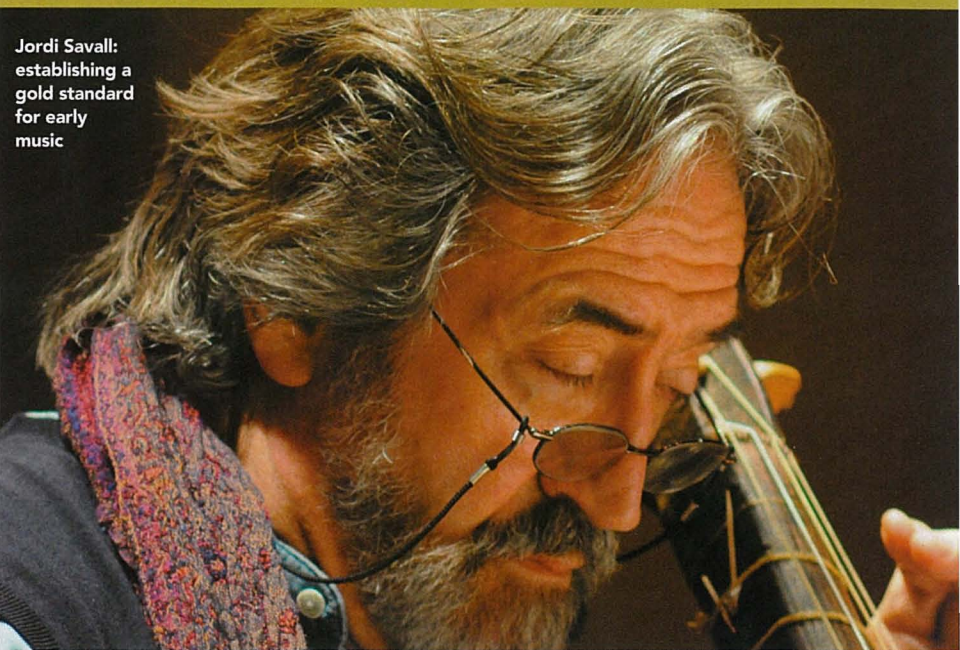


Jordi Savall:
establishing a
gold standard
for early
music



Savall's tribute
to Occitania is
as epic as it is
beautifully performed



'The Forgotten Kingdom'

Music from the Albigensian Crusade
Montserrat Figueras *sop* Pascal Bertin *countertenor*
Lluís Vilamajó *ten* Marc Mauillon *bar* Furio Zanasi
bass Andrew Lawrence-King *hp* La Capella Reial de
Catalunya; Hespèrion XXI / Jordi Savall

Alia Vox    AVSA9873A/C
(3h 50' • DDD/DSD)

Jordi Savall's latest "Livre-CD" establishes a new gold standard for early music. Ostensibly intended as a "small but intense tribute to the awakening of this the historical memory of Occitania", home of the Troubadours and a focus of resistance to the Church of Rome, it shows what international collaboration with fellow musicians and scholars – and EC funding – can achieve.

This epic project – nearly four hours of music and readings in Latin and Occitan (the Langue d'Oc), chronicling five centuries (c.950–1463) – shines fresh light on the Cathars (dissidents calling themselves "good Christian men and woman"), who were hunted down and burnt at the stake – through the words and music of eye-witnesses. Their strophic sirventès, chansons and laments still touch us with their expressive power, authority and poignancy, especially when set alongside contemporary Roman texts. This is the fifth Livre-CD Savall has produced with Alia Vox: a substantial, beautifully illustrated book with 10 engaging essays and a detailed

chronology as well as the song texts and readings – and three CDs.

For more than a decade, Savall and his Hespèrion colleagues have explored the related early music of oppressed people in a succession of recordings, amassing a wealth of knowledge and experience. For this project, Savall augmented his band with specialists on medieval Eastern European and Middle Eastern instruments – flutes, fiddles, lutes and zithers – to evoke a sense of a rich medieval soundscape. Their input can't be over-estimated: working with monophonic, often strophic music, they have created polyphony with drones, by doubling the vocal line, imitating and improvising on it, then providing introductions and ritornelli. They have taken pre-existing tunes and created instrumental fanfares, battle calls and laments, employing muffled drums to signal executions and bells to evoke the powerful presence of the Church. Savall takes ownership of the more elaborate versions of the Joan of Arc songs and the sombre final "Homage to the 'Good Men'" in which his own playing is sublime. Montserrat Figueras and the other vocal soloists and readers deliver superbly vivid performances (one might quibble with the decision to have a woman sing the Jewish chant on the Kabbalah, but her vocal interplay with the flute is exquisite). Altogether an impressive and deeply fascinating achievement. **Julie Anne Sadie**