



Early-music group Les Delices delights in French salutes

By Donald Rosenberg, *The Plain Dealer*

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Chris Stephens, *The Plain Dealer*

Baroque oboist Debra Nagy is artistic director of the early-music ensemble Les Delices, which performed a program of French music over the weekend.

REVIEW

Les Delices

Musicians aren't always as competitive as one might assume. They may envy the gifts that colleagues possess, but they also admire their accomplishments and vision.

Les Delices, a Cleveland-based early-music ensemble that performs music of the French Baroque, devoted its program over the weekend to works by composers saluting peers and figures that influenced them. Theme aside, the group's concert Sunday at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights, where the musicians recently became artists in residence, was a beguiling experience.

The period-instrument ensemble's name couldn't be more apt for the music and the interpretive vitality that the players bring to their repertoire: *The Delights*. Indeed, director and Baroque oboist Debra Nagy and her colleagues are models of suave phrasing and rhythmic purpose as they explore Gallic delicacies.

The only piece on the program that didn't pay specific tribute to a composer was Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's *Sonate in C minor*, which begins in darkness but soon basks in sunlit, lilting territory. Nagy, Baroque violinist Scott Metcalfe, viola da gamba player Emily Walhout and harpsichordist Lisa Goode Crawford lifted the music to the skies through ultra-clear textures and expressive intensity.

As presented by Les Delices in back-to-back works, Antoine Forqueray and Jean-Philippe Rameau characterize one another to captivating effect. The former's "*La Rameau*" depicts an extremely temperamental fellow, especially in Crawford's luxuriant and elaborate account. Crawford, Metcalfe and Walhout applied vigorous attack to Rameau's "*La Forqueray*," which suggests a spirited and harmonically inventive creator.

In Louis-Antoine Dornel's *Deuxieme Suite*, musical friends are celebrated by way of a tragic opening movement – played with long-lined beauty by Nagy – and dances of tender and buoyant personality.

The program's most anguished piece was Marin Marais' "*Tombeau pour Mr. de Sainte-Colombe*," which marks the death of a beloved teacher. Walhout gave eloquent voice to the grieving lines, holding phrases for dear life and bearing down intensely on the angry statements in an impassioned collaboration with Crawford.

Not everything that Les Delices touches is necessarily oh-so-serious. For their finale, the musicians played Francois Couperin's "*Apotheose de Lully*," a collection of 11 fanciful short (and shorter) movements illustrating the ascent of Jean-Baptiste Lully to heaven.

Nagy introduced the movements, which include appearances by Apollo, Mercury and Lully competitor

Arcangelo Corelli and culminate in a rapprochement between the tres-Francais Lully and molto-Italiano Corelli.

Along with oboe, Nagy piped elegantly on recorder, and her partners in French musical crime did their parts with equal panache. In a word, delightful.

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