

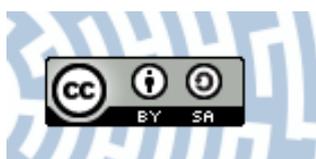


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Wanderer, Interpreter, Guide

The Honoris Causa Doctorate bestowed today upon Maestro Jordi Savall by the University of Silesia in Katowice is not only a testimony to our academic community's admiration for a preeminent artist, but also an expression of the highest esteem, in which we all hold a great humanist: the man who transformed the study and performance of early music into a platform of peaceful rapprochement and mutual fascination, creating a space where artists and music lovers of many cultures and nations meet sharing the spirit of compassion. In the world scarred by historical rifts – and splitting further, time and time again – Jordi Savall carries out his tireless work of transgressing historical and political boundaries to offer us a meeting of minds in the only universal language ever invented by man: the language of music.

For centuries, the impact that music exerts on living beings has been the source of fascination and anxiety alike. Classical stories about the power of music – looming large in the *Odyssey* by Homer or in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – paint it as a captivating force, which neither humans, nor animals, nor even gods themselves, are able to resist. The beauty of the human voice or the mesmerizing sound of the instrument allowed many a musically talented hero to tame beasts, stir emotions in the hearts of the immortals, and even cross from one world into another. When I reflect upon Maestro Savall's extraordinary artistic and academic achievements and on the eminence of his persona, it is this unique dimension of music, engraved deeply into the mythological foundations of our culture, that

strikes me as particularly important in the context of the present ceremony: music has the power to penetrate thresholds between worlds.

In Book 12th of the *Odyssey*, Homer narrates the story of his hero's encounter with the Sirens. Forewarned by Circe, Odysseus understands that no being can resist the enchanting power of their song, but he also realises that the experience of rapture only comes at the price of death. Although the king of Ithaca yearns to hear the Sirens sing, his own untimely demise is not the price he would be ready to pay. Therefore, he orders his crew to tie him to the mast and has his companions plug their own ears with wax. Yet, the power of the song of the Sirens cannot be reduced solely to its sound or melody: the deadly singers lure sailors with the promise of wisdom to be gained from their song:

Oh stay, O pride of Greece! Ulysses, stay!
Oh cease thy course, and listen to our lay!
Blest is the man ordain'd our voice to hear,
The song instructs the soul, and charms the ear.
Approach! thy soul shall into raptures rise!
Approach! and learn new wisdom from the wise!
We know whate'er the kings of mighty name
Achieved at Ilion in the field of fame;
Whate'er beneath the sun's bright journey lies.
Oh stay, and learn new wisdom from the wise!

(translated by Alexander Pope)

The lesson that the myth offers is that music can make us forget about ourselves and want to hear about other people's experiences, about "whate'er the kings of mighty name achieved at Ilion in the field of fame." The workings of the sounds render us powerless not to succumb to the power of music, regardless of possible historical and cultural distance, and irrespective of our limitations in the command of the plethora of languages in which human tribes of the world have recorded their his-

tories and experiences. Surrendering to the language of sounds, we give words access to our inner selves: the speech-of-sounds thus triumphs over the foreignness of the speech-of-words. For more than half a century, Jordi Savall has been working tirelessly as a persistent builder of musical bridges spanning times and cultures. He is an Interpreter and a Guide, leading us through long-departed worlds that he revives in his albums and concerts. His stunning knowledge, his musical talent, his unlimited openness, and his matchless readiness to admire – and to be amazed by – the musical traditions that he tirelessly studies, all render him a semi-magical figure. He appears among us like the mysterious musician of Hamelin, of whose power over others Goethe wrote thus:

Arrogant though the boys could be,
However coy the girls would seem,
All of them now must follow me,
Caught in my net of vibrant strings.

(J. W. Goethe, *Der Rattenfänger*,
translated from the German original by Paweł Jędrzejko)

Jordi Savall’s music, albeit just as seductive, does not inspire a mindless trance; conversely, it engages one in a thoughtful participation in the polyphony of a variety of often unfamiliar or forgotten languages, in the discourse of a multitude of different, often isolated, cultures, as well as in the consonance of a myriad of collective and individual experiences that set people apart as often as they bring them together.

In Karl Kerényi’s *Hermes Guide of Souls* I have come across the following sentence: “In the favor of the Guide is revealed the true essence of God.”¹

¹ Karl Kerényi, *Hermes Guide of Souls*, translated from German by Murray Stein, Revised Edition with a new preface by Charles Boer (Putnam, Connecticut: Spring Publications Inc., 1976), 91.

In my understanding, the “God” of the quotation is tantamount to the idea of the humanities without political boundaries, without academic walls, and happening in an open world, through which we are led by a Pilgrim and a Guide rediscovering abandoned paths and blazing new trails. Involved in a conversation with Jordi Savall, the Artist and the Scholar, which, by virtue of his music, has kept us constantly engaged for half a century, we experience the impossible: we forget about the boundaries between the present and the past, about the differences between styles and genres, about political and cultural borders. Through our ears, we receive an image of the world that is *undivided* and *common*. And yet, this borderless, garrulous, singing world is contained in the hospitality of viola da gamba: an instrument, in whose body Spanish, Celtic, Turkish, Hebrew, and dozens of other melodies live in unison. With each new album and with each new concert Maestro Savall reinforces his thesis that a global human community free from uniformization, unreduced to one language, tradition, or set of values – is possible. The condition for such a community of differences to develop is the shared knowledge of its members’ respective pasts and of the uniqueness of their musical cultures, combined with the immovable will to bring human voices and instruments together, allowing them to resonate in a dialogue such as the one that Jordi Savall has been fostering for years with hundreds of artists from many parts of the world.

Among his plentiful recordings, Maestro Jordi Savall’s great intercultural projects – such as *Jérusalem*; *Mare nostrum*; *Orient-Occident*; *The Routes of Slavery*; or *Venezia Millenaria* – prove beyond doubt that *through music* it is possible to enter into, and sustain, an unimaginably difficult conversation: one carried out in several languages simultaneously, and therefore one simultaneously empowering voices expressing cultural perspectives as divergent as those of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Most importantly, however, apart from the sheer feasibility of the idea, these

works have demonstrated with utmost clarity that such a conversation may be harmonious, kind, and beautiful.

Ryszard Koziółek

Translated by Paweł Jędrzejko