

Les Délices to open season with “The Highland Lassie”

by Mike Telin



*My luv is like a red red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
O my Luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly play'd in tune;*

While these words are attributed to the Scottish bard Robert Burns, he was more accurately the compiler of the famous song. And in their season-opening program, Les Délices keeps the tradition of creating arrangements of songs from multiple sources alive.

On Saturday, September 24 at 4:00 pm and 7:30 pm at Dunham Tavern Museum, Les Délices will present “The Highland Lassie.” The program combines songs, variation sets, and dances — all of which have their origins in the 18th century — performed by Debra Nagy (Baroque oboe, recorders, and voice), Elena Mullins (soprano), Julie Andrijeski (violin), Allison Monroe (violin, viola, and voice), Rebecca Reed (cello), and Mark Edwards (harpsichord). Tickets are available [online](#).

“Developing the program required a lot of source digging, which was pretty fun,” artistic director Debra Nagy said during a recent telephone conversation. “It’s historical from the point of view that I did some research into what an Edinburgh dance band from around 1760 consisted of, and I discovered that even an ensemble of a pair of violins and an oboe could make up a dance band.”

One aspect of the program Nagy is especially looking forward to: the vocal arrangements. “Many people don’t know this, but Allison Monroe also sings quite beautifully. So I’ve created opportunities for Elena, myself, and Allison to sing on this program.”

While *A red, red rose* is Burns’ most famous love song, Nagy noted that the poem has been set to different tunes. “In some cases the entire poem is set, and in others not. So there was all kinds of decision-making involved. Robert Burns often said, ‘I heard this tune and I wrote it down,’ and other times he said, ‘I adapted this lyric and set it to the tune of...’”

Nagy noted that the song *Barbara Allen* can be traced back to the 1660s and was popular not only in England, Scotland, and Ireland, but also across North America, where hundreds of versions were collected over the years.

One commonality shared by many of the song’s lyrics is their sense of longing. “I think there is a romantic sentimentality that is associated with this repertoire — along with the image of the lonely romantic. When you read the texts there are a lot of themes of departed lovers — ‘My lad is far away across the water.’”

While the text may be sad, Nagy said that as the person who is creating a program, part of the fun is that the songs tell great stories. “*William and Margaret* is a ghost story and the text is beautifully compelling as a piece of rhetoric — Margaret passed away and William was her lover or boyfriend, and clearly he had left her for someone else. She comes back from the dead and says to him, ‘Why did you say my face was fair when you looked at someone else? Why did you say my lips were beautiful when you kissed someone else?’ William is both moved and scared and he runs into the night to her grave, lies down on the cold ground, and dies. So they are not the most super fun songs but the stories are touching.”

The program concludes with *The Broom of Cowdenknows*. “It’s a lovely way to end because it is not a downer but rather in full bloom of love and sweetness,” Nagy said. “It’s also a piece where I brought together as many different sources as possible. I borrowed bass lines from many places and there’s a lot of improvisation. I’ve also

created a version where all three ladies sing, and it segues into a pile of up-tempo dances.”

Nagy pointed out that one challenge with programming this music is that the vocal ranges of the songs are expansive. “More than an octave and a fifth. You think of these as folk songs, but that is a huge range.”

In addition to the Cleveland performances, you can catch “The Highland Lassie” in Canton on Friday, September 23 at Christ Presbyterian Church, and in Port Clinton on Sunday the 25th at Firelands Presbyterian Church. Click [here](#) for more information.

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