



Everything Cleveland

Horror! Les Delices makes program of Baroque music a Halloween treat

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Debra Nagy is artistic director and Baroque oboist of Les Delices, a Cleveland early-music ensemble devoted to music of the French Baroque.

What could possibly be scary about a concert by an early-music ensemble? Not much, but Les Delices at least ran gamely with a Halloween-inspired theme to open its second season.

The group's program Sunday at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights was titled "Mirages and Monstrosities" and featured chamber music with strange twists of form, harmony and narrative. There was even a kidney-stone

operation, thank you, with artistic director Debra Nagy as sinister reader. But more about that later.

Nagy, a Baroque oboist of uncommon elegance, did serious homework to come up with the works for this oddly beguiling odyssey through French Baroque music, her ensemble's specialty.

Each piece had a specific role in the weird concept, though nothing – perhaps the kidney-stone episode aside – was so terrifying that you wanted to run screaming from the church's lovely Herr Chapel.

REVIEW

Les Delices

In truth, the music and the playing were models of Baroque vivacity and taste, with ample personality from the five members of Les Delices to animate whatever peculiarity (or otherwise) that could be summoned from the notes and markings on the page.

Plenty of notes go by to suggest the bizarre tale that lies within Jean-Philippe Rameau's suite from "Platee," which concerns a repulsive water nymph courted by Jupiter to elicit the jealous wrath of his wife, Juno. The music is at turns fiery, stately and exuberant, with disembodied violin sounds (played to eerie perfection by Julie Andrijeski and Karina Fox) and giddy flourishes to provide dramatic contrast.

An air of suspense pervades Marin Marais' "Le Labyrinthe," which takes a viola da gamba through a maze of keys and moods with assistance from a harpsichord. Gamba player Josh Lee was a master of the score's wandering and acrobatic itinerary, and Michael Sponseller navigated the harpsichord part with stylish elan.

Sponseller had his own stellar moment in a temperamental miniature, Pancrace Royer's "Le Vertigo," whose sudden changes in dynamics and character evoke the dizzying motion of the title.

The only aspect of Francois-Andre Philidor's Symphony V that is out of the ordinary is its predilection for traveling through distant keys, which must have been shocking in 1755. For the program's finale, Nagy and company offered Michel Corrette's Concerto Comique No. 2 ("Allure"), a score of effervescent and poetic appeal, to restore our equilibrium.

It's just what was needed after Marais' "Tableau de l'operation sur la Taille," the kidney-stone procedure depicted by gamba, harpsichord and narrator. Nagy, assuming the guise of ominous host, read English verses about incisions and blood as Lee and Sponseller immersed themselves in the musical dirty work.

Gross it was, but also, in a perverse way, delicious.

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