

Women of Genius:
Another winner from Les Délices

by Mike Telin



Once again Les Délices scores a winner with the latest installment of the French Baroque ensemble's online subscription series. Debuting on Thursday, March 18 at 7:30 pm, "Women of Genius" takes a historically

thoughtful and musically fascinating look into the music of female composers who influenced French musical culture. After its debut, the video will be available on-demand through March 29. Read our preview article [here](#). To purchase tickets and view connection details, click [here](#).

The 70-minute program features music and poetry by Louis-Nicolas Clérambault, Mme. Duval, Julie Pinel, Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, and François and Louis Couperin. And as we have come to expect from Les Délices' artistic director Debra Nagy, her meticulous research is beautifully woven into the presentation. Her enthusiasm for the subject matter is evident in her on-screen delivery as well as in the informative program notes. Members of the ensemble also share their thoughts on the music, giving the production a feeling of collaboration.

So who were these Women of Genius? Nagy explains that they "were the daughters, the nieces, and the cousins of musical families like the Couperins. They were poets, translators, and librettists for airs, cantatas, and operas. They were brilliant improvisers and arrangers whose celebrated performances were attested to but whose works were never published. They were singers, keyboard, and theorbo players whose intimate work impressed and delighted."

While the program presents an interesting historical account of a group of accomplished composers whose voices have long been neglected in concert, it is the riveting performances by Clara Rottsolk (soprano), Debra Nagy (oboe), Julie Andrijeski (violin), Rebecca Reed (viola da gamba), and Mark Edwards (harpsichord) that make “Women of Genius” a must-see — or should I say hear. Although the video production quality is top-notch, if you find yourself growing weary of looking at a screen, simply dim it down, sit back, and bask in the artistry of this second-to-none ensemble.

Rottsolk’s relaxed, free-flowing voice serves her well during Pinel’s “Airs” from *Nouveau recueil d’airs sérieux et à boire*. Her delivery is appropriately anguished during “*Sombres lieux — obscures forêts*,” and “*Rossignol, vous chantez les douceurs du printemps*” charms as she sings about the ‘sweetness in spring.’ Here Nagy supplies a superb obbligato line, making this duet a highlight.

Rottsolk, Andrijeski, Reed, and Edwards are a *tour-de-force* in Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre’s cantata *Judith*. Her music vividly captures the Hebrew story of the “righteous assassination of a brutal and lusty conqueror at the hands of the least-powerful: the subjugated woman.” Rottsolk’s pure voice shudders at the thought of taking revenge, and turns majestic as Judith triumphs and Israel is saved.

The program also includes captivating instrumentals. Nagy, Andrijeski, Reed, and Edwards sparkle in Mme. Duval’s Suite from *Les Génies ou Les Caractères de l’Amour*. The “Ritournelle” is unhurried, the “Passacaille” is regal, and the “Tambourins” is fast and furious with pristine articulations.

Edwards brings technical wizardry and thoughtful phrasing to François Couperin’s “*La Favorite*” from *Ier Livre de pieces de clavecin*. He also provides his own verbal insights into the mind of the composer.

Julie Andrijeski always brings something special to the table. Her musical lines have direction with seamless transitions between moods. Everything she plays sings, nothing sounds difficult. The violinist demonstrates all of these qualities as she joins Reed and Edwards for a brilliant account of Jacquet de la Guerre’s *Violin Sonata No. 3 in F*. This is ensemble playing at its best as the three players move in and out of solo passages, never stepping on another’s moment in the spotlight. While there are plenty of slow, sublime moments, it is during the spirited, fast sections that you find yourself head-bobbing.

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