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Delighting in the Baroque: Les Délices

EmilyB | Nov 6, 2009 1:06 pm

Featured Member Profile

Performing seldom-heard works from the French Baroque on period instruments, the chamber ensemble **Les Délices** is the only group in the U.S. specializing in historically-informed performances of French Baroque chamber music. Les Délices seeks to bring their captivating repertoire to a wide audience and, with a favorably-reviewed CD and active tour schedule in their native Cleveland, they are succeeding.

Director Debra Nagy, an Oberlin-trained baroque oboist, speaks of recording, touring, fundraising and her ensemble's amazing opportunity at the Metropolitan Museum of Art...

Debra, how does Les Délices stand out from other groups?

Les Délices stands out from other groups on account of its repertoire – I know of no other group in the U.S. that is dedicated to French baroque chamber music – and the instruments on which we perform it: we perform on specialized instruments at low-French chamber pitch. In Cleveland, we are the only chamber ensemble presenting its own concert series.

About the Author

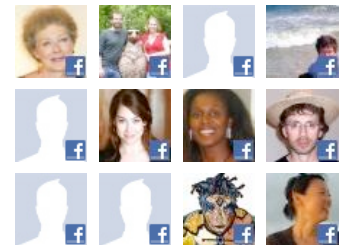
Emily Bowles is a freelance writer and editor with a chronic bend towards the arts.

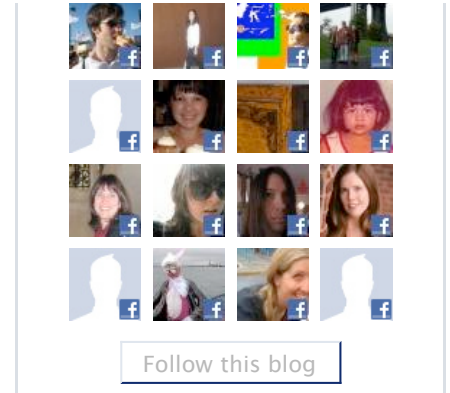


She is also the marketing director of NYC Performing Arts Spaces, a program of Fractured Atlas.



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I noticed on your concert schedule that Les Délices performs at smaller venues, such as churches and art galleries. What is it about these spaces that appeals to you?

There were many factors that led us to choosing smaller venues. First-off, I felt it was really important to put chamber music back in the “chamber.” The music we perform was first heard and appreciated in salons, which were small, social gatherings where artists, musicians, writers, and patrons all had the opportunity to interact. Presenting concerts in art galleries seemed to have many advantages. For one, the size was right. Second, most art galleries have good acoustics (high ceilings, open space, often wood floors, etc.). Third, I love the concept of creating an artistically-integrated, value-added experience for audiences. I take for granted that audiences may be unfamiliar with the music, so I want them to feel like there are so many benefits in coming out for a show, that they will and can have a good experience no matter what. As it turns out, audience response has been overwhelmingly positive. They love the intimacy of the spaces, being up close and personal with the music and musicians, the artistic atmosphere, and the social component (all the gallery concerts include a reception).

Do these venues sometimes even offer a built-in audience?



I've been able to get help from our hosts at the galleries in promoting the events to their lists of patrons. In the end, the galleries benefit from the additional exposure and foot traffic related to the concerts, and we benefit from being able to reach their audience as well.

Tell us about your newest recording – how did it come together?

Les Délices had been performing concerts for a few years as guests on regional chamber music series, so it was a natural and necessary development (artistic as well as professional) for us to record our first CD as an ensemble ([here's a sampling](#)**). We recorded with a wonderful engineer, Peter Nothnagle, who has tons of experience working with period instruments, and I feel fortunate to have a virtual “dream team” of colleagues to play with. We recorded in a beautiful space in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, in July 2008, and worked hard to get the disc out by June 2009. With the disc in hand, we now have an artistic product we can be very proud of as well as an invaluable promotional tool. I'm thrilled, too, that several tracks from the disc were chosen for inclusion on the audio-guide for a current special exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, [“Watteau, Music, and Theater.”](#) A fan and former professor of mine from Case Western Reserve University, Georgia Cowart, helped to curate the exhibit, and suggested our disc for the audio-guide.

Who or what are your biggest influences?

I could name so many influences – both artistic and intellectual! In one sense, I'm quite aware that I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing without the influence of my professors during my studies at the Oberlin Conservatory. I'm also lucky to get to perform frequently with a national pool of early musicians that I deeply respect and admire. In addition, I've been inspired by the recent work of a couple of French ensembles: [Le Poème Harmonique](#) and [Les Musiciens de Saint-Julien](#).



What has been your greatest success to date?

Our greatest success so far has been getting the CD out. It's been receiving wonderful attention and reviews in the local and national media and I couldn't be happier. I should add, though, that hearing from thrilled concertgoers following our performances is most gratifying!

What have been some of your biggest challenges?

Logistical issues always loom large, but I like to think that where there's a vision, there's a way. I love that I have been able to hand-pick musician colleagues who share my passion and dedication to this music, but it can mean that I need to bring in musicians from out of town. So, I have to pay for travel expenses, sometimes car rentals, and arrange for home-stays for musicians. Moving harpsichords around is also a pain, and it can make touring challenging. However, Cleveland has [a very supportive arts culture](#), so I've been pleasantly surprised by the amount of help and support I've received dealing with these issues, and in promoting events. (Naturally, trying to get your name out there on a very limited budget is a challenge we all face!)

How did you find out about Fractured Atlas and what motivated you to become a member?

Believe it or not, I learned about Fractured Atlas from my accountant. She's wonderful, she's a musician, and she also specializes in doing musicians' taxes. Several of her clients are Fractured Atlas members, and she highly recommended [fiscal sponsorship](#), and FA in particular, for helping to raise funds for an artistic project.

How do you use your Fractured Atlas membership?

So far I have just used FA for help in collecting tax-deductible donations in support of our artistic projects. At this point, I am about to launch another fundraising campaign in support of our current and future concert seasons in Cleveland. In the coming months, I hope begin applying for our first [grants](#).



What's next on your professional horizon?

Well, we have two more sets of [concerts](#) in this, our inaugural season. I'm also busy planning our concerts for the 2010-11 season, including an east coast tour. I'd also love to record a second CD in 2010.

How can we hear more music by Les Délices?

Visit our website, www.lesdelices.org, and click on our "Recordings" page to hear clips from live performances. Les Délices' [CD](#) is available from CDBaby, and is available for download from digstation.com, iTunes, and a host of other services. And of course, there's our live concerts: we present three concert sets per year in northeast Ohio, in intimate settings that encourage cooperation and mutual interest between local visual and performing artists.

* * * * *

***Music clip: Excerpt from Pierre-Danican Philidor's "Cinquième Suite" (Gigue), performed by Debra Nagy (baroque oboe), Emily Walhout (viola da gamba), and Lucas Harris (theorbo) from Les Délices' CD "The Tastes Reunited".*

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About Fractured Atlas

Fractured Atlas is a non-profit organization that serves a national community of artists and arts organizations. Our programs and services facilitate the creation of art by offering vital support to the artists who produce it. We help artists and arts organizations function more effectively as businesses by providing access to funding, healthcare, education, and more, all in a context that honors their individuality and independent spirit. By nurturing today's talented but underrepresented voices, we hope to foster a dynamic and diverse cultural landscape of tomorrow.

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