

Early Music Hawaii
presents

Les Délices

Sophie Michaux mezzo-soprano

James Reese tenor

Scott Metcalfe vielle and gothic harp

Debra Nagy recorders, douçaines, harp, and voice

The 14th Century Avant-Garde



Saturday, November 11, 2023, at 7:30 pm
Lutheran Church of Honolulu
1730 Punahou Street

Sunday, November 12, 2023, at 3:30 pm
Queen Emma Community Center
Kealakekua

WESTAF

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and the National Endowment for the Arts

Les Délices

Fourteenth-Century Avant-garde

I. Song as Object

- Ma fin est mon commencement Guillaume de Machaut
(c. 1300-1377)
La harpe de la melodie Jacob de Senleches (fl. 1380s)
Tout par compas Baude Cordier (c.1380–1440)

II. Perfection in Nature

- Rose, liz, printemps, verdure Machaut
O rosa bella (instrumental) Johannes Ciconia (c. 1370–1412)
Rose sans per Anonymous

III. Courtly Love – Circles of Influence

- Esperance qui en mon cuer Anonymous
Ay mi! Dame de valour & Je vivoie liement Machaut
(instrumental) (arr. Nagy)
En amer a douce vie Machaut

IV. Triumph of Reason – Music and Mathematics

- Pictagoras, Jabol et Orpheus Johannes Suzoy (fl. 1380s)
De ce que foul pense (instrumental) Pierre de Molins
(fl. mid-14th century)
Sience n'a nul annemi Matheus de Sancto Johanne
(d. by 1391)

V. Carnal Pleasure – or, The Birds and the Bees

- Bel fiore dança Anonymous (Faenza Codex)
Ma tre dol rossignol Borlet? (Trebol?) (fl. c. 1400)
He tres doulz rossignol Borlet
Je voy le bon temps Anonymous

Sophie Michaux, *mezzo-soprano* James Reese, *tenor*
Scott Metcalfe, *vielle and gothic harp*
Debra Nagy, *recorders, douçaines, harp, and voice*

Notes on the Program

This is a concert about ideas: exploring them, manipulating them, playing, pushing, and prodding to see just how far they might stretch – and how far performers might stretch to meet the ideas’ expectations.

The fourteenth century was a high point in the intellectual life of Europe when scholars at newly-established universities reintroduced the work of Classical thinkers and pursued cutting-edge approaches in mathematics and philosophy. In addition, the political infighting that resulted in the great Papal Schism (1378–1418) further rent the Catholic Church’s stronghold on the pursuit of knowledge. By extension, the fourteenth-century composers represented on this evening’s program felt free to explore their craft from a radically new perspective. Instead of adopting the traditional viewpoint of music as divinely inspired, they sought to reconcile music with the physical properties – both observed and hypothetical – operating in the natural world.

Composers working in a style that we today call “Ars Subtilior” (the more subtle art) sought increasingly to conceive of music and time not in relation to the Holy Trinity, but with respect to mathematical abstraction. They invented new musical symbols to express their ideas or sometimes used old symbols in profoundly new ways. The fourteenth century’s unparalleled freedom of thought and increasing secularization inspired innovative composers to write music that fearlessly explored rhythmic complexity and flirted with the limits of what is possible in performance. The results make for intoxicating listening and music that – even today – sounds remarkably modern.

Tonight’s program thus explores the close connections between mathematics, science, symbol, and sound in late-fourteenth-century France.

We begin with two “high-concept” works that are beautiful and captivating. I have always been fascinated by songs that seem conscious of their own existence: they are songs about being songs in which the song itself even hints at how it ought to be performed. If

that's not enough of a tautological mind-game for you, then consider that Guillaume de Machaut's *Ma fin est mon commencement* (my end is my beginning) is an incredible musical palindrome composed in just two parts (the third part – as the song text informs us – is derived from reading the texted Cantus voice in reverse).

In the case of Jacob de Senleches' *La harpe de melodie*, the song's subject is even made manifest on the page. In a manuscript fragment that survives at Chicago's Newberry Library, Senleches' *La harpe* is transmitted in the shape of a harp – harp strings standing in for staff lines – along with unique note shapes and different colored inks that transmit such subtle instructions regarding rhythmic performance that it is akin to trying to notate a great jazz musician's solo rubato.

Another piece of so-called *augenmusik* (eye-music), Baude Cordier's *Tout par compas* is perhaps more famous for how it looks than for how it sounds. *Tout par compas* (“With a compass I was composed”) appears on the first opening of the famous Chantilly Codex (a songbook from about 1400 from which many works on tonight's concert are drawn). Various texts and tributes are inscribed within circles at the four corners of the page; two concentric circles at the center of the page transmit the music, complete with frequent changes of meter, numerical proportions, and other notational tricks. Certainly, this score (and others like it) was not meant for sight-reading, but for puzzling over in appreciation of its wit, charm, and complexity.

Our second set, Perfection in Nature, explores the symbolism of flowers and, in particular, the rose. *Rose sans per* exemplifies the rose's symbolic fluidity: it may symbolize profane love one moment and the peerless Queen of Heaven (the Virgin Mary) at another. In Machaut's beautiful four-voice rondeau *Rose, liz, printemps*, the rose and lily evoke the purity, sweetness, and fleeting quality of springtime.

Just as the Rose might symbolize springtime or the Virgin Mary, in the famous lyric poem, *Le Roman de la Rose*, it symbolized the object of love onto which the lover projects his psychological drama. The influential *Roman de la Rose* survives in no less than 300 manuscripts, and its allegorical characters (such as *Amour-love*, *Bel Accueil-fair welcome*, *Dangier-danger*, or *Esperance-hope*) loomed large in the cultural imagination for at least 300 years. In fact, the character of Esper-

ance played a major part in Machaut's lyric *Le Remede de Fortune* (from which the beautiful four-voice balladelle *En amer a douce vie* is drawn).

En amer a douce vie in turn became the source for musical and poetic citations in a number of related songs by other composers (including the rondeau that opens the third set, *Esperance qui en mon cuer*). Citation was not simply about paying tribute to a respected composer or work. Rather, composers might lift a whole phrase of music (perhaps with its original text) from another piece (today, we call this plagiarism!) or even create a new work where every phrase was borrowed from a different piece! In effect, citation became a sort of coded game whose delight rested on recognition. It also points out the close relationships between these composers and their overlapping circles of influence.

As Suzoy's ballade *Pictagoras* implies, the composers of the fourteenth-century avant-garde saw themselves as inheritors of musical and intellectual traditions stretching back to the Classical philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras (who theorized the proportions of string lengths and their corresponding pitches) and beyond. For instance, Jubol (or Jubal) is a musician mentioned in the book of Genesis, while Orpheus is the legendary musician and poet of Greek myth. While the song's subject honors ancient musicians, its music is state-of-the-art with use of complex proportions and each voice notated in different, frequently-changing meters. The inherent message of Matheus de Sancto Johanne's *Science n'a nul annemi* (Science has no enemy but ignorance) is apt even in our own time. While the piece is far simpler rhythmically than *Pictagoras* (and thus not overly "scientific"), it is rife with challenging harmonies.

Our final set is inspired by the sounds of nature as symbols of love and fidelity. Birds and their songs have long been associated with rebirth, springtime, and love, but the specific birds mentioned in these works – the Nightingale (*rossignol*), Cuckoo (*cucu*), and Lark (*alouette*) – each held specific meaning. In *Ma tre dol rossignol joly*, the Lark assumes its traditional role as a messenger (liasing with the Nightingale) and retains its identity as the only bird that sings while flying up towards the heavens.

—Debra Nagy

The Artists

“A baroque oboist of consummate taste and expressivity” (Cleveland Plain Dealer), **Debra Nagy**, director, is one of North America’s leading performers on the baroque oboe. Inspired by a creative process that brings together research, composition in historical styles, improvisation, and artistic collaboration, recent projects have included critically-acclaimed multimedia productions of Machaut’s medieval masterpiece *Remede de Fortune*, music from the *Leuven Songbook* (c. 1470), and an acclaimed CD combining jazz and French Baroque airs called *Songs without Words*, and *The White Cat*, a pastiche Baroque opera for singers and chamber ensemble with puppetry and projections based on the Countess D’Aulnoy’s 1690s feminist fairytale. Debra was awarded a 2022 Cleveland Arts Prize (Mid-Career Artist) and honored with the 2022 Laurette Goldberg Prize from Early Music America for her outreach work with *Les Délices*. In addition to her work with *Les Délices*, Debra plays principal oboe with Boston’s *Handel & Haydn Society*, *American Bach Soloists*, *Apollo’s Fire*, and many other ensembles. When not rehearsing, performing, or dreaming up new projects, Debra can be found cooking up a storm in her kitchen or commuting by bike from her home in Cleveland’s historic Ohio City neighborhood.

Scott Metcalfe is musical and artistic director of *Blue Heron*, acclaimed by *The Boston Globe* as “one of the Boston music community’s indispensables,” and music director of New York City’s *Green Mountain Project* (Jolle Greenleaf, artistic director), whose performances of music by Monteverdi and others have been hailed by *The New York Times* as “quite simply terrific.” Metcalfe has been guest director of *TENET* (New York), the *Handel & Haydn Society* (Boston), *Emmanuel Music* (Boston), the *Tudor Choir* and *Seattle Baroque*, *Pacific Baroque Orchestra* (Vancouver, BC), *Quire Cleveland*, the *Dryden Ensemble* (Princeton, NJ), and *Early Music America’s* 2011 *Young Performers Festival Ensemble*. He also enjoys a career as a baroque violinist, playing with *Les Délices* (dir. Debra Nagy) and other ensembles. When not playing or directing, he is at work on a new edition of the songs of Gilles Binchois and teaches

vocal ensemble repertoire and performance practice at Boston University. Metcalfe received a bachelor's degree from Brown University, where he majored in biology, and a master's degree in historical performance practice from Harvard.

Praised for her “warm, colorful mezzo” by Opera News, **Sophie Michaux** has become one of North-America's most versatile and compelling vocalists. Born in London and raised in the French Alps, Sophie's unique background informs her artistic identity, making her feel at home in an eclectic span of repertoire ranging from grand opera to French cabaret songs. Recent solo engagements include the role of Alcina in Caccini's *La Liberation di Ruggiero dall'Isola d'Alcina* (Haymarket Opera), Olofernes in Scarlatti's *La Giuditta* (Haymarket Opera), and the Alto solos in the Handel' *Dixit Dominus* (Upper Valley Baroque), DeFalla's *El Amor Brujo* (Lowell Chamber Orchestra). She is thrilled to collaborate with Blue Heron, The Lorelei Ensemble, Les Délices, The Boston Early Music Festival, Roomful of Teeth, Bach Collegium San Diego, Palaver Strings, and others. Last season, she was also part of the Lorelei Ensemble's US tour, premiering *Her Story* by Julia Wolfe with the Boston, Chicago, Nashville, and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras.

James Reese is a frequently sought tenor soloist with leading orchestras and ensembles throughout North America and Europe. A noted interpreter of baroque music, James gives performances that are both “splendid” (San Francisco Chronicle) and “captivating” (Broad Street Review). He regularly collaborates with notable performers including Philharmonia Baroque, Tafelmusik, the Boston Early Music Festival, the American Bach Soloists, and the Portland Baroque Orchestra. He won a GRAMMY award as a soloist in 2023, appearing on the album *Born* released by The Crossing. James is also an active recitalist, frequently collaborating with pianist Daniel Overly in song recitals throughout the United States. He is a graduate of Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music, and holds a masters degree from Yale University's School of Music. He lives in Philadelphia.

Translations

Ma fin est mon commencement

My end is my beginning and my beginning my end.
My third part moves in retrograde thrice only and so ends.

La harpe de melodie

The harp of melody, created without melancholy from pleasure,
must surely please all who hear, play, and see its harmony.

Tout par compas suy composés

With a compass was I composed in this circle as befits me.
To sing me more correctly, behold how I am composed.
Three times in total by your count, you can chase me joyously.

Rose, liz, printemps, verdure

Rose, lily, springtime, greenery, flowers, balm, and sweet perfume.
Fair one, you surpass them all in sweetness and good gifts of Nature
are yours—thus I adore you.

Rose sans per, de toutes separée

Rose without peer, apart from all others,
none can be compared to you,
for you are crowned above all and the true flower of beauty.

Esperance qui en mon cuer s'embat

Hope, which enters into my heart, makes me feel the sweet life of
love. But False Dominion refuses and battles Hope, which enters into
my heart. He shall not fall unless fought by Free Heart, who reigns
over sweetness.

En amer a douce vie

To be in love is a sweet life, happy for him who knows how to live it.
It is a sweet trouble to bear, which brings joy to the heart of a lover
and his lady. So love must be cherished and served, so much can she
help one who asks. She can protect from death and heal a heart that
begs for health.

Pictagoras, Jubol, et Orpheus

Pythagoras, Jubal, and Orpheus were the first fathers of melody. According to scripture, they listened to its sweetness and harmony. Thus those who live now should praise their mastery and affirm that music is the fount of all honor and the sovereign of love.

Science n'a nul ennemi

Science has no enemy except the ignorant. They are jealous and destroy melody with loud cries. Those who shout loudest have no sense of rhythm, pitch, or proportion. They say they are friends but resort to False Seeming. Accursed be such partisans.

Ma tre dol rossignol

Cantus 1: My sweet, pretty nightingale, who calls “Oci, oci, oci,” I beg you go now to my beautiful lady and tell her she has killed me. Tell of my pure heart. Lark, who flies so high sing “lyry, lyry,” to my lady and say my heart is leaping.

Cantus 2: Lark, calling after the nightingale, make good accord between my fair lady and me and beg her to grant me mercy. Sweet nightingale come speak with me.

Tenor: Fair nightingale of the wood, bid the peasant “Bad Morning” then death.

Hé, tres doulx rossignol joly

Cantus: Hey, sweetest nightingale, who calls “Oci, oci, oci,” pray call my lady now. Tell her I swear that she has killed me if she does not soften her heart. Lark, who flies so high, tell my lady that my heart is suffering, that I beseech you have mercy.

Tenor: Fair nightingale of the wood, bid the peasant “Bad Morning,” then death.

Je voy le bon tens venir

I see the good season arrive and the trees turn green again. I will devote myself to Love and serve him always. One in love cannot suffer evil. You want me to make my fair lady happy. But she makes me suffer and I alone must behave as best I can.

Sponsors and Contributors

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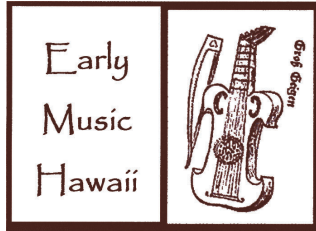
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Early Music Hawaii thanks the **Lutheran Church of Honolulu** and **Queen Emma Community Center** in Kealahou for continuing to host our concerts for the past decade and more. Their spaces resonate with the exceptional acoustics and warm aloha which suit the early music repertoire so well.



Early Music Hawaii is a non-profit organization established in 2004 to promote the performance and enjoyment of medieval, renaissance, and early baroque music in our islands and to encourage historical performance practices. Each concert season, we present two vocal and instrumental concerts in Honolulu, all with local performers. We also present two leading professional ensembles from the mainland who perform in Honolulu and Kona. Both local and visiting ensembles also provide outreach to schools.

Donations

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Join us again for the remaining concerts of the season:

Tourdions!
Renaissance Dances and Circle Songs *with*
Ciaramella

Saturday, March 9, 2024, at 7:30 pm
Lutheran Church of Honolulu

Sunday, March 10, 2024, at 3:30 pm
Queen Emma Community Center, Kealakekua



Rome 1600
Glories of the Early Italian Baroque *with*
The Early Music Hawaii Ensemble

Saturday, May 18, 2024, at 7:30 pm
Lutheran Church of Honolulu

