

Review

**Les Délices: *Conversations Gallants*
at Tregoning & Co. (February 1)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Les Délices, the Cleveland early music ensemble that devotes itself to resurrecting treasures from the French Baroque, designed its mid-winter program, *Conversations Gallants*, around the idea of musical conversation as that social art was practiced in the salons of eighteenth-century Paris.

Alas, there were fewer voices in last weekend's discussions than originally planned. Nagy had lined up a program of quartets, but a sudden illness reduced the group to oboe, violin and harp-

sichord and the playlist had to be changed accordingly. Happily, the repartée in the altered program was probably no less eloquent. In music by Rameau, Leclair, François Couperin and Forqueret, Debra Nagy, Julie Andrijeski and Michael Sponseller provided plenty of engaging wit and delicious colloquy to delight the audience at Tregoning & Co. gallery on Saturday evening.

The hour-long program began and ended with all hands on deck. Jean-Philippe Rameau's *2eme Concert* from 1741 engaged oboe, violin and harpsichord in a playful chase (*La Laborde*), an intimate moment of reflection (*La Boucon*), a vivacious dance featuring the harpsichord (*L'Agaçante*) and a pair of sweet *Menuets*. Designed for professional players, the piece gave all three musicians shining solo licks as well as proposed tricky ensemble moments. The trio rose to all individual and collective challenges with ease and grace.

At the end of the program, three movements from Jean-Marie Leclair's 1737 *Deuxième Récréation de Musique* were written with amateur players in mind, but those players must have been pretty accomplished to negotiate the subtleties of the *Ouverture*, *Chaconne* and *Tambourin*. The substantial middle movement was rich in its harmonies, the finale charmingly rustic.

In mid-concert, everybody but Sponseller got to sit out a piece. Leclair's unabashedly Italian-leaning *Septième Sonata* from 1734 received elegant treatment from Julie Andrijeski. The concluding *Gavotta* surprised the ear with a sudden lurch into the major mode.

Debra Nagy brought François Couperin's 1724 *Quatuorzième Concert* to her tag-team round, demonstrating both physical stamina and a lovely consistency of tone on the baroque oboe, which can prove recalcitrant in less accomplished hands (and embouchures).

The seemingly tireless Michael Sponseller followed with a striking and complex *Chaconne* "La Morangis ou La Plissay," a 1749 variation set that favored the lower end of the harpsichord and garnered cheers from the non-playing salon guests.

This was an engaging evening, and no less than one expects from Les Délices, who bring music from a remote and highly artificial culture to life with a minimum of fuss and abundant charm. The ensemble's sense of good taste even extends beyond the music. Complimentary wine and elegant cheeses brought this salon to a *comme il faut* conclusion.

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