

Les Délices & Kaleidoscope: Purcell plus at Lakewood Presbyterian (Sept. 29)

by Daniel Hathaway



Debra Nagy, director of Cleveland's period instrument ensemble Les Délices, invited Arianne Abela and her geographically widespread vocal ensemble Kaleidoscope to the first installment of its 15th anniversary season on September 29 at Lakewood Presbyterian Church.

After extensive opening remarks, the two organizations collaborated in "The Pow'r of Musick," a two-hour concert intermingling works by English Baroque

composer Henry Purcell with four contemporary choral pieces, two of them by members of Kaleidoscope.

The essence of collaboration is the joining of two entities, each of which lacks something that can be supplied by the other. Les Délices doesn't run a chorus, and Kaleidoscope is a vocal ensemble that normally doesn't use instruments.

One shared quality: both groups describe themselves as advocates of diversity and underrepresented voices, something that is not so common among early music ensembles. Adding all of that together, Les Délices and Kaleidoscope presented a program that was a rich mix of possibilities.

Purcell's *Welcome to all the pleasures* and excerpts from *Hail Bright Cecilia* bookended the program — two examples of the 24 surviving courtly or royal odes he was expected to supply on state occasions. Although the lyrics are prosaic — this is not the most distinguished era of official British poetry — the choruses were festive,

and a parade of fine vocal and instrumental soloists showed their individual charms in the arias. A bit more emphasis on the composer's signature harmonic clashes would have even further enlivened the music.

Two smaller Purcell works, the *Three parts upon a ground* and *An Evening Hymn*, closed out the first half. The three intertwining treble parts were savvily played by violinists Shelby Yamin, Caitlin Hedge, and Jonathan Goya over a repeating bass line supplied by cellist Rebecca Landell Reed and violone player Sue Yelanjian and realized by continuo organist Mark Edwards.

Reed returned for the *Evening Hymn*, originally set for a single voice with continuo, but on Friday heard in an arrangement by Sebastian Gottschick which elaborated on Purcell's brilliantly simple variations over a ground bass.



Baritone Brandon Waddles' setting of *Set Me as a Seal* was expressively written and sung, while Sidney Guillaume's *This, Too, Shall Pass* was inspiring for its straightforward simplicity.



VIEW TEXT & TRANSLATIONS

Racial issues were front and center in Jonathan Woody's *Nigra sum, sed formosa: A Fantasia on Microaggressions*. Debuted at an April 2019 concert by Boston's Handel & Haydn Society, the work cleverly combines a Medieval chant setting ("I am Black but beautiful," also with words from the *Song of Songs*) with a small anthology of clueless audience remarks collected by Black classical musicians and set by Woody to neo-Baroque music. (Scan the QR

code for the texts for this concert, which weren't printed in the program book. Either way, words were difficult to make out in the church's boomy acoustic.)

Written in something of the style cultivated by contemporary Scandinavian composers, but more varied in its textures, Caroline Shaw's *And the Swallow* showed the mark of a natural composer in its first few bars.

While wishing Les Délices the happiest of 15th anniversaries, we hope the ensemble hasn't totally jettisoned its appealing 75-minute, intermissionless format.

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