

## Preview

### **Les Délices presents the final two concerts of their season**

by Mike Telin



On May 14 & 15, Les Délices will present their final concerts of the season, titled *Myths & Allegories*, at the Tregoning & Co. Gallery and the Herr Chapel at Plymouth Church respectively.

As we have come to expect, Artistic Director Debra Nagy has once again created an innovative program, this time weaving depictions of tales from Homer's *Odyssey* together with instrumental

chamber music inspired by Greek mythology.

Debra Nagy, baroque oboe & recorder, Julie Andrijeski, violin, Emily Walhout, viola da gamba, and Peter Bennett, harpsichord will be joined by the acclaimed soprano, Clara Rottsolek, who is making her Cleveland debut, in cantatas by Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre and Thomas-Louis Bourgeois. Clara has been lauded by the New York Times for her "clear, appealing voice and expressive conviction" and by the Philadelphia Inquirer for her "opulent tone [with which] every phrase has such a communicative emotional presence."

We spoke to Debra by telephone in California where she was performing with The American Bach Soloists, and began by asking her about Les Delieces' recent East coast performances.

Debra Nagy: We had a great time and were very warmly received by everyone. I think I mentioned that we played to a sold out house for the concert at The Frick Collection. So yes, we were very happy. We'll be returning to New York in November for a performance on the prestigious Music Before 1800 series.

*Mike Telin: That's fantastic, Music Before 1800 is another very important series, congratulations.*

DN: Thanks.

*MT: Once again you have developed an extremely interesting program; how do you keep coming up with these ideas?*

DN: Like most of my programs, there was a seed of an idea that evolved. The first thing I do is to look for repertoire that is going to suit the performers that I have in mind for the performance, and in this case I wanted to create a cantata program for Clara Rottsoik, plus an ensemble that would include oboe and violin.

I first had in mind a program that would feature a variety of mythological figures, and they probably would be women, but as I started researching the program a pattern emerged, so the program around women is still evolving and perhaps you'll hear about that in a year or two. But for this program I realized that I could create a program around one figure, Ulysses, who is obviously not a woman, with scenes from the *Odyssey*. And the more that I considered additional repertoire surrounding other characters in the *Odyssey*, like Minerva, or Penelope his wife, I realized that I had enough music for three concerts. So we are happy to be presenting these two wonderfully contrasting cantatas. We will also be performing excerpts from Rebel's opera *Ulysses*.

*MT: How did you first discover Clara?*

DN: As you know, the early music world is pretty small, and about five years ago I started hearing about this really wonderful soprano from various friends. As it happens, she was and still is dating a close friend and baroque oboe colleague of mine, so naturally I was very excited to finally get to meet her. It turned out that her singing was every bit as good and probably more so than I had heard. She has a really great communicative presence on stage, and I have had the pleasure of being able to perform with her in a variety of projects in Philadelphia and New York. So I am very happy to be able to bring her to Cleveland.

*MT: I love your program notes by the way, and in them you say; "despite its beautiful music and attractive subject, Rebel's Ulysses suffered the same fate as virtually every other opera written between the time of Lully and Rameau. That is, it saw only a few performances and was never revived." Why is this?*

DN: I wish I was exaggerating in that statement, but I'm not, because we are all aware that as a ruler, Louis XIV was an absolutist. He had a stranglehold on pretty much anything that was going on in France, what was published, and what was happening in the

culture. And his court composer, Jean-Baptist Lully, was a musical counterpart to that, so he had a stranglehold on French music and theatre during his lifetime. Although Lully died fairly young, in 1687, I would have to say that after his death, French opera suffered from an interminable conservatism. That is, regardless of quality, virtually every serious opera that was produced was shot down for not measuring up to these Lullyian benchmarks. Or they were criticized for incorporating Italian elements that threatened the supremacy of French opera.

What I think is great about baroque and classical music is that for the audiences of that time, it was all about new music. Pieces were written for special occasions, and that was that. You didn't listen to old music, but it was completely the opposite in France, because Lully's operas were constantly being revived through the 1750's, and we must remember that he died in the 1680's. So it was not until Rameau had his first opera performed in 1733, that anyone was really interested in a new French opera composer. But even then, he was extremely controversial. There were even letter-writing campaigns in the press.

*MT: Has anyone tried to revive Rebel's Ulysses?*

DN: Yes, and I only found this out later, after I began to research the opera more, but as far as I can tell, the work has been performed "in concert", but not staged. And it has been recorded by another oboe and recorder player who has an ensemble in France, Hugo Reyne, who has an ensemble called Simphonie du Marais, and it, was recorded in 2007. But I am not sure there has been a staged presentation since 1703.

*MT: Could this possibly be a Les Délices project?*

DN: I think that would be a pretty major project. Perhaps I'll start with recording number two.

*MT: Did you encounter any roadblocks while doing your research?*

DN: I didn't run into any for this concert, I did have a few inconveniences. When I first started thinking that I wanted to include some music from Rebel's *Ulysses*, I overlooked the fact that there was a copy available in the United States. So at first I was trying to get someone in Paris to get a copy of the opera for me, and then, when I did my homework more thoroughly I was like, oh my goodness, the two copies outside of France happen to be at UC Berkeley, and I just happen to be there on a pretty regular basis. So I dedicated a day when I was here to go back to the library and I worked both with the printed edition, and one they also have on microfilm, so I could make scans to work from. But what's pretty normal for operas that were published in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is that they were only published in what is called a short score, so you only have the treble and bass lines. Occasionally there might be some instructions pertaining to

orchestration, but we do know that the opera orchestras consisted of a five-voice ensemble. So usually there were one or two treble lines, maybe three viola lines and a bass line, so there is a lot of music that is actually not there for you to see.

We will be expanding this program when we take it on tour in March of 2012, so we are looking forward to that.

*Published on [clevelandclassical.com](http://clevelandclassical.com) May 10, 2011*