showcase for exploring a really wide range of styles, emotions and (as the title says) characters – even while staying within the French baroque style of dance. The great challenge of the piece is developing these distinct characters and then switching between them quite rapidly, as the music calls for.

"We have many choreographies that preserve dances from early 18th-century France – they developed a notation system that gives you a lot detail about what is happening in the dance, particularly the steps and the floor patterns. Even so, when you're reconstructing a dance from a choreography, you have to do a lot of work to infer the character behind those steps – it's very similar to the kind of work that musicians do trying to breathe life into a score.

"For Rebel's *Caracteres* we don't have any surviving choreography, but we do know that it was danced by one of the great dancers of the period, Françoise Prévost. In addition, several years after the creation of the dance, a poetic setting of the melodies was published, where each of the dance movements is personified as a different type of lover. So in this poem, for instance, you have the menuet, in which a young girl hopes that her mother will be asleep when her lover visits her at home. The gavotte apparently expresses the frustrations of a scorned woman.

"Some modern interpreters have chosen to model their reconstructions of the dance directly on the parodie poem, even incorporating elements of pantomime to make the narratives explicit. Others have disregarded the parodie entirely.

"I decided to take a middle route. So, while I'm not necessarily following the narratives of the parodie, I'm taking inspiration from these quite fleshed out characters, and my hope is that these characterization will come across as really distinct and will enhance the experience of the dance and the music."