



Reprints

Feature: New Ways of Encountering Classical Music— Les Délices Gallery Concerts and Fridays@7 at Severance Hall

Published November 16, 2009

by Mike Telin & Daniel Hathaway

What makes music exciting is that musicians and organizations are always looking for new ways to present themselves to the public. Two events we attended recently made great headway in breaking out of the standard, 8:00, two hour concert format. Les Délices presented a 70-minute concert juxtaposing French Baroque music with modern art in a gallery, and the Cleveland Orchestra launched its Fridays@7 with a 70-minute orchestra concert followed by a 70-minute set of world music. In both cases, two art forms shared the same evening and complemented one another without seemingly having anything to do with one another. Both series represent new, passionate, entrepreneurial efforts on the part of individuals and organizations to attract audiences to performances of live music in an age when it's all too attractive to stay at home with one's digital music collection.

LES DÉLICES: GALLERY CONCERTS

Les Délices represents a good number of ensembles in the Cleveland area whose musicians are taking the bull by the horns and self-producing their own concerts. Founded in 2006 by Cleveland based baroque oboist Debra Nagy, Les Délices (Lay deh-LEASE) is quickly establishing itself as an expressive, dynamic group whose members are local and guest artists with national and international reputations, and share a passion for little-known works of the French Baroque.

Debra Nagy approached Bill Tregoning of Tregoning & Company last summer with the idea of performing in gallery spaces like the one he runs on West 78th Street in the Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood. Debra told us, "I wanted to find an intimate space seating between 45 and 100 people to present the very formal and stylized music of the French Baroque in a casual setting. When I recently visited Versailles, I was struck by the juxtaposition of control and chaos in the gardens and I thought this could be recreated in a concert experience."

Tregoning was instantly attracted to the idea, having admired Nagy's playing in the past and having his own vision of art plus music for his new, flexible space in a beautifully restored ware-

house. "I'm a huge fan of 18th century French Baroque music, and I want to use this space to collaborate with musicians and Cleveland artists to produce an amazing churning of artistic energy". Tregoning had previously produced concerts at his gallery in Chagrin Falls, where he collaborated with an adjoining harpsichord gallery owned by Frances Burmeister. "When Debra Nagy came to see me, I immediately said 'Yes!'.

Such an approach could sound precious or pretentious, but in the hands of people who have really thought through the concept, carefully chosen the venue and work to provide a welcoming, friendly, almost club-like environment, the experience can add up to a laid-back, intimate, fun evening of great music performed by fine musicians, as well as a way to meet new people.

Because of scheduling conflicts, the first concert in what Debra Nagy hopes will become an annual series of 3 or 4 concerts and spin off into tours, actually took place on October 10 in the William Busta Gallery at the intersection of Prospect Avenue and the Inner Belt -- a space probably completely unknown to those who usually attend classical concerts. The gallery opened at 7:30, giving the audience the opportunity to enjoy a glass of wine or punch and take in 'debris from a lost campaign', an exhibit of tiny, mixed-media pieces by Cleveland artist Laurie Ott.

After figuring out how to arrange a group of nearly 60 people in a gallery that seats 45, we settled in for an excellent concert entirely devoted to music by Marin Marais (1656-1728). This famous gambist and composer will already be familiar to those who saw Gerard Depardieu play him in the film 'Tous les Matins du Monde'. Debra Nagy was joined by violinist Julie Andrijeski, viola da gambist Josh Lee and harpsichordist Michael Spontseller in four of Marais' suites, a violin piece imitating the ringing of bells at the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève du Mont de Paris, a set of variations on 'La Folia' and 'La Gamme en forme de petit opéra', cut down -- on the composer's own advice -- from its normal 25-minute length.

As an experience, the whole evening worked very well. Sure, it was hot and crowded, but that didn't seem to matter. The players introduced each work with light-hearted comments, Marais'

music was so different in style from piece to piece that one never got bored, and it was fun listening to this music in a small space with interesting art hanging on the walls that had nothing to do with what one was hearing. And afterward, the audience had the rare opportunity to mingle with the performers and each other.

Following a format that Les Délices has established for this season, the concert was repeated again the following day in the chapel of Plymouth Church of Shaker Heights, another intimate space of a different character.

The next pair of concerts, 'Homages', including Couperin's 'Apotheosis of Lully' and other tributes to composers of the era takes place at the Tregoning & Co. Gallery, 1300 West 78th Street, Cleveland, on February 20, and at Plymouth Church, 2860 Coventry Road in Shaker Heights, on February 21. The third pair of concerts, 'Les Petits Violons du Roy' is scheduled for May 22 and 23. The gallery opens at 7:30 each evening for wine and punch and the concerts begin at 8. Plymouth Church concerts start in Herr Chapel at 4 pm.

CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA FRIDAYS@7

This season, the Cleveland Orchestra has redesigned its Friday evening concerts into a new 'Fridays@7' Series. Each of five evenings features a one-hour performance by the Orchestra, followed by a musical presentation curated by world percussionist Jamey Haddad.

For the first performance on October 9, a capacity crowd enjoyed an all-Beethoven concert including a brilliant performance of the fourth piano concerto with Mitsuko Uchida as well as a supercharged reading of the fifth symphony under Franz Welser-Möst which had everyone on the edge of their seats. First attenders must have known that they were hearing something very special tonight. The enthusiastic crowd brought Franz back for numerous bows before going out to the lobby to hear a variety of musical genres performed by the New York based Brazilian band, Cyro Baptista's Beat The Donkey, set up in the middle of the lobby.

Part two of the evening found one's self in the situation of entering a new club for the first time -- you weren't quite sure what the etiquette was. Where should I stand? Where are the bars? Am I allowed to dance? Naturally, people ended up standing on the stairways to have a view of the band -- until the fire marshal stopped the performance and told them to move to the floors (an

interruption which had a negative effect on the mood of the evening). Any glitches will certainly be worked out before the second Friday@7. For all the kinks, this was a very enjoyable evening.

The second concert, scheduled for November 20, features Alisa Weilerstein and British conductor Jonathan Nott in a concert dubbed 'Cello and Space', featuring the Dvorak Concerto ('Cello') and Richard Strauss' 'Also Sprach Zarathustra' (used in '2001, A Space Odyssey'). The second half of the evening features a special return visit by Jamey Haddad's percussion group that proved to be such a hit with audiences in Osvaldo Golijov's 'Azul' last season in partnership with Alisa Weilerstein. We talked with both Alisa and Jamey about Fridays@7.

Mike Telin: Jamie, why do you think that audience building initiatives like Fridays@7 are needed?

Jamey Haddad: Some of the Orchestra's former patrons have moved on or died out, and some of the new blood in the city has not yet embraced the orchestra -- and therefore doesn't have the same affection for the orchestra and Severance Hall that I do. I could imagine some of my friends saying, well, I might have a problem with a two and a half hour program, but a one-hour program followed by something that had a little more casual feel to it would make for a beautiful night. My challenge in programming the second half of the evening is to give people something they just wouldn't experience somewhere else.

MT: Programming orchestral and world music on the same evening could seem as an unlikely pairing to some?

JH: In a way I'm from a situation that's similar to what the orchestra is trying to do, and this seemed like a wonderful way to bring world music musicians together who should know about each other. More importantly, these are some of the best contemporary music groups, and like the Cleveland Orchestra approach their art from a very well informed body of work and tradition.

MT: On the 20th you will have the same group of musicians that performed on last year's performance of Osvaldo Golijov's "Azul" and at that performance, we were treated to a fantastic encore that included Alisa. I understand that she will be joining you after her performance of the Dvorak, and I wondering if we can expect more of what we heard that night, and will there be anything different?

JH: We only played one piece as the encore, [improvisations around the late Brazilian accordion-

ist Sivica's "Feira de Mangaio"] but between then and now, we've been practicing a few things. You know I'm always amazed at the response we get when we play that piece. I guess I attribute it to the willingness of Alisa to really put herself out there. We'll again be joined by Dylan Moffitt, a CIM percussionist, and the Japanese percussionist Keita Ogawa and of course Michael Ward-Bergeman on the hyper-accordion [which he describes as "an acoustic accordion with extended range and expressive capabilities."] Both of those guys were former students of mine at Berklee in my rhythm classes and world music ensemble. I am also going to be bringing about 20 students from my world music classes at Oberlin and the Cleveland Institute of Music who will be providing the grooves and feels off mic as kind of an accompaniment.

MT: Alisa, Regarding the Friday @ 7 series, I understand that you will be doing double duty first performing the Dvorak Concerto with the orchestra and later joining Jamey Haddad during the world music portion?

Alisa Weilerstein: Yes I am very excited about that and it's great that you were able to talk to Jamey.

MT: I heard you play the Dvorak with the Chicago Symphony back in June.

AW: Yes, and I just played it with Philadelphia. It's my Dvorak month!

MT: So what will you be doing with Jamey? Will it be something like what you did after the performance of Azul with the orchestra back in April?

AW: You heard the Azul and the encore after, so that was kind of the catalyst actually. I had done Azul with the guys many times and then, Michael and Jamey came up to me and said would you consider learning a tune for an encore, learning to improvise on stage? I was completely freaked out about improvising on stage. I had never done anything like that, but they are unbelievable

musicians as you know, and they gave me so much, just playing with them. I felt very free to do it and it went really well and we loved doing it so much that we said, we really have got to do some more of this. So we are picking out some other tunes which we will surprise you with. I don't know what Jamey told you, maybe he has spoiled the surprise

MT: No he hasn't. Like you he said, I would be in for a surprise.

AW: So, yeah, it's going to fun, it going to be really fun.

MT: Jamey, what can we expect at the following concert on January 8th to go with Tchaikovsky's fourth?

JH: A long time associate of mine, Mark Stewart, has a band called Polygraph Lounge. How do you describe what they do? It's sort of a musical satire -- in fact they usually pass out nose flutes to the audience. Its kind of like Frank Zappa meets Spike Jones meets Crosby Stills and Nash, meets Bach and Beethoven. They're so well informed on all sorts of things. Check out their website, they've got a great one. It will be a big hit.

We did check out their site www.polygraphlounge.com and it is great. We strongly recommend that you do too.

We talked about a number of other subjects both with Jamey and Alisa -- including Jamey's teaching philosophy and Alisa's day at the White House, her upcoming recording of the Elgar Concerto with Daniel Barenboim and her work with the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation -- all of which you can read on the ClevelandClassical.com Blog.

In the meanwhile, run, do not walk, to buy your tickets for Friday evening the 20th at Severance Hall. This one could also be a sellout!