

Les Délices goes live with *The White Cat*

by Mike Telin



For centuries the fairy tale of *Puss in Boots*, the wily cat who stops at nothing to gain power and wealth for his penniless master, has been a source of inspiration for composers and choreographers.

“For some time I’ve been thinking about how to bring attention to the women authors of fairy tales from late 17th-century

France,” Debra Nagy said during a telephone conversation. “I started reading them and thinking about which stories would be appealing to a 21st-century reader, and Catherine D’Aulnoy’s *The White Cat* really drew my attention. It’s an interesting rewrite of *Puss-in-boots* from the point of view of her humility, kindness, and generosity which is in contrast to the manipulative *Puss-in-boots* who gets ahead almost entirely through trickery.”

On Friday, April 1st at 7:30 pm at the Akron Public Library, Les Délices will present their new 65-minute opera, *The White Cat*. Based on D’Aulnoy’s story with an original libretto by Larry Rosenwald and music by Lully, François Couperin and Marais, the enchanted musical fantasy is perfect for all ages. The production features soprano Elena Mullins, tenor Jason McStoots, and puppeteer and dancer Samara Steele. Puppet and set design is by Ian Petroni with projection design by Camilla Tassi.

Instrumentalists include Julie Andrijeski and Shelby Yamin (violin), Kathryn Montoya and Debra Nagy (oboe & recorder), Rebecca Reed (gamba & cello), and Mark Edwards (harpsichord). Performances continue at the Breen Center in Ohio City on Saturday, April 2 at 3:00 pm and 7:00 pm and Sunday, April 3 at 3:00 pm. Click [here](#) to purchase tickets.



The creation of *The White Cat* was also informed by Nagy's interest in what was a common artist practice in the 17th-century that is no longer in style today. "It was fashionable to create pastiche entertainments — to create new operas out of old bits and pieces of stories and music," Nagy said. "But this is a huge project on so many levels. We created a full-blown opera that spans over an hour and happens to be in English. It's just a beautiful and fantastic introduction to the art form — through music, visuals, and storytelling."

Like many fairy tales, this one is at times quite gruesome, although Nagy said that she sees the story of *The White Cat* as being about trust and having faith that things will work out beautifully for everyone in the end. "Our show is really the first half of the fairytale which is the

cat's relationship with the prince and the three quests that end with her being transformed back into a princess. And everybody gets to live happily ever after."

The production consists of a prologue and five acts, each of which is followed by a fable and provides a "divertissement" within each act. "In the story there are places where years pass, so we've embedded some musical verses to propel the narrative. They also play on the setting I was initially inspired by — what had been a labyrinth at Versailles that had 29 fountains each depicting an Aesop fable."

The opera's narrative is also advanced through the use of puppets designed by Ian Petroni whose work with local organizations include Cleveland Public Theater, Groundworks Dance Theater, Playhouse Square and Parade the Circle.

While Petroni has created many puppets for the production, the two primary ones depict the cat and the king. "Elena Mullins voices the White Cat and with Samara Steele, they operate this bobcat-sized puppet." Nagy said that the king is basically a non-character with only three lines. "He just hands out ultimatums and we decided to treat him the

same way that adults speak in Charlie Brown — mumbling unintelligibly — although that puppet is about eight-feet tall, so he is larger than life.”



In an interview with Les Délices, Ian Petroni said that in multidisciplinary performances it is easy to present each element alongside one another. The challenge is to weave those elements together. “[You don’t want] a separation between the musicians and puppets and the visual projections. I am looking forward to interacting onstage with the puppets and the musicians, and even having the musicians lend a hand in bringing the puppets to life.”

Winding down our conversation, Debra Nagy said, “I feel very, very, close to this production and I think the performances will be quite magical.”

To view the filmed version of the opera that will be released on Marquee TV on April 28th, click [here](#).

Published on ClevelandClassical.com March 28, 2022.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)