

Les Délices to present three performances of “Cantiques Spirituels — Music for Lent”

by Mike Telin



This weekend, Les Délices will present “Cantiques Spirituels — Music for Lent,” a concert that straddles the worlds of private devotion and the public sphere. “What I think is wonderful about this program is the interesting juxtaposition of the texts with the music,” guest soprano Nola Richardson said during a recent telephone conversation. “The texts are quite somber, but the music of Couperin and Charpentier is so elaborate and beautiful.”

On Friday, March 6 at 7:30 in Oberlin College’s Fairchild Chapel, Nola Richardson, soprano, Debra Nagy and Kathie Stewart, recorders and flute, Julie Andrijeski and Scott Metcalfe, violins, Beiliang Zhu, viola da gamba and Michael Sponseller, organ, will perform settings of the Lamentations of Jeremiah by François Couperin and Marc-Antoine Charpentier, as well as works by Pierre Du Mage and Marin Marais.

The program will be repeated on Friday, March 7 at 8:00 pm in St. Peter’s Church in downtown Cleveland, and on Sunday, March 8 at 4:00 in Herr Chapel of Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights. A pre-concert lecture will be given by Peter Bennett beginning at 3:00 on Sunday.

In her program notes, Les Délices artistic director Debra Nagy explains that the program “centers on the hauntingly beautiful laments for the destruction of Jerusalem that were performed in French Catholic Tenebrae services during Holy Week. The texts for the *Leçons de Ténèbres* (drawn from the Book of Lamentations) became a metaphor for the loneliness of Christ. As scholar Robert Kendrick has observed, Jeremiah served as a prefiguration of Christ: ‘both were sanctified in the womb, preached, wept over Jerusalem, and were eventually put to death. Thus the prophet’s words were also the

Savior's, which underscores the book's dual role as history and prophecy.' More importantly, the horrific destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem evoked *compassion* in listeners (literally, 'suffering the Passion together with Christ),' which was a primary component of Jesuit spirituality."

Nola Richardson is currently pursuing her DMA at Yale University's Institute of Sacred Music, where she is also a member of the Yale Voxtet, a group that performs as soloists in concert repertoire and chamber works. She said that one of the challenges of this weekend's program is the language. "The texts are in Latin, although it is pronounced in a French style. Fortunately, last semester I had a class on all of the different varieties of Latin. For example, in this concert there are a lot of different vowel and consonant sounds, which adds an extra color to the music. It sounds so French even though the text is in Latin."

Another challenge is the style. "In my study of early music, I quickly realized how distinct all of the national styles are, and French has its own unique flavor," Richardson said. "The ornaments are incredibly florid, and honestly, when I first received a copy of the Couperin, it was a little overwhelming. I learned it from a facsimile of the engraving, and there are so many tiny notes on the page, and so many symbols. First of all, I had to figure out how the rhythms fit into the bar, and then figure out how I was going to include all of the ornaments in the midst of some very long passages. I don't want things to sound too metrical in performance."

Richardson said that she feels fortunate to be part of Yale's Institute of Sacred Music because she has so many resources at her fingertips. "I have a coaching every week with wonderful baroque specialists like harpsichordists Avi Stein and Ignacio Prego, and of course my teacher, James Taylor."

Richardson came to early music relatively late. "It wasn't until I got to Peabody for my masters. I kind of fell into it because I was cast in a baroque opera my first year, and since I have a lighter voice, the music suited all the things I do well. Pretty soon I really started to love it. In some ways, there is more freedom and flexibility in that repertoire. I hope to sing more of the standard operatic repertoire. I love art song and new music. But in the standard repertoire, there are more expectations of how each piece is supposed to be sung. In early music, if you're singing something that has not been heard a lot in the past two to three hundred years, you can put more of your own spin on it, and it feels fresh and exciting to be able to do that."

Nola Richardson is honored to have been asked to perform with Les Délices. "I first met Debra Nagy when I studied at the American Bach Soloists Academy in San Francisco in 2012 and 2013. Both times Debra was on the faculty and I was able to work with her on

some Bach cantatas and a Rameau cantata. I've really respected her for a long time, so I was thrilled when she asked if I would be part of this project."

What does Richardson do with her copious amounts of spare time? "Right now I don't have a lot of free time, but I am an avid reader, and I have a Kindle 1 that I take with me everywhere. Another big hobby of mine is knitting. I make a lot of clothes like sweaters and cardigans for myself, and that's great for me because it's freezing here right now."

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