

## Les Délices opens season with “The Highland Lassie”

by Mike Telin



Why is it that people never seem to tire of 18th-century Scottish folk songs? The moment we hear the poems of *A red, red rose*, they conjure up the image of the lonely romantic, sitting alone next to a fireplace or in the corner of a village pub while a band entertains the other patrons.

On Saturday afternoon, September 24, Les Délices brought these images to life during their season opener, “The Highland Lassie.” The program mixed an entertaining set of songs steeped in romantic sentimentality, with fiddle tunes that made it impossible not to tap along. The venue — Dunham Tavern Museum — provided the perfect ambiance for the capacity crowd to sit back and enjoy the 60-plus minutes of top-notch performances that blurred the lines between folk song and art song.

The program’s success was due in large part to the charming arrangements created by the ensemble’s artistic director, Debra Nagy. And the musicians — Nagy (Baroque oboe, recorders, and voice), Elena Mullins (soprano), Allison Monroe (violin, viola,

and voice), Rebecca Reed (cello), and Mark Edwards (harpsichord) — transformed themselves into the ideal Edinburgh dance band.

The arrangements also provided an opportunity for Nagy, Mullins, and Monroe to showcase their vocal prowess, as they did during a magical rendition of *As I came o'er the Cairney Mount*, which opened the program. During *The bonny boatman*, Monroe showed off her fiddling chops, underscoring Mullins' clear delivery of the text, while Edwards provided some inventive solo lines.

However it was during *A red, red rose* and *William and Margaret* that Mullins' richly hued voice filled the room with crystalline tones. Robert Burns' poetry took on a deep introspection, while the ghastly tale of William, who betrayed his lover Margaret while she was alive, finds her returning from the grave to confront him with his misdeeds. Suffice to say that things don't end well for William.

While many of those songs' lyrics were on the darker side, each was followed by a set of energetic dances. Monroe brought lively fiddling to *I love my love in secret* and the ensemble was in fine form during a set of Caledonian Country Dances — *Scornful Nancy*, *Galloway Tom*, and *Bonnie Lass Reel*. And Edwards again took center stage during Niel Gow's *Major Graham*.

The final set of works began with a splendid performance of *The Broom of Cowdenknows* featuring the vocal trio of Mullins, Nagy, and Monroe and led into three foot-stomping dances — *Lady Doll Sinclair's Reel*, *Border Reel*, and *Rantan, Rantan Highland-man*.

“The Highland Lassie” was a great way for Les Délices to kick off their season. It's a program that has traveling legs that will hopefully reappear in a pub near you.

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