

# Long Ago and Far Away

Musica Ficta brings a new world of Baroque and Renaissance music to the Golandsky Festival.

**W**ITH its soaring vocals, haunting woodwinds, virtuoso guitars and harpsichord, Musica Ficta takes listeners back to the Baroque era and before. But there's a twist. The group, founded and based in Bogota, Colombia, reveals how this music sounded in Spain and Latin America, as opposed to Europe and England — and *viva* the difference.

When set against more familiar early music instruments like the recorder and shawm, the strumming of the Baroque guitar and vihuela di mano gives Musica Ficta a distinctly Latin American flavor.

"Also, there's probably more syncopation in our music," says Jairo Serrano, tenor and percussionist for the ensemble. "The rhythms would be different, much more dramatic than in English or German music."

Musica Ficta is a little something new for the 2007 Golandsky Institute International Piano Festival at Princeton University July 16 through 22. The festival is part of the 2007 Golandsky Institute Summer Symposium at Princeton, an intensive immersion in the Taubman Approach, where pianists, teachers and students can converge for private lessons, clinics, master classes, workshops, panel discussions, lectures and more.

Each evening throughout the symposium, the piano festival features performances by a roster of musicians from around the world. The renowned pianists include 14-year-old Rachel Cheung of Hong Kong, Ilya Itin of Russia, Gulsin Onay from Turkey, American Father Sean Duggan and Alexander Gavrylyuk of Ukraine.

Musica Ficta, which in addition to Mr. Serrano is comprised of his brother Carlos on recorders, shawm, pipes and tabor; Julián Navarro on Baroque guitar and vihuela di mano; and Elisabeth Wright on harpsichord, is the only ensemble in the festival. The group was personally invited by one of the festival's planners, who stumbled on Musica Ficta's work by chance.

"It'll be a very different concert from the usual piano recitals," Mr. Serrano says. He spoke with *TIMEOFF* in June, on a visit to the Princeton area to see his sister Betty Serrano Post, who teaches and practices bodywork and holistic modalities of healing in Princeton Junction.

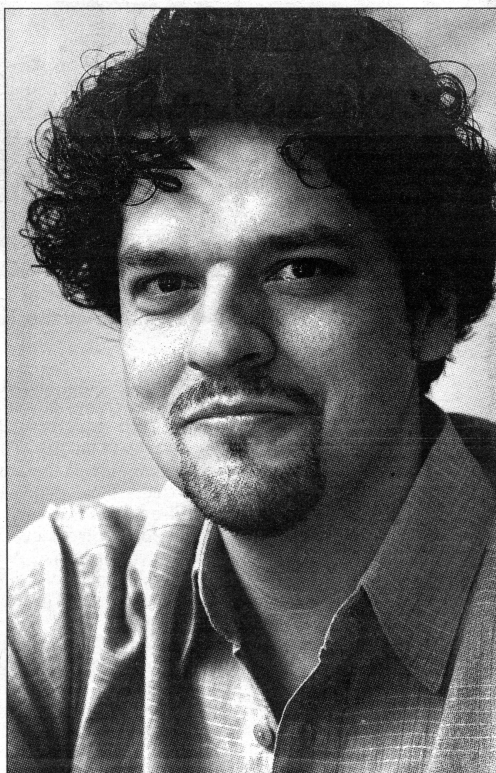
Mr. Serrano says Musica Ficta finds its music in the libraries and archives of Latin America's largest churches, for example religious centers in Bogota, Lima (Peru) and Mexico City.

"The music comes from all over," he says. "We go to these sources and look for things that we would like, things that would adapt well to the quartet. We often travel to do research and it's a little like archaeology. The original manuscripts are written in different notation from today, so you have to learn about the notation and how to transcribe it so it makes sense."

Another singular aspect to early music from Latin America is that it was sometimes sung in native languages to appeal to the various tribes. Since there was so much missionary work going on in all of the Latin-American countries, much of the music was related to religion, and used as a way to convert tribal people to Catholicism. For example, in some regions of Peru, in some texts, the songs would be sung in Quechua, the ancient language of the native people of the Peruvian Andes.

"This would make it more appealing for the Indians," Mr. Serrano says. "If they could listen to something they'd understand, maybe they'd convert. It depends on the source and the composer."

It's the stringed instruments that really set Latin-American early music apart from its counterparts in Europe and England. The vihuela di mano was a typical Spanish instrument, very popular in the Renaissance, con-



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**"We often travel to do research and it's a little like archaeology," says Jairo Serrano, tenor and percussionist for Musica Ficta, describing how the ensemble finds its music.**

sidered the counterpart to the lute in northern Europe.

"It's similar in sound to the lute," Mr. Serrano says. "It is also similar to the Baroque guitar, with six double strings, and like the lute it has movable frets. In 17th century early Latin music in South America, you would use the vihuela."

Another part of the ensemble's research is visual. Mr. Serrano says the members of Musica Ficta often look at paintings from the Baroque and Renaissance to validate the authenticity of a piece's instrumentation. In fact, he has formally researched musical iconography in 17th century Italian painting.

"We'll look at a (religious) painting, look at the angels, for example, to see what they're playing, and often it's a vihuela," Mr. Serrano says.

Founded in 1988, Musica Ficta has earned an international reputation for its performances of New World and Spanish Renaissance and Baroque repertoire. Its concert programs are characterized by scholarly musicological work combined with creative programming and an enthusiastic Latin American approach, which has generated wide popular and critical acclaim.

The colorful variety of music, the unusual instrumentation combined with the versatility of the ensemble's members have led to performances in such diverse places as the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, the Victoria Concert Hall in Singapore as well as Jesuit missions in the Bolivian Amazon. The ensemble has made several tours of Eu-

rope, the U.S., Latin America and the Far East, performing at major international festivals in nearly 20 countries. Musica Ficta's teaching and research activity is centered at the Early Music Institute of Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, and at Universidad Javeriana in Bogota.

Mr. Serrano is a 1999 graduate of the Early Music Institute of Indiana University. He also graduated with a degree in composition from Universidad de los Andes in Bogota. Renowned for his warm, expressive tenor as well as his talents as a percussionist, Mr. Serrano began singing after listening to the Beatles' so-called *White Album* "about a thousand times," he says.

"We all came to early music in different ways," Mr. Serrano says. "My older brother used to listen to a lot of pop stuff, especially from the '60s, and I grew up listening to that. I love the Beatles, especially their harmonies. They were really innovators."

He's also very attached to the music of Neil Young and the British neo-psychedelia and lavish arrangements of XTC.

Brother Carlos was studying biology when he realized he was more fond of early music. He attended Baroque performance courses at Mannes College in New York and the Summer Baroque Performance Institute in Oberlin, Ohio. Upon his return to Colombia in 1988, he founded Musica Ficta. Thanks to a scholarship from the Colombian Ministry of Culture and Indiana University, Carlos also took specialized courses at Indiana University's Early Music Institute at Indiana University. In 1998, he undertook a degree at Indiana specializing in recorder and early double reed instruments. According to the liner notes for the group's CD *Esa Noche Yo Baila* (Musica Ficta, 2005), "in his free time (Mr. Serrano) plays the bagpipes and marches in delirium from one castle to another."

The same notes describe baroque guitarist Julian Navarro as discovering the guitar "on a sunny afternoon, while considering whether or not to graduate as a mechanical engineer." Mr. Navarro has a long list of academic and critical accolades and has been a member of the Iberia Quartet as well as early music ensembles Villanos and Abraxas.

Ms. Wright has been studying and playing keyboards since age 5, but fell in love with the harpsichord while at Sarah Lawrence College. After graduation, she traveled to the Netherlands for specialized studies in harpsichord at the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam. She is a professor of harpsichord and fortepiano at Indiana University and has given master classes at conservatories in Europe, Australia and the U.S.

The classically trained keyboardist was not as exposed to English and American pop music, and Mr. Serrano says Ms. Wright was taken aback but delighted to learn how his beloved Beatles employed the harpsichord in at least one song.

"I was telling Elisabeth about the Beatles," he says. "I told her that the Beatles used a harpsichord in (the George Harrison song) 'Piggies,' so she listened and could not believe it. It was fascinating the way they used all these instrumental colors and interesting for Elisabeth to hear the harpsichord in this different context." ●

Musica Ficta will perform at Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall, at the intersection of Washington Road and Ivy Lane, on the campus of Princeton University, July 19, 8 p.m., as part of the 2007 Golandsky Institute International Piano Festival, July 16-22. All performances take place at Taplin Auditorium at 8 p.m. Tickets cost \$25. (877) 343-3434; [www.golandskyinstitute.org](http://www.golandskyinstitute.org). Musica Ficta on the Web: [www.musicafictaweb.com](http://www.musicafictaweb.com)