

**Les Délices: *The White Cat*, a new  
Baroque opera at the Breen (Apr. 2)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Ailurophiles rejoice! There's a new opera in town, created as many French Baroque titles were back in the day, out of bits and pieces of existing material, and the principal character is a large feline. (It's actually a princess seeking to be rehumanized through the traditional heroic means of fulfilling a series of impossible challenges or quests.)

The creative team behind *The White Cat* begins with Les Délices artistic director Debra Nagy, who has had Larry Rosenwald adapt Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy's story *La Chatte Blanche* into a five-act (or five-quest) libretto that recasts the manipulative Puss in Boots, who gets ahead almost entirely through trickery, into a kinder, gentler feline. Each quest is linked with a French version of one of Aesop's Fables coupled with a *divertissement*, and joined together by well-known tunes like Couperin's *Les Barricades Mystérieuses*.

Nagy acknowledges that with this project, Les Délices set out on its own quest — to tell a story in the musical language of French Baroque Opera — because “we love it,” and that shows in every musical, literary, and theatrical gesture in *The White Cat*.

The production is both sophisticated and charmingly *naïf*. Elegant projections by Camilla Tassi change the setting from gorgeous interiors to fantastic natural scenes, and costumes and props are beautifully wrought.

The marionettes of the White Cat (which comes in two sizes, the larger version possessed of fiery emerald eyes) and the rat, which makes comical appearances, are clearly fabulous representations of real animals. The cats, operated by puppeteer Ian Petroni, Elena Mullins (while singing), and Samara Steele, perambulate by hopping like rabbits.



The arrival of the King in the form of an 8-foot puppet with useless, dangling legs makes a remarkable effect later in the show.

Musical values are sky high as one would only expect from Les Délices musicians Julie Andrijeski and Shelby Yamin, violins, Kathryn Montoya and Nagy, oboe and recorder, Rebecca Reed, gamba and cello, and Mark Edwards, harpsichord. Tenor Jason McStoots did admirable double duty as stage director and male lead, and soprano Elena Mullins sang beautifully while wrangling the big kitty.

As delightful as it was in its first iteration, *The White Cat* would have greatly profited from supertitles. Even though the songs are in English, it was difficult to make out what was being sung. A QR code in the program could be scanned to bring the libretto onto your own mobile device, an option few chose to use.

And while most attendees probably didn't feel this, the use of French folk tunes that have also become Noël's made a curious effect for anyone who knows them in their alter egos of Christmas carols!

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