

“Noel, Noel” — Les Délices premieres new Christmas program Thursday

by Mike Telin



By now it's no secret that the phrase “home for the holidays” has taken on a whole new meaning this year. And while we won't be able to attend in-person concerts performed by large orchestras and choruses, Les Délices has created a new seasonal program that can be enjoyed from the comfort of your home — with your favorite beverage.

On Thursday, December 10 at 7:30 pm, the Cleveland-based ensemble will present the premiere of “Noel, Noel.” The pre-recorded, streamed program features French Noels, German hymns including Michael Praetorius' *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* and *In dulci jubilo*, and the haunting Old English *Coventry Carol* and 17th-century *Drive the Cold Winter Away*. The playlist also includes Gustav Holst's *In the bleak midwinter* and Franz Gruber's *Silent Night*.

Presented in the style of Lessons and Carols, the music is interleaved with poems by Christina Rossetti, e.e. cummings, and Thomas Campion, as well as recent work by

Northeast Ohio poets Dave Lucas, Diane Kendig, and Julie Warther recited by longtime local radio and TV host Dee Perry.

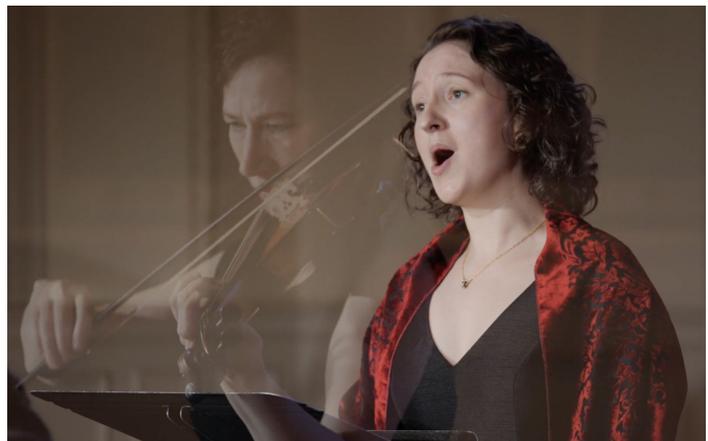
A pre-concert talk begins at 7:00 pm, the premiere begins at 7:30, and a Q&A with the artists follows at 8:30. Click [here](#) for ticket information. If you're not available on Thursday, no worries, your ticket gives you streaming access through December 23.



“It was so much fun to get to work with an all-star group of local musicians,” violinist Julie Andrijeski said during a telephone conversation. “This show was a great opportunity for all of us to get together and perform music that is going to bring a lot of comfort and joy to people.” The ensemble includes Elena Mullins (soprano), Debra Nagy (oboe and recorder), Julie Andrijeski and Allison Monroe (violins), Rebecca Landell Reed (viola da gamba), and Mark Edwards (organ).

During a separate conversation, Elena Mullins said that while she has previously performed in Christmas programs curated by Les Délices artistic director Debra Nagy, those took on the form of a “scaled-back Lessons and Carols” presented in retirement homes and homeless shelters.

“That was sort of the genesis for this program, so some of these pieces I’ve been able to work on for a few years now. My favorite is a French Carol, or technically a Noel, by Charpentier — *Chantons, je vous en prie* — it’s one of these cool Debra mash-ups where she’s incorporated music from a couple different sources. It’s a piece that I don’t get to do anywhere else because it is a Debra invention, but it is absolutely stunning.”



Another of Mullins’ favorites is the traditional song *Drive the cold winter away*. “That comes from *The English Dancing Master* (1651). Debra came up with some

harmonizations that we tried out in rehearsal — we’re always making tweaks once we hear it. But there’s one in the German set by Christian Geist, *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*, that we pretty much played from score. There are other pieces that are really constructions — taking three-voice pieces and writing a fourth voice. I think Debra loves doing that kind of work.”

Andrijeski shares Mullins’ admiration for Nagy’s arranging skills. “For example, Debra took John Playford’s *Greensleeves* variations and arranged them for me and continuo. Sometimes she left it up to us to add little ornaments here and there during a verse of our own choosing. And Allison did some of her own divisions that are just fabulous. I’m delighted that Debra trusts her musicians enough to make things up — sometimes on the spot or written out. It’s fun to be part of that process. And it keeps us on our toes.”



“Noel, Noel” was recorded in Herr Chapel at Plymouth Church two months ago — I asked Andrijeski if it was difficult to get into the Christmas spirit in October, and she laughed.

“I think the recording setup that we have at Plymouth is kind of like a fantasy land anyway. So doing Christmas music in October is just another part of it. At this point I’ve done, I think, five different programs with Les Délices for broadcast, and it all takes place within this insulated world that suspends time. And it’s wonderful to be in that space and to be in a setup where everyone can see each other — we don’t have to face the audience, so we have a nice rapport even though we are fairly distanced from each other. And that is another part of the fantasy because we can’t do that in a performance with a live audience.”

Andrijeski and Mullins agreed that they are in awe of the work by the local production team — Mathias Reed, Ken Wendt, Erica Brenner (cameras), Allison Monroe

(production assistance), Erica Brenner (video editing), Andrew Tripp (audio editing and mastering), and Lori Kella (original artwork).



“What really has struck me over these five projects is how artistic and creative they are,” Andrijeski said. “Everytime I go in, I see more and more what they do and how they work out where the cameras are going to be. I can’t wait to see it when it premieres because I have no idea what the poetry part looks like, except that it’s going to be fabulous.”

Were they thinking about the audience during the recording sessions? “You have to have the audience in mind when you’re performing,” Mullins said. “You share your energy with your fellow ensemble members. But it is different when you’re singing to people behind cameras versus a big audience. I’ve never done as much recording as I have in the past year. I’m appreciative of all the projects but it is a whole different discipline — you learn a lot when you record yourself.”

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