



Les Delices takes elegant journey with music inspired by "The Odyssey"

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By

Imagine trying to cram all 10 years of Ulysses' famous expedition into a musical saga. The result would be much, much longer than Wagner's "Ring" cycle. Or a one-performance flop, like "Home Sweet Homer," the 1976 show with Yul Brynner as wandering hero.

Les Delices, the Cleveland early-music ensemble devoted to the French Baroque, took a more sensible approach to the subject Sunday at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights. Its final program of the season, "Myths & Allegories," comprised a bit more than an hour's worth of selections from 18th-century works based on Homer's "The Odyssey."

As always, artistic director Debra Nagy's thoroughly researched journey reaped abundant rewards. It's likely that few in the audience had heard any of the afternoon's pieces by Jean-Fery Rebel, Thomas-Louis Bourgeois, Jean-Philippe Rameau or Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre – or most of the composers, for that matter.

So the music came across as fresh, delightful and affecting, especially when Nagy and company were joined by a marvelous young soprano, Clara Rottsolk, who should soon be a star in the early-music world.

Rottsolk's voice is pure and shining, and she sings dead-center on pitch. What's more, Rottsolk treats words with special care, enunciating the French texts to make sure the narratives receive nuanced treatment.

The program's two most extended works were cantatas depicting separate episodes in Ulysses' prolonged voyage, Bourgeois' "Les Sirenes" and de la Guerre's "Le Sommeil d'Ulisse." In both, Rottsolk conveyed the action and emotions with urgent beauty.

She wrapped her soprano around Nagy's plaintive oboe to spellbinding effect in the first aria in "Les Sirenes." Later,



Soprano Clara Rottsolk appeared as soloist with the early-music ensemble Les Delices on Sunday at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights.

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playing recorder in the de la Guerre cantata, Nagy brought mellow and tender serenity to the slumbering passages in tandem with Rottsolk.

Excerpts from Rebel's obscure 1703 opera, "Ulysse," gave the musicians of Les Delices the chance to demonstrate the elegant prowess they bring to everything they touch. The overture introduced sprightly dotted rhythms that set Ulysses on his not-always-so-merry way. A chaconne between two arias, again vibrantly sung by Rottsolk, was yet another example of the ensemble's refined energy.

Harpsichordist Peter Bennett had a moment in the sun animating the driven passages in Rameau's "Les Cyclopes," while violinist Julie Andrijeski was the temperamental and fleet protagonist in Rebel's sonata, "La Fidelle," a portrait of Ulysses' loyal wife, Penelope.

Along with Bennett, the trip's harmonic motion was in the vital hands of Emily Walhout, who plays viola da gamba with the kind of bold and sensitive commitment that an intrepid Greek hero would admire.

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