

## Les Délices welcomes the festive season with “Noel, Noel” (Dec. 7)

by Stephanie Manning



Once December kicks in, an almost overwhelming number of holiday programs pop up around Northeast Ohio. But Les »Délices’ offering should draw your attention.

While other festive concerts may create the atmosphere of a bustling party by the fireplace, “Noel, Noel” is like observing a snowy evening from the warmth of the indoors. This is music best enjoyed in quiet contentment, and especially live — so it’s no surprise that the early music ensemble brought

back this signature program for three performances this month.

On December 7 at West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church, the six-member group presented a lovely ninety-minute program, which is also available on CD and via [streaming](#) until the end of the year.

There’s much to explore beyond the traditional selections, but there are a number of familiar tunes — a highlight being *The Holly and The Ivy*. Soprano Elena Mullins Bailey began the piece accompanied only by a steady viola da gamba note from Rebecca Landell, one of many moments to appreciate Bailey’s sweet and beautifully supported voice.

John Playford’s *Divisions on Greensleeves* featured violinist Shelby Yamin as her melody wound through a theme and variations, supplemented by interludes from viola da gamba and organ (Mark Edwards). Recorder player and Les Délices artistic director Debra Nagy arranged other selections as cheerful instrumental interludes, including *I Saw Three Ships* and *Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing-day*.

Going a little further past the hallmarks of the genre reveals some real gems. Nagy’s arrangement of Michael Praetorius’ *In dulci Jubilo* embodied the calm and contented spirit of the program, as Edwards’ organ playing gently developed into five-part

harmony with the other instruments and voice. The effect resembled a refreshingly chilly winter's night.

The real-life weather mirrored the musical one, although to the detriment of the delicate period instruments, which required much extra tuning between pieces. The adjustments between warm and cold spaces meant they “put up a little bit of a revolt,” Nagy joked in her remarks towards the end. But patience paid off, as any effect during the selections was essentially unnoticeable.

Nagy's enjoyable arrangement of the Elizabethan-era carol *Drive the Cold Winter Away* involved all the players, including Nagy herself on recorder and Liz Loayza Herrera on second violin. Bailey joyfully delivered the octave leaps of the rhyming English text, which focused more on community togetherness than religious themes.

During a collection of Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Noëls*, Bailey's voice became more subdued as she narrated the Biblical story of Mary. In Dietrich Buxthude's short cantata *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt*, the fast counterpoint between the string players complemented the long, melismatic passages and repeated Alleluias in the voice.

The festivities continued with the beautiful cadences of Christian Geist's *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* and the holiday cheer of *The Wexford Carol*.”The group then sent us off with a final Nagy arrangement, *Make we joy now in the fest*, which satisfyingly alternates between English and Latin to fit the rhymes. It was a good reminder of the spirit of celebration — as were the cookies and punch available on the way out.

*Photo from Dec. 6 performance at Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Cleveland Heights*

*Published on [ClevelandClassical.com](http://ClevelandClassical.com) December 11, 2025*

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