

Les Délices and soprano Hannah de Priest leave audiences “Starstruck” (Apr. 26)

by Stephanie Manning



Part season finale, part album release party, Les Délices’ recent “Starstruck” program celebrated both its past and its future.

The group’s latest CD, *Arcadian Dreams* — released on March 13 — collects a group of pastoral pieces that local audiences heard live in 2024, featuring soprano Hannah de Priest. Last week, de Priest marked the album’s release by returning for “Starstruck,” a program of music exclusively by Georg Frederic Handel. The

performances toured Akron and Cleveland Heights before the final rendition on Sunday, April 26, at Rocky River’s West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church.

Les Délices have been more than happy to support the exciting, early career of de Priest, who first met artistic director Debra Nagy as a Case Western Reserve University student and currently works as the group’s communications director. As Nagy put it, Les Délices decided to record a CD with her before anyone else did — and the wisdom of that choice is apparent once you hear her sing.

The soprano revealed a voice of equal power and sweetness during two arias from *Apollo e Dafne*, both about Daphne’s commitment to holding calm in the face of danger. de Priest threaded through the instrumental textures during “Come in ciel benigna stella” and rode the broader waves during “Felicissima quest’alma.”

The latter benefited from an intro of string pizzicatos under a lovely oboe solo from Nagy, before de Priest briefly dipped into a gorgeous low register during the second verse.

Violinists Shelby Yamin and Laura Lutzke, cellist Rebecca Landell, and harpsichordist Mark Edwards created a playful dialogue during the Trio Sonata Op. 5 No. 1 in A Major, trading back and forth between the continuo and the violins.

Nagy and violist Kate Goddard completed the group of six for the opening Concerto Grosso in G Major, Op. 3 No. 3, with its two slow and two fast movements featuring a beautiful oboe and violin blend as well as a spirited air.

de Priest returned to close things out with *Silete Venti*, HWV 242, interrupting the flurried instrumental opening with a “Be quiet, winds!” that drew chuckles from the crowd in the silence that followed. This piece provided the majority of the solo moments for the soprano, allowing for a closer appreciation of her musicality.

Her enchanting melismas delighted throughout the motet, her voice as clear as the cloudless sky that hung just outside the church windows. Though *Silete Venti* is a singular piece, it is divided into sections, which might have been helpful to note in the program. People were understandably eager to clap after certain points, like the aria “Dulcis amor, Jesu care.”

The soprano’s encore of “Now the night is chas’d away” from Henry Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen* further cemented the desire to hear her in a complete operatic role, and hopefully soon.

One more way Les Délices spotlighted the future of early music was by opening this specific “Starstruck” event with a performance by the Lakewood High School Chamber Orchestra. The string ensemble’s two-year partnership with Les Délices has allowed the group to benefit from regular coaching, led by Shelby Yamin and Rebecca Landell.

Director Michael Dandron helped outfit the young players with Baroque bows, quite an unusual advantage for high schoolers. With conductorless coordination, the Orchestra played the first three movements of Telemann’s *Don Quixote Suite* with a nice tone and plenty of spirit.

After congratulating the students as they walked offstage, Yamin and Landell gave each other a high five — rightfully celebrating the achievements of the next generation.

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