

Robert Zephiro Milla • **SPIRITUS SALUTARIS**

*The Secret Algorithm of Spiritual Healing in J.S. Bach's
Sacred Songs from the Schemelli Songbook*

This is not a classical Bach album, but rather an ambitious spiritual music project: a new recording of hymns by Johann Sebastian Bach from the Schemelli Song Book in unconventional, modern arrangements

"Spiritus salutaris" (Latin/English "Redemptive Spirit") consists of 24 selected hymns by JS Bach from the so-called "Schemelli Song Book," brought to new life thanks to modern arrangements that are absolutely exceptional in the context of classical music.

"Spiritus salutaris" is, however, more than just the rebirth of those dignified religious vocal pieces from the legendary volume by Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Christian Schemelli with a re-invented sound background that is audacious and at times surprising. For Robert Zephiro Milla, who is not only the vocal artist, but also the producer of the album, it portrays above all an attempt to escape our world that is marked by chaos, performance pressure, fast pace, terror, fear, lies, superficiality, disorientation, misery and distress. It is an attempt to confront the storm of conflicts present everywhere and in all of our lives. Healing. Distraction and focus on inner strength at the same time.

"Spiritus salutaris" is even more than that. It's an experiment, a very personal attempt by the artist to decrypt the healing code he acoustically perceives and feels in the heart in these very special Bach songs from the "Schemelli Song Book". The unique melody and basso continuo lines in the chorale-like arias, says Robert Zephiro Milla, seemed to him a secret algorithm that revealed a spiritual healing energy. His goal was to make that innate sensation audible and tangible in his new arrangements of the 24 pieces.

And finally, "Spiritus salutaris" is also something else. Beyond all the metaphysical efforts and considerations, the album is also simply a soundtrack for inner reflection and spiritual quest and refreshment.

Historical background to the songs

The so-called "Musical Song Book" by Georg Christian Schemelli (published in 1736 in Leipzig) includes 954 religious songs in the original version, of which only 69 are provided with notes. For these 69 pieces, only the melody and a basso continuo have been recorded. Those 69 titles, written down in notes, have been attributed over the centuries to the composer Johann Sebastian Bach. Although these songs, whose lyrics are rooted in the pietist tradition, are still listed today in the official Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis ("Bach Works Catalogue"), the latest musicological findings can no longer confirm with certainty which titles were created by Bach. However, that fact does not spoil the beauty of all these religious songs, nor does it diminish their ingenuity. Whether JS Bach was actually *not* involved in some of these works, or has only edited melody or basso continuo, at all times both the voice leading and aura of the compositions give the listener the impression of indulging in the unique musical realm of JS Bach.

Birth of the “Spiritus salutaris” project

Even so, these gems of musical history have been almost entirely forgotten. They are rarely performed and are entirely unknown to the general public. Why is that? Robert Z. Milla asked this question at a time when his destiny confronted him with a protracted and severe nervous disorder. It was a state lasting several months, during which any noise, as well as the rush and the excessive dynamics of our modern society, was repugnant to him to such an extent that, entirely unconsciously, he resorted to his old music book with these very songs by Bach/Schemelli. In the painful phase of this inner retreat caused by illness, he experienced an unexpected longing for that religious music. Milla then sang the songs of Schemelli for himself every day. They were good for the soul, he says, and seemed to act like a medicine. It seemed to him almost as if a certain algorithm of spiritual healing would be hidden in all these very similarly structured melodies with the associated numbered bass lines. Thus Robert Z. Milla, who as an artist and a composer had been switching between classical and pop music in his previous works, gradually developed the plan to write entirely new, unprecedented arrangements for a select number of songs from the Schemelli music book, in order to return the meaning of these songs, as he perceived it, to the outside, and possibly to make the songs in such a form available to a wider audience. Unquestionably our listening habits, believes Milla, which are influenced and shaped by the ever new and powerful sounds of pop music and the intoxicating, effervescent sounds of film music, may make these Bach-Schemelli songs appear somewhat colorless and monotonous in their simplicity and purity, if they are always only accompanied by either a harpsichord, a piano or even just an organ, as was customary over the centuries. And this is where the story of the album "Spiritus salutaris" begins...

Album Credits:

- All songs taken from the "Schemelli Songbook" by Johann Sebastian Bach
- All arrangements written by Robert Zephiro Milla
- All tracks produced, recorded, programmed, edited and mixed by Robert Zephiro Milla
- Mastered by Michael Schwabe, Monoposto
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