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## Interview with Patrizia Bovi (Ensemble Micrologus)

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**Ensemble Micrologus has a wonderful contact with the audience while performing. Isn't it paradoxical that ages-old music can elicit such a lively reaction in modern-day audience?**

In our attempts to restore the music that comes from many ages ago, we wanted to track down its primary function. By doing this, one discovers the music's sense and livelihood, and so it automatically becomes 'up to date'. Today, this also pertains to people who study not archeology of music, but rather emotions elicited by the it as long as it is situated in functional context. If you are performing a dancing piece and the audience does not feel the urge to dance, you have failed.

Moreover, in order to restore the language of music, you need to understand the music itself. This is the first, crucial step. The performer needs to understand the music – intellectually, emotionally – and analyze it from the perspective of its primary context. Only this way can you enable the audience to get a grip on the music as well.

**How do you respond to a criticism raised by some people, according to which by presenting modern-day performances as “ancient music”, one involuntarily falsifies cultural past? Can one somehow respond to this by referencing folk music?**

The criticism might be on target. There's a risk that the older the music, the more likely it is that performing it changes its core aesthetic sense. It's hard enough to avoid the interpretational biases with regards to medieval music that arose in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and during Mannerism. Travelling back in time in search of another aesthetic is a complex process that requires knowledge of secondary, historical, aesthetical, philosophical sources, etc. Primarily, it requires the ability to serve the music rather than become its subject.

Analyzing orally transmitted musical repertoires has been of much use for me. I had learned a lot by reading musical transcriptions of musical pieces from oral tradition. If didn't have a recording of a certain piece, attempting to learn it would turn out futile. Musical notes can only partially represent what a given piece would sound like if performed by a "witness" of oral transmission. Sometimes they represent an altogether different piece.

Just think about notes that had been written down in a codex that's six hundred years old. How limiting it can be to base one's work only one written source. This sort of parallelism turned out helpful when we faced the challenge of interpreting such an temporally distant repertoire. Therefore, doubts and lack of confidence can actually turn out be your biggest allies.



(cover of a new Micrologus CD:  
*Gloria Et Malum. Musica e danza del Quattrocento nelle corti italiane*)

**Would you say that the temperament and personality of the performer could be expressed in medieval music? According to widespread opinion, it wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the artist's individuality became freely expressible in his or her works.**

I believe that musician's personality is necessary in interpreting music, especially since it's impossible to hide it while communicating any kind of message. At the same, musician's personality should serve the music and not the other way around, contrary to what often happens in opera recitals, when the performer sings pieces created by Mozart, Vivaldi, Gershwin or Beatles without any regard to different musical styles, but rather with intention to concentrate audience's attention on his or her own voice. I think it's inappropriate. One needs both personality as well as honesty of a researcher – both

those things enable the music, if it's treated with respect, to move the audience on emotional level.

**Not everyone is aware of this, but many things have changed in recent years when it comes to performing medieval and renaissance music. Have you ever felt as innovators rather than simply performers that closely follow the historical material?**

Our path as musicians has always oscillated between these two extremes. On the one hand we conduct multi-level historical research, and on the other we are aware of the fact that we are contemporary performers. When we can't "cheat" by mixing up different styles, we instead make "cross-over" albums, such as *Kronomachia*, which we recorded in cooperation with Daniele Sepe and his jazz-rock band. On this album, we used medieval music like a jazzman uses jazz "standards", i.e. as a foundation on which to build something else, and the end-result we eventually came up with was contemporary music.

**How does Ensemble Micrologus approach elements of improvisation in their performances? Do you sometimes attempt to improvise collectively?**

There are repertoires which leave room for improvisation. However, this requires extremely thorough preparation since you can't use the same improvisation formulas in every repertoire. Italian monody has its own specific formulas, and so does 13th century Spanish one. What's more, if we improvise in counterpoint – 15th century rules are even different. There doesn't exist one, universal language. In order to improvise, we need to get a very good insight into the rules of the original repertoire. In some programmes we leave room for moments of collective improvisation. In others – like, for example, in a programme devoted to 15th century dancing pieces – only soloists improvise. It all depends on the context and repertoire.

**I wonder how your cooperation looks like "behind the curtains". Does your professionalism extend to the way you deal with moods and the challenge of reaching interpersonal understanding? If it's not a secret, did you ever happen to come onto stage estranged or angry at each other?**

An artist who performs on stage needs a strong nervous system along with much empathy towards other group members. Micrologus came to be as a group of friends – passionate people who wanted to study while also having fun together. This still holds true 27 years later, when we give concerts together. I can recall many lively debates among us, but I don't remember us ever walking onto the stage angry at each other.

**The human body... what kind of instrument is it for you?**

It's an instrument that enables the soul to play its tune.

**Many young people go off the beaten path while searching for their musical inspirations. What is your opinion about situations in which people lacking any kind of appropriate background or education become fascinated with the work of Ensemble Micrologus? Do you treat them with any kind of reserve?**

I consider myself a strict teacher. The main thing I teach my students is to emulate the artistic way rather than its end-product!!!

This is the first rule. Before singing and playing, we need to know that which we are planning to perform. We need to precede the performance with hard work and research that nobody can do for us. Otherwise, we can at most become a good copy. The works by Piero della Francesca, Manet, Guillaume de Machaut are unique, the rest are just copies! What kind of performer would ever want to become a copy? Only a mediocre one.

**I've heard opinions about you as being just as charismatic as some of the rock or pop stars. Do you treat this as a compliment or is it in a way unsettling for you?**

I'm happy if by taking my artistic path I enabled young people to get to know ancient music. I think this is the best weapon we have against cultural homogenization and shallowness. If having a charisma helps this case, I embrace that as a compliment.