

Preview**CMA Performing Arts Series: Jordi Savall and Hespèrion XXI in "Honey and Blood"**

by Daniel Hathaway



For the third November in a row, Jordi Savall will visit the Cleveland Museum of Art to play on the museum's Performing Arts Series. In 2011, Savall appeared with his son, Ferran in a program called "Music Dialogues from Orient and Occident," when Jordi played lira da gamba and seven-string bass viol and Ferran played theorbo and sang. In 2012, Jordi Savall brought his ensemble, Hespèrion XXI, to Cleveland to chronicle two centuries of European Renaissance and early Baroque consort music — an occasion on which he played the treble viol.

This year, Savall and Hespèrion XXI will return to Gartner Auditorium on Friday evening, November 1, when the resourceful Catalan musician will play vielle and rebec as part of the Museum's "Masters of the Violin" series-within-a-series in a program entitled "Honey and Blood: The Cycles of Life in the Mosaic of Christians, Sephardic Jews & Muslims of the Balkans." The ensemble includes five singers

and half a dozen other instrumentalists playing exotic regional instruments. We reached Jordi Savall via Skype in his studio near Barcelona to ask how this program came about.

Jordi Savall: The original inspiration was a concert marking the twentieth anniversary of the attack on Sarajevo. We invited different musicians from the Balkan region and it was fascinating for the diversity of styles — beautiful repertory, beautiful songs, beautiful music. So we started to make research. Our first recording was *Balkan Spirit* and we're now working on *Cycles of Life in the Region of Honey and Blood*.

DH: Can you explain "Honey and Blood?"

JS: It's the translation of Bal-Kan. Bal in Ottoman Turkish is honey and Kan is blood. When the Ottomans arrived in the area and tried to conquer it, they found a beautiful country and a people so conscious of defending the area with so much energy and courage there was a lot of blood.

DH: Tell us how you've organized the program.

JS: This program is about the music of memory which has its origins in the cycles of life: *(reading from program headings:)* "Creation - Birth and Infancy, Learning and Adolescence - Love, the Meeting & Marriage - The Family, Work, Maturing & Celebrations - Experience, Wisdom, Sacrifice, Spirituality, Exile and Death. And Reconciliation." All the music is music of memory about a central European civilization that is now a region with poor countries with terrible conflicts created by nationalism. The people lived in peace for five hundred years until the nineteenth century when the Russians brought Orthodox culture, the Germans Catholic culture and the Muslims Islamic culture. Everyone started trying to recover their own territory, but if we gave every culture the land they'd like to have, the region would be twice as big. This program emphasizes what those cultures have in common: emotions, beauty, the energy of life — the most essential things.

DH: I see you're bringing a number of singers this time.

JS: Yes, not only because of the different languages but because of the different cultural styles: French for medieval Christian songs, Turkish for the Ottoman style, Greek for the Orthodox tradition, Bulgarian for that very high, very clear style, Jewish to represent the Sephardic tradition — this was the most important region where Sephardic Jews went after the expulsion because the Ottomans were very tolerant.

DH: It looks like all the singers participate in "The Reconciliation."

JS: That's a very nice part of the program. Every singer sings a song with a similar melody but in Greek, Ottoman, Sephardic and Serbian, then all sing together each in their own style, a symbol that all can sing and play together.

DH: The vielle and rebec — precursors of the violin — were important medieval instruments in Western Europe. Did those come West during the Crusades?

JS: No — during the seventh and eighth centuries from Persia and Egypt and they were brought by the Gypsies. Gypsy and Egypt come from the same word. Those were civilizations two or three thousand years old while the eighth century was a very dark time in Europe.

Jordi Savall will tell the audience more about the early ancestors of the violin in a 6:00 pm pre-concert talk in Gartner Auditorium.

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