

Preview

Les Délices: *Woman Scorned*

by Mike Telin



For the past four years Les Délices have presented well-researched, thought-provoking and highly entertaining programs that explore music and themes of the French Baroque. Their concerts are performed in intimate settings that create an atmosphere similar to that in which this music was intended to be enjoyed.

This weekend Les Délices begins their Fifth Anniversary season with *Woman Scorned*, a program of wild, descriptive music depicting sorceresses and temptresses that explores

universal themes of desire, jealousy, shame, and revenge by giving voice to the spurned lovers of antiquity. The program also includes two works never before heard in Ohio.

In addition to Les Délice's regulars, baroque oboist Debra Nagy, baroque violinist Julie Andrijeski, viola da gambist Emily Walhout and harpsichordist Michael Sponseller, *Woman Scorned* also features renowned, Chicago-based mezzo-soprano [Angela Young Smucker](#).

Les Délice's founder and artistic director Debra Nagy says the program exalts in wild, passionate music portraying characters such as Circé, Phèdre, Armide, and Medea while contemplating the somewhat misogynist portrayals of the women in these works that is – in some cases – far removed from their classical origins. In her informative program notes Nagy writes:

The characters in Woman Scorned loved deeply and passionately, exhibited devotion and loyalty, yet they were abandoned or otherwise rejected – only to respond with ferocious anger equal to their pain and guilt. Despite their furious displays, they have their human qualities – remorse and shame figure prominently in depictions of their psychological struggles. A connection to the supernatural or otherworldly and the use of magic or poison to manipulate or inflict harm is another common thread: the sorceress Circé offers Odysseus' men an elixir that will turn them into beasts, her niece Medée poisons her rival

in love, Phèdre puts an end to her own guilty fate with a potion given to her by Medea, and Armide casts a spell on her enemy to make him fall in love with her.

As with most of her programs, Nagy says the idea developed slowly over time, “I’ve had the concept floating around in my head for a couple of years,” adding that after researching her subjects, “I’m drawing the conclusion that these women are all tortured in their own way and having been manipulated each in their own way, they are all doers of ill.”



The program also presented the opportunity to feature a mezzo. “I’m excited about these concerts because so far Les Délices has only featured sopranos and for these femme fatale sorceresses I wanted to have a darker, richer voice. And actually with the low pitch I think it works very well with a mezzo.” Nagy adds that Angela Young Smucker’s beautiful and very rich voice is perfect to portray these characters. And although Nagy shies away from the word sinister, something she finds interesting about the characters is, “they’re not just flat angry vengeful women, they have regrets and tenderness as well.” After all is said and done, does Nagy have a favorite character? “I have been thinking a lot about *Phèdre*. I find her story to be captivating.”

Like many Les Délices concerts, Nagy has had to do her fair share of scholarly research in order to create *Woman Scorned*, “There is no recording of Thomas-Louis Bourgeois’s *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, and that is exciting because it will be a chance for everyone, including me, to hear it for the first time. There is a recording of Colin de Blamont’s cantata *Circé* on YouTube, but I had to order manuscript pages from the Bibliothèque nationale de France,” she says, noting that the cantata exists in three different versions. Both Thomas-Louis Bourgeois’s *Phèdre et Hippolyte* and Colin de Blamont’s cantata *Circé* will be receiving their Ohio premieres at these performances.

The program also includes Jean-Féry Rebel’s trio sonata “La Junon,” and excerpts from Marc-Antoine Charpentier’s opera *Medée* and the chaconne from Lully’s *Armide*.

On Saturday, October 5, the performance begins at 8:00 pm at the William Busta Gallery. On Sunday, October 6, a second performance will take place in Herr Chapel at Plymouth Church at 4:00 pm. CWRU musicologist Susan McClary will give a pre-concert lecture on Sunday at 3.

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