

Preview**Les Délices in Love: conversations with
Carrie Henneman Shaw and Nigel North**

by Mike Telin



This is the time of year when all thoughts turn to love. Les Délices in collaboration with the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society presents *Portrait of Love* on Saturday, February 16 beginning at 8:00 pm in the Tregoning & Co. Gallery and on Sunday, February 17 beginning at 4:00 pm in the Herr Chapel at Plymouth Church. The concert features Carrie Henneman Shaw, soprano, Nigel North, lute & theorbo, Debra Nagy, oboe & recorder and Emily Walhout, viola da gamba.

In her program notes, Les Délices's founder and artistic director Debra Nagy writes:

In early-seventeenth century France, composers began to experiment with a new, expressive language of musical gestures designed to elicit intense emotional responses in the hearts of listeners. They also distilled their music to the barest essentials – a voice with spare accompaniment – in order to achieve the most direct effect: to make hearts melt with tenderness, ache with longing, weep in despair, or burn with passion. The resulting air de cour (courtly air) was a miniature masterpiece that could alternately express tender sentiments, gut-wrenching sorrow, utter desperation, languorous swoons, and intense ardor.

The program takes a “kaleidoscope of feelings aroused by love” including *La douceur* (sweetness or tenderness), *Le contentement* (satisfaction or happiness), *La douleur* (grief and pain), *Les feux de l’amour* (burning love), *La langueur* (languor and lovesickness) and *Le desespoir* (despair).

We reached soprano Carrie Henneman Shaw by telephone at her home in St. Paul and began by asking her what she likes about the program.

Carrie Henneman Shaw: It’s definitely a butterflies in the tummy kind of program. But the one thing I really like is that it spans a wide range of time. There are some entabulated pieces and some continuo songs, so there is a nice broad harmonic language.

It's funny because a couple of years ago on a whim I decided to fly to Cleveland for cocktail hour and I asked Debra if I could stay overnight. At the time I was reading a book by the musicologist, Catherine Gordon-Seifert called *Music and Language of Love*, about French *Aires de Cour* and Debra and I were talking about how interesting her ideas were — connecting certain compositional strategies to affects, which was something a lot of philosophers and pseudo-scientists were investigating in the seventeenth century — what happens to the body when you're feeling anger or in love. Gordon-Seifert separated out a number of affects that certain writers specifically named like languor, sweetness and despair, and Debra has divided the program into those areas.

Mike Telin: Debra sent me the draft of the program notes and they're fascinating! I've learned so much about the French Aire de Cour.

CHS: Yes, and there is so much out there that has not been explored. I've been doing a long-term research project about a 17th century French musical publication that came out once a month. Each issue would contain six or seven songs by a variety of people. Some were anonymous female and male composers but some were well known. It's really fascinating.

MT: Can you please explain what a continuo song is?

CHS: The difference between the tablature and the continuo is the entabulated songs show fingerings the performer should play, whereas the continuo songs only have the bass line and figures.

MT: You have your own ensemble, Glorious Revolution Baroque. It seems that early music ensembles always come up with such inventive names. Are there classes on choosing a name?

CHS: I wish there were. The first time I ever tried to come up with a name for a group, a vocal septet, we were desperate and at our low point someone suggested *Periwinkle Turnpike* which was possibly the worst name ever. We ended up calling ourselves the *Deviated Septet* which we actually got from a list of bad band names. Now, even more than before, you do start to think that if I was going to Google something, what would I be Googling and how would someone stumble upon me?

MT: Speaking of Googling, I did Google Glorious Revolution and forgot to add baroque, but I did learn the historical background of your group's name, Glorious Revolution Baroque: Early Music brought to you by Pleasure-loving Trouble-makers!

CHS: Well that was the best way I could describe us.

MT: And how do you define a Pleasure-loving Trouble-maker?

CHS: [Laughing] I think I define it as people who aren't really out to prove that they're smart. We want everybody to walk away from our concerts saying "my, that was so delicious and over the top." Most of the people who are famous in our business came up in

the 1970s and early 1980s, and a lot of what makes them famous is that they know so much about everything. I do respect that but it does set such a high bar for the rest of us. What I'm trying to do is to restore some of the party atmosphere to what we are doing. It all came out of a party! Everything that we do in *Glorious Revolution Baroque* is about trying to give pleasure and entertaining people as best as we can.

MT: It's always amazing to me how research goes into a concert like "Portrait of Love." In a video you did with Matt Peiken you say you like to combine research with intuition.

CHS: I think it is a healthy change of direction – planting seeds in less furrowed ground. We, *Glorious Revolution Baroque*, recently did a concert with the Bach Society of Minnesota. It was a Bach and Jazz show. We sang a lot of standards along with baroque stuff. There was a lot of trepidation among the baroque specialists because they were thinking, wow, I haven't studied this, I don't know what I'm doing. And the jazz people were like don't worry, everything is right and nothing is wrong. I think it's always good to be reminded that we are all musicians and we all know what feels right, so let's just try stuff.

MT: When did you first fall in love with singing?

CHS: I always loved music and singing. I fell in love with *Little Orphan Annie*. I just couldn't stop thinking about Annie.

MT: Do you still sing THAT song?

CHS: No, but then I would get on the school bus everyday and start singing *Tomorrow* much to the annoyance to everyone on the bus.

Nigel North



We spoke to British-born lutenist Nigel North this past summer prior to his performance for the Lute Society summer workshop. The following is an excerpt from that interview.

British-born lutenist Nigel North has been captivating audiences for nearly forty years. His diverse musical life extends well beyond the concert stage; as a teacher, accompanist, director and writer, he has inspired generations of students and lovers of this most challenging instrument. "I love teaching", Mr. North told us by telephone from his home in Bloomington, Indiana, where he has served as Professor of Lute at the Early Music Institute of Indiana University since 1999.

MT: Do you find that lute players tend to be a tight-knit group of people?

NN: The lute society has its summer workshop in Cleveland every two years, and I've been there five or six times. In the lute community everybody knows each other pretty well and it's growing. And there are also a lot of loyal followers. All of the teachers and

performers get together and this is about the only time of the year that that could ever happen.

MT: I personally love lute concerts, but what would you tell someone who has never been to one to convince them to attend? How much does one need to know in advance — or should you just show up and enjoy?

NN: I think you can just show up, and I would say it would be like an evening of poetry. It's not hard music to listen to by any means. The instrument has such a beautiful sound, so if anybody does go to a lute concert you can just sit there and enjoy this very gentle, calming sound. But once you are used to that, there is an amazing amount of variety in the music, even from one composer. So I would say if somebody has never been before, you come for a pleasant and calming surprise.

MT: You have been part of the Historical Performance movement for quite some time; how have you seen it evolve over the years?

NN: I think, quite incrementally, people have had the time to focus on more and more detail on how the music is constructed and how it might have been played. They have also had time to let go of modern, romantic approaches to music. They have had time to read what sources in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries have said, so now after forty years it seems as though people are starting from a much more aware place. And the levels of playing have gone up so much on every instrument, so now there are lots of new generations of young players to whom it is all just music. It's no longer the circus act.

MT: You have had a very prolific recording career; what are the difficulties of making a lute recording?

NN: One thing is that you need it to be very quiet, but if you go into a recording studio, there isn't usually much of an acoustic so it is added afterwards electronically, and I don't like to do that. So the difficulty is finding a quiet enough venue, with good acoustics, which is usually a church, and then hoping there are no airplanes, dogs, birds, lawnmowers and road construction. I was recording a month ago and there were farm fields all around. It had been raining, but that day it was dry, so they planned to do twelve hours of harvesting, but fortunately their vehicle broke down. So very often we find that we tend to record very late at night and into the early morning. Which is actually quite nice because everything is so still, and that fits the lute very well.

MT: Finally, how did you first come to the lute?

NN: I can't really answer that except to say that when I was in my early teens and playing the guitar, I found that the music I liked just happened to be lute music, and that is what made me pursue it. The style of the music from the 16th to 18th century seems to fit my nature.

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