

# EARLY Music

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An Inside Look at Making  
**THE ITALIAN  
HARPSICHORD**

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Roman duets recorded here make use of aspects of all these styles for two musically intertwining voices and between them cover three generations of composers from this period of intense experimentation.

Many of the pieces chosen for this live recital are lighthearted, the voices merrily pursuing, imitating, interrupting, and melding with each other over repetitive bass patterns.



The performers favor a smoothly lyrical and dance-like—even folk-like—flow over detailed attention to the poetic meaning of the texts or rhetorical flourishes. On the whole, the tempi are on the fast side, rhythms steady, dynamic effects and rubato employed economically, dissonances glossed over rather quickly. In pieces that seem to demand a more drawn-out, flexible, sensual approach, such as “Tornate” by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) or “Occhi che sete” by Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643), the effect can be flat. In other cases, this emphasis on momentum produces enjoyable results, notably in the breathless hunting call of Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger’s (c.1580-1651) “Alla caccia.” Another piece that centers on the chase, Monteverdi’s “Crudel, perché mi fuggi,” is urgent but lacks a convincing expression of the conflicted state of mind that drives its meandering pursuit.

Vivante’s continuo group is varied, consisting of theorbo, guitars, harpsichord, viola da gamba, and triple harp in combinations and alone, and tenors Tore Tom Denys and Eric Leidal possess warmly attractive voices that blend melodiously. Their interpretations of this interesting repertoire—Rovetta (c.1595/7-1668), for one, is not often encountered on disc—are not dramatically incisive, but they are charming.

—Berna Can

**The Black Dragon: Music from the Time of Vlad Dracula**

Cançonier (Annette Bauer, Phoebe Jevtovic, Shira Kammen, Tim Rayborn)

CANCD 02

[www.cdbaby.com/cd/canconier2](http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/canconier2)

In many ways, 2010 was the year of the vampire. The *Twilight* movies have become synonymous with teen culture, *The Vampire Diaries* is frequently labeled one of

the better shows on television today, and a slew of other vampiric references—Anne Rice, Bram Stoker, *True Blood*—abound.

Enter Cançonier, who brings this musical offering to the world of the vampire. *The Black Dragon*, the group’s second CD, features music from the time of Vlad III. Of course, no one truly believes that the erstwhile Prince of Wallachia was a vampire, but he was known even in his own time for his brutal and gruesome treatment of his empire’s Turkish enemies—perpetuated in a poem written by 15th-century author Michel Beheim.

Very little, if anything, is known about the types of music that Vlad might have had in his court or



chambers. Cançonier has therefore chosen music representative of the different cultures with which Vlad would have interacted—Turkish music; Byzantine chant; Dufay’s lament on the fall of Constantinople; a whirlwind of dances and folk songs from Italy, Germany, France, and Balkan traditions; and a *contrafactum* of the aforementioned Beheim poem by Tim Rayborn, which bookends the recording.

Musically, the performance is exquisite. The upbeat selections are vibrant, playful, and exciting; the slower or more sacred pieces are sorrowful, delicate, and moving. An incredible amount of textural and timbral variety is present. At least half of the works feature voice, but never quite the same way twice—sometimes with lute or vielle, sometimes with bells or harp or recorder. The Ottoman Turkish selection offers the delightfully rich sound of the oud, while the Italian and French dances feature lute, vielle, recorder, and the most unusual tromba marina. The central block of Hungarian/Transylvanian/Moldavian/Bulgarian music is absolutely gorgeous, going from a free-flowing Marian lament (“Volek sirolmtudotlon”) to the whirling dervish that is the traditional dance “Ugr inska Ruchenitsa.” A slight caveat here—Cançonier makes it perfectly clear in their liner notes that the folk music is not necessarily datable to Vlad’s time. They have chosen traditional music that was most likely passed down orally, and thus is not datable, but that bears modal or melodic similarities to other Medieval pieces. Despite the

potential historical inaccuracies, the CD hangs together excellently.

Obviously, this is not meant to be a documentary recording in which the Life and Music of Vlad Dracula are laid out for the listener in precise, factual detail. But as a speculation on the possible sound world of someone in Vlad’s time, it’s a delight.

—Karen Cook

**The Czar’s Guitars: Souvenirs of Russia**

Oleg Timofeyev, John Schneiderman, guitars  
Dorian Sono Luminus DSL-92112  
[www.dorian.com](http://www.dorian.com)

What is the early music for which this magazine is named? It is not so much music from a particular period or periods, and not even necessarily the use of historical instruments. To my mind, it is much more the liberating freedom to explore music that has been forgotten and the equally forgotten ways to make that music speak. It is the antithesis of the stultifying “conservation” practiced by the conservatory tradition, in which a very narrow repertoire is passed down as canonical along with unexamined ways of performing it. One of the best examples of this, alas, is the sort of quartet repertoire brought to audiences on concert series by management firms—nothing but Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, and, at the outer extreme, Dvorák. No sense of the musical culture in which these icebergs floated.

In this sense, the new disc by Timofeyev and Schneiderman represents the very best of early music, presenting virtually unknown but compelling repertoire in beautiful and expressive performances on period instruments, in this case the Russian seven-string guitar, an instrument introduced and popularized in Russia by Andrey Sychra in the early 19th century. Anyone who listens to the first track on this disc, Pettoletti’s

arrangement of the Russian national anthem, Op. 15 (the tune familiar to listeners from the *1812 Overture*), cannot help but be drawn in to the world of this fascinating collection. The recording and performances are first-class, capturing the beauty and depth of the cantabile and resonance of the duo. Both artists have

extensive discographies that listeners may wish to explore, including two previous discs of Russian guitar by Timofeyev. We are told the artists are preparing a multi-CD box of this repertoire for Dorian. I look forward to it avidly.

—Tom Moore

**Dancing in the Isles: Baroque and Traditional Music from England, Scotland, and Ireland**

Musica Pacifica  
Solimar 101  
[musicapacifica.org](http://musicapacifica.org)

At first glance, there would seem to be more in common between the disparate worlds of a San Francisco-based ensemble focused on Baroque music and that of the traditional Irish music session than one might think: violins/fiddles, flutes/whistles/recorders, plucked instruments providing a harmonic foundation/background, compelling dance rhythms, including jigs/gigas/gigues. And yet there are certainly other elements that set these worlds far apart.

The Irish music session in the United States is usually populated by musicians whose parents or grandparents came over from Ireland (or



they did themselves). The musicians learn the repertoire by ear from other players and

also play it by ear. A professional can play every night and have hundreds of tunes at his/her command. And usually the player has little or no connection with or exposure to other musical genres.

Our early musicians, in contrast, come from a literate tradition in which music is learned from written parts and virtually never played from memory. Complicating matters further is the fact that our exposure to traditional music from the British Isles is already second hand in the United States, and only cities with a large Irish diaspora can be said to have a thriving traditional music culture. Early musicians, having learned to re-create written historical music, must learn to re-create a second musical culture without sufficient contact.

All this by way of saying that those who journey from one world to another run the risk of being judged as interlopers, of laying claim to what is not rightly theirs, and can

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