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In Johannes Vermeer's painting *The Music Lesson*, also known as *A Lady at the Virginals with a Gentleman* (ca. 1662-1665), a young woman plays the eponymous instrument. The inscription engraved on the bottom of its lid reads: *Musica laetitiae comes – medicina dolorum* (Music is a companion to joy and a medicine for pains). In the light of these words, music is not only, as Nikolaus Harnoncourt puts it, a unique "speech of sounds." Exceeding its own limits, music is much more: it *heals* people and sparks off *joy* in their hearts. As such, it alleviates pain and soothes wounds, but also relieves one from the burden of sadness and sweetens the bitterness of the darkest melancholia; it can create a good mood, prompt merriment, or transform mundane moments of human life into truly Epicurean experiences. For centuries, these properties of music have been attested to by such masters of literature as the Polish Renaissance poet Jan Kochanowski, who formulates the following observation in one of his *Songs*:

[...] when a worthy company at the feast assembles
good thought joins swiftly, especially astute
if not without the lute.
The lute – chief of dance and of all learned songs
The lute – chill soothing thoughts fiery for too long
(Song 16, Book II. Translated by Paweł Jędrzejko)

Likewise, in *The Book of the Courtier* count Baldesar Castiglione emphasizes the healing properties of the art of sounds:

[...] in Apulia musical instruments are used for those bitten by the tarantula, and various tunes are tried until the humour that causes the malady (through a certain affinity it has for some one of those tunes) is suddenly stirred by the sound, and so excites the sick man that he is restored to health by virtue of that excitement.¹

A musical instrument, as is evident, wields a remarkable power. Kochanowski attributed this potency to the lute; other Renaissance artists ascribed it to the viola da gamba. Unlike the cello, viola da gamba is not equipped with an endpin and therefore, as the Italian attribute in this unique instrument's name suggests, most of its types are held vertically, the body of the viol resting on the musician's thigh or between his or her knees ("gamba" - "leg"). Owing to this, the instrument fuses with the musician's body, becoming, in a sense, a "human voice."

A viola da gamba is also present in Vermeer's *The Music Lesson*. The instrument lies on a geometrically tiled floor, near the virginals, half-obscured by a lavender-coloured chair adorned with glittering studs standing by a table covered with a richly embroidered tablecloth. On the top, a meticulously rendered porcelain jug on a silver tray draws the viewer's attention; the chalky, intense white of the vessel is almost dazzling. The viol lies there, mute and abandoned, as if sensing its fate. The onset of the Age of Reason doomed one of the most popular instruments of the Renaissance and the Baroque to oblivion. The soft, subtle, misty voice of the viol was muffled by the strong sounds of dynamic cellos, which, next to violins, came to dominate the inventory of musical instruments at the beginning of the Romantic era. The viola da gamba, however, was not ultimately silenced. Commenting upon the enthusiasts of obsolete names, in Volume 2 of his *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust shares the follow-

¹ Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 15.

ing observation with his audience: “by drawing upon their collections of ancient and sonorous words, [they] give themselves concerts like the people who acquire viols da gamba and viols d’amour so as to perform the music of days gone by upon old-fashioned instruments.”² It is also the latter type of the viol that Serenus Zeitblom, the narrator of *Doctor Faustus*, “quite incidentally” admits to owning: “it pleased me that I, too, although a student of profane studies admitted into this circle, could occasionally contribute to the entertainment by playing my viola d’amore when asked”³ (translated by John E. Woods). Practically absent from concert halls and recordings, the viol had led its secretive and silent life until Jordi Savall took it up:

When I was beginning to play the viola da gamba – he recalls many years later – there were no teachers yet to guide me. [...] I played the first compositions for the viol in 1966, and I recorded the first CD with this repertoire in 1975. So, I spent ten years playing these pieces every day. I started off with the *Premier Livre* by Marin Marais. I began with the first page, continued to the second and then to the next, step by step, in uninterrupted sequence. At the time, I would play his “pièces de viole” without the slightest idea about this music. However, as time passed, everything would gradually fall into place, until the moment when I would feel that the piece was becoming clear to me.⁴

² Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* (Volumes 1 to 7), trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1889–1930) – vols. 1 to 6 Sydney Schiff (1868–1944) – vol. 7, One More Library Ebook, 682, https://onemorelibrary.com/index.php/en/?option=com_djclassifieds&format=raw&view=download&task=download&fid=27190 (Accessed 02.11.2021).

³ Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus. The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn As Told by a Friend*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage International, 1999), 131.

⁴ Jordi Savall quoted in: Dariusz Czaja, *Kwintesencje. Pasaże barokowe* (Kraków: PWM, 2014), 65. Translated by Paweł Jędrzejko.

Between the 1960s and 1970s Jordi Savall turned to the viola da gamba and began to practice the art of playing an early instrument, soon developing a truly intricate virtuosity. As an instrumentalist, he joined Gustav Leonhardt and Nikolaus Harnoncourt who had founded their first early music ensembles a decade earlier. Since then, he has rendered an extraordinary service to the world of music, restoring a vast body of masterly compositions and reintroducing to the audiences the piercing voice of the very viol that Thomas Mann's protagonist played. As of 1975, Savall has been working hard to bring forgotten scores back from oblivion, simultaneously recording new viola da gamba albums including compositions by Marin Marais and his master and teacher Jean de Sainte-Colombe, François Couperin, Antoine Forqueray, Luis de Caix d'Hervelois, Orlando Gibbons, Anthony Holborne, Tobias Hume, William Lawes, Matthew Locke, Alfonso Ferrabosco, and Diego Ortiz, as well as collections of Celtic music, follies, and ostinato variations. Since then, he has authored a phenomenal transcription of Bach's *Kunst der Fuge* (AVSA 9818 A + B) for a Baroque viol family; working with an ensemble of gambists and the lute player José Miguel Moreno, he has demonstrated his mastery in employing the full palette of tender sounds to paint a wide gamut of the shades of human tears (see J. Dowland, *Lachrimae or Seaven Teares*, ES 8701); in collaboration with other viola da gamba masters - M. Müller, S. Watillon, S. Casademunt, W. Kuijken and P. Pierlot - he attained the pinnacle of finesse and musical precision bringing out the dense, multi-colored texture of Henry Purcell's "heavenly" *Fantasies* in his group's performance (see H. Purcell, *Fantasias for the viols* 1680, ES 8536). Over the years, the musician has managed to create a unique body of recordings, which, to allude to the title of one of his solo albums, one could collectively call *Les Voix Humaines* (see AV 9803). Abiding by the principles of historical rigor, meticulous in his work, he would systematically produce collections of ravishing songs with the accompaniment of viola da gamba and other instruments, most often

in collaboration with his late wife, Montserrat Figueras. Undoubtedly, the true musical gem among these is the anthology of lullabies titled *Ninna Nanna 1500–2002* (see AV 9826). It is worth adding that in the *Ninna Nanna* Montserrat Figueras sings duets with her daughter, Arianna Savall.

Along with his recordings of viola da gamba music, Jordi Savall releases CDs with a classical repertoire. The artist calls into existence three musical formations: Hespèrion XX (which in our century adopted the name of Hespèrion XXI), La Capella Reial de Catalunya, and Le Concert des Nations. Using instruments from the period, with these ensembles Savall recorded music by Johann Sebastian Bach (*Mass in B minor* BWV 232, *the Brandenburg Concertos*, *Overtures* BWV 1066–1069, *Musikalisches Opfer*), masses by Heinrich von Biber (*Missa Bruxellensis* and *Missa Salisburgensis*), *Les Concerts Royaux* and *Les Nations* by François Couperin, arias, lamentations, as well as *Vespro della Beata Vergine* (*Marian Vespers*) and the opera *Orpheus* by Claudio Monteverdi. He also recorded several concertos, the opera *Farnace* and the *Juditha Triumphans* oratorio by Antonio Vivaldi, as well as symphonies (Nos. 39, 40, 41) and *Requiem* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Symphony No. 3 in E flat major*, Op. 55 “Eroica” by Ludwig van Beethoven. More recently, he gave his audiences the *Weihnachtsoratorium* by Johann Sebastian Bach, Marin Marais’s lyrical tragedy *Alcione* and *Passion* by Tomás Luis de Victoria. The list, impressive as it is, is certainly not exhaustive.

Importantly, however, Jordi Savall has never limited himself to the canon, which markedly distinguishes him from other pioneers of early instruments. From the very beginning of his career, the artist would focus on the study of the musical and musicological past, opening up, like no one before him, to its geographical, cultural, and anthropological diversity. He would eagerly search various archives, extracting forgotten sheet music; he would study treatises (both musicological and non-musicological) that had not been read for years; he would restore old instruments, and – most importantly – trusting his matchless intuition, in various parts of the

world he would seek and find singers bestowed with a unique timber of the voice and virtuoso artists playing instruments typical of particular lands or regions, whom he would then invite to participate in multicultural projects. As a result of Savall's long, truly Benedictine commitment, a unique body of work entered the history of phonography. Essentially – as the titles and subtitles of his albums suggest – Jordi Savall's oeuvre is a “musical dialogue” between different cultures that spans the ages. Let us recall a few of the titles: *Bailar Cantando. Fiesta mestiza en el Perú. Codex Trujillo, ca. 1780* (AV 9927), *Diáspora Sefadí. Pour que Ilorax blanca niña – romances vocales. Las estrellas de los cielos – música instrumental* (AV 9809 A + B), *El Nuevo Mundo. Folías criollas* (AVSA 9876), *Esprit D'Arménie* (AVSA 9892), *Esprit des Balkans* (AVSA 9898), *Granada. Desde la fundación del reino de Granda, expansión y esplendor del Al-Ándalus, hasta su incorporación al reino de Castilla y León y la conversión forzosa de los musulmanes. 1013-1502* (AVSA 9915), *Hispania & Japan Dialogues* (AVSA 9883), *Istanbul. Dimitrie Cantemir. “Le Livre de la Science da la Musique” et les traditions musicales Sépharades et Arméniennes* (AV 9870). As can be inferred, Jordi Savall's oeuvre is founded upon the idea of creating meeting spaces: spaces, where tradition meets the astonishing, delightful and, above all, irreducible polyphony of musical cultures. *De la Iberia Antiqua al Nuevo Mundo (1550-1750)*, the subtitle of the album *Villancicos y danzas criollas* (AV 9834), is an eloquent example of the artist's philosophy. Indeed, all of these albums present material falling within a defined temporal range, each time delimiting a peculiar space in which an encounter with what is different, other, alien, or foreign happens in and through music. In this way, the works recorded by Jordi Savall and his ensembles reveal their causative power. What power is it exactly?

The answer to this question may be found in the series of CD albums produced in the book form, which Dariusz Czaja described as the “Savall

Library.”⁵ In addition to the musical material, each of these “sound books” has a unique visual frame, consisting of numerous paintings, engravings, drawings, copperplate prints and woodcuts, as well as photocopies of maps from old atlases and reproductions of early scores. The titles succinctly yet accurately capture the subjects of individual volumes. Let us mention at least a few of them: *Christophorus Columbus. Paraísos Perdidos* (AVSA 9850 A + B), *Dinastia Borgia. Chiesa e potere nel Rinascimento* (AVSA 9875), *Erasmus van Rotterdam. Éloge de la Folie* (AVSA 9895 A / F), *Francisco Javier 1506–1553. La Ruta de Oriente* (AVSA 9856), *Ibn Battuta. Le Voyageur de l’Islam* (AVSA 9930), *Les Routes de L’Esclavage 1444–1888* (AVSA 9920), *Mare Nostrum* (AVSA 9888), *Ramon Llull. Temps de conquestes, de diàleg and desconhort* (AVSA 9917), *Venezia Millenaria 700–1797* (AVSA 9925). Importantly, what distinguishes this series of albums from other achievements of the artist is the primacy of the written word over the “speech of sounds.” Essential for the series are various texts central to world culture, such as *In Praise of Folly* by Erasmus of Rotterdam or the account of the 14th-century traveller Muhammad Ibn Battuta, translated into English as *A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling* (commonly known as *The Rihla*) – texts which Savall reads through the lens of music. The latter phrasing is significant: Savall does not simply “orchestrate” Erasmus’s satire or the medieval travelogue of journeys along the routes of Muslim countries. Rather than that, he offers his audiences a multifaceted, innovative reading of each of the narratives included in the series. Thus, Jordi Savall shows the world yet another face: the face of a seasoned philologist. There could be no better testimony to this claim than his *Miguel de Cervantes. Don Quijote de la Mancha. Romances y Músicas* (AVSA 9843 A + B), the “book” published by Alia Vox in 2005, which opens the entire “library.”

⁵ See Dariusz Czaja, *Kwintesencje*, 76–83.

In his commentary to the book Savall points out that in the novel about the adventures of the famous knight-errant he found a heretofore undiscovered “musical treasure” in the form of a substantial inventory of ballads, songs, or madrigals. Indeed, Cervantes’s heroes sing surprisingly often. For example, when don Quixote and Sancho Pansa meet the goat-herds, one of the characters, Antonio, sings “the ballad about his love” to the accompaniment of his rebeck, thereby proving to his audience “that even in the mountains and woods, there are musicians.”⁶ Unlike Antonio, Cardenio sings without accompaniment, but he does it twice. His first song, “sweet and pleasing in tone,” makes the listeners “not a little astonished,” but in his second song, “the music [...] turned to sobs and heartrending moans.”⁷ Insidious Altsidora, attempting to seduce Don Quixote for sport, sings her romance to the accompaniment of the harp.⁸ Finally, the knight himself sings, which the narrator deliciously, albeit not without a hint of irony, announces in detail: “When eleven o’clock came, Don Quixote found a guitar in his chamber; he tried it, opened the window, and perceived that some persons were walking in the garden; and having passed his fingers over the frets of the guitar and tuned it as well as he could, he spat and cleared his chest, and then with a voice a little hoarse but full-toned, he sang the following ballad, which he had himself that day composed.”⁹ This scene can hardly surprise anyone, especially that in the first volume of the novel the knight instructs Sancho Pansa “that all or most of the knights-errant in days of yore were great troubadours and great musicians, for both of these accomplishments, or more properly speaking, gifts, are the

⁶ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Ormsby. Ebook, 92, <https://thevirtuallibrary.org> (Accessed 2.11.2021).

⁷ Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, 210.

⁸ Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, 672.

⁹ Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, 692.

peculiar property of lovers-errant.”¹⁰ Throughout the novel, the melodies of the songs blend with the sounds of instruments and the sounds of nature. Cervantes’s narrative pulses with music! Jordi Savall’s reading brings out its sound – a sound that fades away when reading quietly. The singing *Don Quixote*, the first volume in the “Savall library,” gives one an important, exemplary, lesson: it pulls us out of silence, it questions the value of quiet reading, opens our ears to the “speech of sounds,” restores the faculty of hearing to the process of reading. *Miguel de Cervantes. Don Quijote de la Mancha. Romances y Músicas*, followed by all subsequent volumes of the series, invokes the word which becomes reified through sound, thus offering a solidly grounded critique of reading based solely on the ocu-locentric paradigm. This, in turn, allows philology to forego the hegemony of sight and re-link the act of reading with the practice of listening.

Jordi Savall’s text of the “libretto” on the adventures of the knight-errant is prefaced by a motto from Cervantes’s novel: “Donde hay música no puede haber cosa mala.” This unique auctorial signature, much like the sentence inscribed into Vermeer’s painting, is also a declaration as to what, essentially, music is to the writer. The more recent English translators of *Don Quixote* – John Rutherford and John Ormsby – seem to agree on the interpretation of this passage; in both versions the observation formulated by Sancho Pansa reads alike: “where there’s music, there can be no evil” (Rutherford) vs. “where there’s music, there can’t be mischief” (Ormsby). If this is the case, then does music possess the power of agency in protecting us against evil? And is it a fact that, as *Don Quixote*’s squire would have it, “music is a sign of mirth and merrymaking”?¹¹

We add a question mark to the motto, because the novel itself questions the epigram’s universality. After all, the words of the knight’s faith-

¹⁰ Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, 176.

¹¹ Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, 623.

ful companion are uttered in a specific situation: as we remember, “the blaze of the fire and the noise of the warlike instruments [...] repeated lilies after the fashion of the Moors when they rush to battle,” the whole terrifying cacophony of “trumpets and clarions, [...] drums, [and] fifes,”¹² which soon transmogrifies into the “sound of sweet, harmonious music,”¹³ is nothing else but a masquerade arranged by the aristocratic couple with the view to mocking the knight’s insanity. The squire passes a judgment on the art of sounds, listening to the music played for mirth and merriment, yet, to paraphrase Miguel de Unamuno’s warning from *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*, one should remember that human pranks are worse than the fury of the wild beast that attacks one out of hunger: a man setting up a prank may easily slide to the rock bottom of crime and ultimate meanness, and many of the most disgraceful deeds originate in pranks. Thus, Sancho’s words manifest themselves as lined with the bitterness of Cervantesian irony – the irony looming large in all the texts included in the “Savall library,” yet revealed with particular clear-sightedness in two poignant volumes: *Jeanne D’Arc. Batailles et Prisons* (AVSA 9891) and *Le Royaume Oublié*, bitterly subtitled *Un fresque musicale et historique passionnant Le Rayonnement des Catharismes et l’Essor de l’Occitanie. La Croisade contre les Albigeois et le témoignage des Troubadours. L’Inquisition pers persécution et élimination du Catharisme 950–1465* (AVSA 9873).

History, shaken with conflicts and wars, religious crusades, marred with murderous slaughter and the crime of slavery – history, to which Savall restores its poignant voice – seems to contradict the belief that “where there’s music, there can’t be mischief.” Besides, this doubt has always-already colored Don Quixote’s worldview. Perversely, Cervantes makes his protagonist sum up his squire’s words with a laconic phrase

¹² Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, 621.

¹³ Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, 623.

“that remains to be seen,”¹⁴ which foreshadows the Duke and the Duchess’s prank, which will brutally interrupt the knight’s singing, and will inflict on him so much pain and vexation that he will, eventually, fall into deep grief.¹⁵ The prank with the cats reveals the writer’s intricate contrariness, a device resorting to which he discreetly – and somewhat “silently” – anoints Sancho Pansa as a madman. After all, Cervantes’s novel disavows the notion that music necessarily “is a sign of mirth and merrymaking.” Thus, the knight’s repetitive adage “that remains to be seen,” surprisingly perhaps, manifests itself as the voice of reason, while the words the squire speaks about the power of music – the voice of madness.

Although he never forgets that music does have a dark side to it, Jordi Savall advocates Sancho Pansa’s madness – a beautiful and sublime madness, which places music in the sphere of ethics. The squire’s words from Cervantes’s novel can therefore be considered as emblematic of all of his oeuvre, which, from the very beginning, aimed at creating spaces to which evil would have no access: spaces called into existence through music. As his album titles indicate – *Harmonie Universelle* (AV 9810) and *Musica Nova. Harmonie des nations* (AVSA 9926), while searching for “universal harmonies” in music, Savall, at the same time, desires to incorporate them into the life of human communities. Thus, he effectively practices what could be described as the politics of a friendly meeting with otherness, multiplicity and diversity – a politics based on a musical dialogue between cultures and nations, between distant history and our own *here* and *now*. It is through this respectful dialogue that Savall carries out his eminent work of a translator and interpreter, who – as Tadeusz Sławek suggests in his essay on the “politics of translation” – “seeks a common tongue while respecting the dissimilarity, that is, without imposing a single obliga-

¹⁴ Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, 623.

¹⁵ See Chapter XXXV, 636.

tory language upon anyone.” Simultaneously, Jordi Savall cultivates “good curiosity,” because it “leads to the consent to the difference, to otherness, which has the right to remain different and other. The translation of the Other will then not be tantamount to appropriation; rather, it will be an act of an eye-opening illumination of Otherness. It is an incarnation of the virtue of hospitality, consisting in embracing otherness, and thereby excluding any forceful solutions.¹⁶ Savall’s music allows the Other to resonate without violating its, her, or his cultural or religious identity, thus reifying the gesture of hospitality in the friendly meeting with the otherness of the Other.

The outstanding, truly exceptional work of Jordi Savall – the source of emotions and delight, beauty and spirituality – strengthens our faith in the agency of music and offers a solid fundament for the conviction that art and knowledge, a friendly meeting and a compassionate dialogue, are necessary if we wish to improve our world. Beyond doubt, his stellar achievements make him worthy of the highest academic honour that the University of Silesia in Katowice can bestow upon him: the Honoris Causa Doctorate.

Ireneusz Gielata

Gliwice, September 10th, 2021

Translated by Paweł Jędrzejko

¹⁶ Tadeusz Sławek, *Na okrężnych drogach. Tłumaczenie literackie i jego światy* (Kraków-Gdańsk: Karakter, 2021), 15, 232.