

## Early-music ensemble Les Delices serves up some delicious Baroque treats

Posted by [jkappes](#) February 19, 2008 11:08AM

Along with the many advantages of his position, Louis XIV had the wherewithal to keep composers, players and singers occupied. The "Sun King" allowed music to flourish at Versailles, where he invited select subjects to hear new works in his private chambers.

### REVIEW

#### Les Delices

West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church, Rocky River

Monday, Feb. 18

Les Delices, a Cleveland-based early-music group, devotes itself to French Baroque repertoire, including pieces Louis XIV had a hand in commissioning. The ensemble's concert Monday for the Rocky River Chamber Music Society at West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church focused on a handful of these delights.

Many of the composers on the program were the cream of the day. The celebrated names were Jean-Baptiste Lully and Francois Couperin, but they had equals in musical imagination in Marin Marais, Jean-Henry d'Anglebert, Pierr Danican Philidor and Benigne de Bacilly.

To each of these composers' works, Les Delices applied rhythmic buoyancy, suave phrasing and seamless interplay. The group's founder, Debra Nagy, is a Baroque oboist of consummate taste and expressivity, with a timbre of mellow woodsiness that explores worlds of nuance.

Nagy was a motivating presence in every work she touched. Lully's Sonata in C major from "Trois pour la coucher du Roy" found her trading phrases deftly with Baroque violinist Scott Metcalfe. Their dialogues with viola da gamba player Emily Walhout and harpsichordist Lisa Goode Crawford were compelling.

Philidor, an oboist when not composing, wrote many scores for transverse flute that oboists have appropriated. His Cinquieme Suite gives the oboe ample opportunity to weave florid and invigorating material with viola da gamba and harpsichord.

Crawford's artistry at the keyboard was a model of balance in ensemble works and charismatic in a solo piece, d'Anglebert's Tombeau de M. de Chambonnieres, an elegy for the composer's teacher. The harpsichordist exulted in the trills and ornamental figures, even as she maintained a sure sense of line.

Marais' Suite in G major for viola da gamba and harpsichord brought Walhout to the fore. Her playing gave mellifluous voice to the dance pieces, as well as earthy appeal to the final hunting minuet, along with swaggering harpsichord. In the composer's Suite in G minor, the full ensemble set each movement in energized or yearning motion.

Nagy and Metcalfe relished the unison lines between oboe and violin in Couperin's Deuxieme Suite from "Concerts Royaux," which contains descriptive contrasts of dynamics in the final "Echos" movement.

Louis XIV also had singers at his command, though instrumentalists found their music so alluring that they tweaked them for wordless treatment. Even without texts to tell the story, Les Delices probed the emotional contours of three de Bacilly songs in fine arrangements by Nagy. The results were delicious.

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Footer