

**Les Délices presents *Starstruck*:  
music by a young George Frideric Handel**

by Mike Telin



When you think of music by George Frideric Handel, the first works that come to mind are likely to be his large-scale oratorios such as *Messiah*, *Israel in Egypt*, and *Solomon*.

“People think of Handel’s *Gloria* as a showpiece for soprano and small ensemble,” Les Délices artistic director Debra Nagy said. “But *Silete venti*, which is not often heard, is an extraordinary showpiece for a soprano and I think it’s going to be a real thrill to play.”

On Friday, April 24 at 7:30 pm at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Akron, Les Délices will present *Starstruck*. The all-Handel program highlights the composer’s brilliant chamber music along with dramatic early cantatas brought to life by the magnetic soprano Hannah DePriest. The program will be repeated on Saturday at Heights Theater and Sunday at West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church. Both concerts begin at 4:00 pm, and tickets are available [online](#).

This week’s concerts coincide with the release of the ensemble’s newest CD, [Arcadian Dreams](#), featuring Hannah DePriest. “The CD is officially out, so these concerts are our Cleveland release celebration,” Nagy said.

In addition to *Silete venti*, the playlist also includes “Come in ciel benigna stella” and “Felicissima quest’alma” from *Apollo e Dafne*, along with the *Concerto*

*Grosso in G*, Op. 3 no. 3, and *Trio Sonata in A* Op. 5 no. 1, played by Debra Nagy (oboe & recorder), Shelby Yamin and Laura Lutzke (violins), Kate Goddard (viola), Rebecca Landell (cello), and Mark Edwards (harpsichord).

Nagy noted that audiences were thrilled by the vitality of the music that Handel was writing in his early 20s. “All the music on the Starstruck program is really from the first ten to fifteen years of his career when the young Handel is bowling everyone over with his energy and ceaseless fountain of ideas.”

Indeed, audiences were taken by the young composer’s music — his biographer John Mainwaring wrote, “They were thunderstruck with the grandeur and sublimity of his style: for never had they known till then all the powers of harmony and modulation so closely arrayed, and so forcibly combined...”

“Mainwaring was writing 30 or 40 years later about these events, so you have to take it with a grain of salt, but it’s still such a fabulous image,” Nagy said.

Given that the music on the program and CD was written when Handel was in his 20s and it was so well-received by audiences, why hasn’t it made its way to the concert stage more often?

“I think it’s the unfortunate fate of, let’s call it private music, as opposed to big public spectacles like opera or even oratorio. We take these big works as kind of the standard, to the neglect of other things.”

Handel was also a famous self-borrower. Music from his early cantatas often end up in his operas.

“Most of the instrumental music on this program can trace itself back to Handel’s *Chandos Anthems*,” Nagy said. “They’re publications from the 1730s, but they represent music that he was writing in the 1710s — 20 years earlier. So there’s a certain amount of creative reuse, especially when Handel felt like he hit on a great idea. So they resurface as ‘great works,’ but they were great to begin with. I don’t know what else to say other than it’s a really cool project to bring all these to life — not that they were ever really dead.”

Nagy said that she has been interested in cantatas as a vocal chamber music form for a long time. “There’s so much richness there, and I really appreciate the kind of power and the directness that you get from this small scale format. The pieces themselves aren’t necessarily small scale but they’re for smaller forces. And you’re

bringing them to audiences in a relatively intimate environment. It's a from me to you situation, which is also something I enjoy."

Nagy is happy to have been able to work with Hannah De Priest both on this program and on the recording.

"She's so well organized and easy to deal with," Nagy said. "There's a lot of warmth and generosity in her singing. She's also at a point in her career where she's rising fast. She has brought so much to the table. So much study, diligence, and commitment to expression, and she wants the audience to feel every bit as excited about this music as they did in the 18th century. I think this is a fun program and a great showpiece for her because the singing that she gets to do is quite literally thrilling."

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