

# The Voice of the Viol

## Jordi Savall

in discussion with Claire Bracher

Jordi Savall is and has been a pioneering force in the late twentieth century revival of the viola da gamba, and its wealth of undiscovered music. As a pioneer, Jordi had to be his own teacher and mentor, and to create his own inspiration. After forty years, he is still researching, discovering new (forgotten) works and inspiring a generation of musicians to follow him.



Jordi Savall / Le Concert des Nations will be performing at the 2012 Lufthansa Baroque Festival

My inspiration when I started was, fundamentally, the music. I started to play viol music on the cello when I was fifteen years old. In addition to the standard repertoire for the cello, I discovered, for myself, viol music by Marin Marais, by J.S. Bach of course, by Diego Ortiz and Christopher Simpson. I found this music fascinating because nobody had played it, and because it was all very beautiful. I was practising this music during the eight years, until I completed my cello studies.

I was then able to try all this music on an original viol. It was a big surprise for me to see just how different the sound was, and it was through this chance to play on an original viol that I was able to start to understand what was for example the French style. Only after I was able to play on an original viol did I truly understand.

In 1964 there were so few people that played the viol, and

I think there was a fascination as a young musician to give a voice to an instrument. The possibility to do something with this instrument very much attracted me. I had to start alone. I started by searching in libraries; I spent a lot of time in the British museum looking at the manuscripts, the printed consort music, and tablature music. I was in Paris, looking at microfilms and seeing all these originals. This was an exciting moment of creation.

For the young musician today however, it is different, it is more difficult to find new music. The people of my generation have been allowed to have the first love, and today it is difficult because this music has already been loved for thirty years. The young generation today have a little bit of a problem; they are living in a world where everything goes fast, too fast. When a young musician today finishes his studies in early music, if he does not make a recording in the next year, he feels not very happy and will think, 'ahh I am not good enough'. I was able to take ten

years to work on Marin Marais, before I started to record his music; ten years. Now, it is a different time and system.

Of course, if I were to record Marais again today, there would be certain aspects that would be different and certain things not. Actually, I re-recorded one Marais suite from book two [Marais, between 1686 and 1725, wrote five books of viol music each entitled, *Pièces de viole*], the homage to Lully, and to St. Colombe. For me, it was fascinating to see that with most of the dance movements, and without trying to, most of the movements were only one or two seconds different from the recording I made fifteen years ago.

What changed? With time, you lose certain elements of freshness, or maybe a certain spontaneity but, at the same time, later, you are richer in experience and you have more freedom. When I made this recording for the first time thirty years ago, I had to be proving myself and demonstrating something. Now I do not have to prove anything, I have the freedom to play what I like with the music.

However, when you work ten years on music and you find the right tempo, this remains forever, this is a very important quality, to remember the different tempos of the language. Of course, if you record in different venue each time it will make a difference to the tempos. If the hall for one recording is resonant and the other is dry, of

course the tempo will change, but I personally have always recorded in similar acoustics.

Music and language always go together. Musical language is something very much influenced by the way you sing or speak a language. The language that you speak gives us something; it gives you the

