

Les Délices: *Noel, Noel* from darkness into light

by Mike Telin



With the Winter Solstice and the conclusion of Advent upon us, the days grow shorter in the Northern Hemisphere — a quiet time for meditation, reflection, and anticipation that brightness will soon arrive.

On Wednesday, December 20 at 7:30 pm at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Akron, Les Délices will present *Noel, Noel*, performed by Amanda Powell (soprano), Debra Nagy (recorder and direction), Julie Andrijeski and Allison Monroe (violins), Rebecca Landell (viola da gamba), Mark Edwards (organ), and Daniel Swenberg (theorbo and Baroque guitar). The program will be repeated on Thursday at West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church and Friday at the Cultural Arts Center at Disciples Church, both at 7:30 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

Noel, Noel is divided into six sections — From Darkness, Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and To Light — each featuring carols and hymns interwoven with classic and contemporary poems. “It’s a program that is intended to draw people into the darkest nights of the year and hopefully emerge in a great and beautiful way,” Debra Nagy said during a recent conversation.

Although the program began its life as a video, Nagy said that significant changes have been made, creating a more dramatic arc for live performance. “The video was made in the first pandemic holiday season, and it was quieter and actually ended with *Silent Night*. So this feels quite different and ends with a feeling of joy.”

The element of poetry has also been revised. “I wanted to use it to not only create an atmosphere but to make links between the sections of the program.” This includes English poets Susan Cooper’s *The Shortest Day*, Christina Rossetti’s *Christmas Eve*, and Thomas Campion’s *Now Winter Nights Enlarge*. Contributions by Northeast Ohio poets include Dave Lucas’ *Three Kings* and Diane Kendig’s *At the Christmas Tree*.

Although unintended, Nagy said it was interesting how the music steered toward the 17th century. “I’m excited about the music — it’s all really beautiful. There’s enough that is familiar to feel really cozy, along with new pieces to make it really interesting for all parties, including the artists.”

The program begins with her own arrangement of the *Coventry Carol*, which dates back to the 15th century. Another Nagy arrangement will be *Drive the cold winter away*, which first appeared as an Elizabethan-era broadside ballad. “The broadside ballad is the root of all sorts of popular songs. Although their origins are in England during the 16th and 17th centuries, they were being published all the way through the 18th and 19th centuries.”

Nagy noted that “broadside” refers to the single sheet of paper on which the words to the ballads were printed. “It often said it should be sung to this or that tune, so they have well-known tunes and stories of various sorts attached to them. The ballads themselves took on lives of their own and became part of the vernacular.”

Nagy has also arranged *Lo, how a Rose e’er Blooming*. “It’s very simple — we start with the Praetorius harmonization, and Allison Monroe has improvised a beautiful violin solo. And for the final verse I also wrote a decant that Allison plays.”

Amanda Powell will be featured in Tarquinio Merula’s *Canzonetta Spirituale La Nanna*, “a super intense piece that will blow you away,” as Nagy described it. “It’s definitely at the emotional core of the program. Amanda also suggested the *Wexford Carol*, and it was fun to incorporate that into the program.”

In conclusion, Nagy said, “I’m excited to have so much beautiful music and poetry with such richness to create a strong sense of atmosphere.” What more could you ask for during the darkest time of year?

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