

MUSIC REVIEW | JORDI SAVALL

## Teachings of a Missionary From the Old World

By [ANNE MIDGETTE](#)

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A man, a plan, a viola da gamba: Jordi Savall. That's all that was onstage at Weill Recital Hall on Thursday night — a bearded man playing an amber instrument in muted light — and it was more than enough to fill an evening, richly.



Richard Termine for The New York Times

Jordi Savall playing the viola da gamba Thursday night at Weill Recital Hall.

Mr. Savall has gained a tremendous following as a pioneer of early music in general and the gamba repertory in particular. His presentation combined a kind of asceticism and absolute integrity with a profound ability to communicate, and the rapt audience responded to every word he spoke between sets during the second half of the program. He explained, for instance, that early gamba players would have been proficient on other instruments like the lute, so they sometimes held the gamba across their laps. He then demonstrated lute technique in a virtuosic piece called "La Cloche" by John Playford, which involved a kind of duet between plucked and bowed notes that Mr. Savall made sound easy.

This might give the impression that the evening was didactic; it was not. Before he began to speak, Mr. Savall played more than half of the program in eloquent silence, exploring the nuances of an instrument that in his hands was now throaty, now twangy, now vibrant, now a mere whisper, and always tangibly expressive. His program, called "Les Voix Humaines," wafted gently back through the ages into an ever more distant past, starting with Carl Friedrich Abel, an 18th-century student of Bach, and receding nearly two centuries to Tobias Hume and Alfonso Ferrabosco, whose "Coranto" required Mr. Savall to retune his instrument (a technique called scordatura).

The hall was full of gamba fans. If not all listeners in attendance fitted that description when they arrived, they certainly did by the time they left.

*Jordi Savall and his ensemble, Hesperion XXI, will perform a concert called "From the Old to the New World" tonight at 8 at the Church of St. Paul the Apostle (Columbus Avenue at 60th Street), presented by the Miller Theater, (212) 854-7799.*