

Jordi Savall, UNESCO Artist for Peace, interview during the Utrecht Early Music Festival (August 29, 2013).

By Vincent Wintermans, Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO.



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In the same week that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon visited The Hague to commemorate the centenary of the Peace Palace and when tensions are rising about a possible military intervention in Syria, Jordi Savall spoke about war and peace, music and history at the Cervantes Institute in Utrecht.

Savall was in Utrecht for the annual Early Music Festival, which this year commemorated the Treaty of Utrecht. Savall gave a concert featuring a wide variety of music (including composers Gesualdo, Sweelinck, Charpentier, Fux, Bach, plus anonymous Jewish, Ottoman, Hungarian and

Polish compositions) representative of the period between the Union of Utrecht and the Peace of Utrecht. The Union of 1579 marked the end of the Dutch revolt against Habsburg Spain and the formation of the Northern Netherlands as an independent state. The Peace of Utrecht ended the War of the Spanish Succession in 1713, exactly 300 years ago.

Savall says that music is sometimes too easily seen as a universal language; however, a real appreciation of Japanese or Indian music for Europeans is not possible without a thorough study of the completely different musical traditions. The music of the Middle East as well is not directly accessible. But here the Early Music Movement builds a bridge: the Arab, Jewish and Western traditions are genetically related, and only with the emergence of polyphony and counterpoint did Western music moved away from the common source. Musicians who specialized in the authentic interpretation of Medieval European music have therefore an easier access to music from cultures that have not followed Western innovations. Thus Savall plays with musicians from Morocco, the Balkans, Israel or Armenia.

The nice thing about the music is that these historical connections can not only be scientifically proven, but also can be felt when by actually playing it. Savall quotes Elias Canetti: "music is truly living history."

It is particularly these intercultural projects that have earned Jordi Savall his appointment as UNESCO Artist for Peace. He sees this title mainly as an acknowledgment that his humanist and pacifist values are those of UNESCO. The multimedia book *Pro Pacem: Texts, Art & Music for Peace* [link to <http://www.alia-vox.com/catalog.php?id=106>] was not made with the direct support of UNESCO, but it is entirely in line with the mandate of the organization. Savall's CD booklets are distinguished by their multilingualism - that again is an expression of respect for cultural diversity, which he shares with UNESCO.

Savall is convinced that nothing will happen if we wait for our governments to ensure our peace. Everyone has to work in his or her immediate vicinity to enhance peace. In the words of the Portuguese Nobel Prize winner Jose Saramago: "The main characteristic of man is being good". Understanding others is a part of it. Savall cannot change the world, but he wants his music to be an instrument for more understanding in a violent world.

Links:

Music from Mare Nostrum project (El Cant dels Aucells)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGPb9fiSgfo>

Music from Jerusalem Project (Armenian lament)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8rt7bQlg2E>