

The Sibyls

The Goliards

Ashley Adams, Rebecca Faucette,
Cuffy Sullivan, Holly Wagoner - *voice*
Jonathan Brazell - *recorder, voice*
Anne Acker - *organ, sinfonye*
John Hillenbrand - *vielle*
Anne Durant - *harp*

Anonymous

The Chant of the Latin Sibyl

Hildegard
Hildegard
Hildegard
Hildegard

O virga ac diadema
Cum processit
O frondens virga
O tu illustrata

PAUSE

Hildegard
Hildegard
Hildegard
Hildegard
Hildegard

O orzchis Ecclesia (instrumental)
O viridissima virga
Ave Maria, o auctrix vitæ (inst.)
Caritas abundat
In principio

Sibylline prophecies have been a part of European culture since (at least) the end of the sixth century B.C., although the notion of the 'Christian' sibyl dates from after 389 A.D. - this was the year in which the Emperor Theodosius ordered the destruction of all of the texts that would have allowed scholars to have understood better the religion of the ancient world and its literary expression. Of course, no ruler has ever managed to repress all knowledge, or the thirst for it.

Virgil (70 B.C.-19 B.C.) referred to this religious world, and in particular, to the Sibyl of Cuma (*Bucolics IV*) when he recalled the last age of the prophesy of Cuma: "*This is when the great order of the centuries begins. Already the virgin too returns, the reign of Saturn returns. Already a new generation ascends from the high heavens.*" The Cumaean Sibyl's gradual emergence as the prophetess who foretells the Christ, the second coming, the last judgment, and the end of the world was a logical development. What is extraordinary, however, is the continued tradition of this mythology through the Middle Ages and Renaissance in a number of European countries; in Corsica, Sardinia, and the Balearic Islands, it continues as an uninterrupted tradition to the present day.

A homily/skit that is attributed to St. Augustine (dating to the early Middle Ages, at any rate) was read on Christmas Eve to persuade non-Christians of the coming of the Messiah. It involved a variety of characters from the ancient pagan world, who would each give a brief testimony. As the tradition evolved, the words of the *Judicii signum* were added to the rendition of the Sibyl's vision (from the tenth century, at least) during Christmas matins (between the sixth and ninth Lessons) in France, Italy, Castille, and Aragon. This tradition was banned by the Church during the Counter-Reformation, although this proscription was ignored in some places (Majorca and the Catalan region).

Twenty-three transmissions of the *Judicii signum* chorus and the Latin verses of the prophesy survive from medieval (pre-1500) manuscripts. Our program employs the melodies (there are slight variations between most of them) of thirteen of these transmissions, a different one for each of the thirteen verses. The basic melody is introduced via the Osca Cathedral Codex 19 version of the chant.¹ During the Renaissance, polyphonic versions (in Catalan) of this basic melody were composed for two to four voices - six of these survive. In our performance, we have taken two of these melodic variations and adapted them to our own instrumentarium for use as instrumental interludes.

This work has traditionally been performed by a boy-soloist, simply because, for centuries, women were forbidden to sing in church. The Sibyl, however, was a woman, and in convents, a nun would have sung this rôle; we feel that it is perfectly appropriate to have a woman sing the solo part.

Hildegard

It was not until the eighth century that the Anglo-Saxon missionary, St. Boniface, established the archbishopric of Mainz, so the arrival of Christianity came relatively late to the lands east of the Rhine. By the twelfth century, however, a series of Benedictine abbeys had been erected within the archdiocese, often perched on forbidding and inaccessible hilltops overlooking the river. The membership of these communities tended to be aristocratic, consisting of younger sons of the nobility, the same social class that had endowed and established the monasteries in the first place.

Hildegard (b. 1098 at Bernersheim, near Alzey, in what is today Rheinhessen) was the tenth child of a family of this provincial nobility.² From childhood, Hildegard had the gift of inner visions, which she always received in a wakeful state of mind. Among the legends that have become part of Hildegardian lore is a tale of her having predicted, in childhood, the coloration and markings of a calf that was *in utero*.

Jutta of Spanheim, a recluse, had established a hermitage, and later, a convent (Diessenberg) as an adjunct of the monastery of Disibodenberg, and Hildegard was given into her keeping, quite literally, as a tithe. At fifteen, Hildegard became a nun, and led a studious, predictable life for seventeen years. At the age of thirty two, her visions intensified, causing her great emotional and physical distress. At thirty eight (1136), she succeeded Jutta as abbess of Diessenberg, whereupon she began to write down (or to have written down)³ the content of her visions. This was contained in the 1141-51 work *Scivias* (*i.e. sciens via Domini*, the one who knows the ways of the Lord), which was approved, half-completed, by the archbishop of Mainz, and later, on the advice of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, by Pope Eugenius III at the Synod of Trier (1147-8). From this point, her fame began to spread throughout Europe.

In the following years, she created *Liber vitae meritorum* (1158), a guide to life, and *Liber divinum operum* (1163-73), a guide to men and the world. Her intense studies of nature and natural phenomena contributed to her reputation as a healer, and she embodied this natural and medical knowledge in two books: *Physica* and *Causæ et Curæ*.

Whatever else she may have been, it is apparent that Hildegard was a woman of uncommon intelligence, strength, charisma, and obstinacy. In an era of entrenched misogyny, for a woman to write an authoritative book (or, for that matter, to *know how* to write at all) was hardly normal and was certain to have aroused negative feelings among many churchmen. It is possible that her works would have been suppressed by the Church but for the fact that she disclaimed their authorship: She was merely a conduit for the word of God Himself, who spoke through her in much the same way that a minstrel would speak through the strings of his harp or vielle; the existence of prophetesses was acknowledged in the Bible, so she was violating neither canon nor dogma.

Often cited as a proto-feminist, Hildegard had a unique view of the rôle of women, and in particular, nuns in the Church: hypothetically, that religious virgins are the Brides of Christ as the Church is the Bride of Christ - therefore, nuns are the actual incorporation of Christ's Bride, a special, pure kind of Church. Women who retain their virginity for love of Christ are His spokesmen, His beloved spouses, who address the world on His behalf; therefore, the form of woman kept pure is the image and resonance of God.

Kuno, abbot of Disibodenberg, was among those churchmen likely to have found her celebrity (Soon after the publication of *Scivias*, she began to be known as 'The Sibyl of the Rhine') to be a cause for jealousy and annoyance; on one hand, her fame was bringing in donations and endowments from far and wide, but on the other, her prestige was eclipsing that of Kuno himself, her putative superior. In 1150, as the probable result of this friction, Hildegard moved her community to Rupertsberg, near Bingen. Once settled there, she reformed several other extant convents, and consolidated them at Eibingen.

Like many other visionaries, she felt called upon to write admonitory (and sometimes scolding) letters to important men, and her correspondents included Henry II of England, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, King Konrad III, Pope Eugenius III, Pope Anastasius IV, Bernard

of Clairvaux, and numerous lesser lords and prelates. Many of her surviving letters addressed entire communities of monks and nuns, as well as communities of Christian laymen. Defying frequent infirmities, as well as the rigors of travel in the twelfth century, she undertook several journeys, and held public penance services in front of clerical and lay audiences in Bamberg, Würzburg, Metz, Trier, Cologne, and other cities.

Toward the end of her life, she and her convent got into trouble with the Chapter at Mainz for burying an excommunicate in their cemetery, and they were placed under an interdict; she appealed to the archbishop successfully, and he lifted it.

Hildegard died (1179) at the age of nearly eighty one, an unusually long life for her era. Although miracles performed by her were reported both during her life and after her death, attempts to attain her formal canonization in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were unsuccessful. In the fifteenth century, however, her name was inserted in the Roman Martyrology, and her cult (dating from the thirteenth century) was approved for German dioceses.

In the 1140s, at the same time that she first started to write down her visions, Hildegard began to compose liturgical poetry and music, and by 1148, the Magister of Theology at the University of Paris, Odo of Soissons, had noticed the originality of her songs. In Odo's words: "*They say that you, lifted up into heaven, see many things, and can create the airs of a new song, though you did not study the craft...that much is revealed to you, and that you bring forth great writings, and discover new manners of song.*"

In her memoirs, Hildegard recalled how she began to compose: "*...untaught by anyone, I composed and chanted plainsong in praise of God and the saints, although I had never studied either musical notation or any kind of singing.*" In the 1150s, she assembled these works into a cycle, which she called *Symphonia harmoniae caelestium revelationem* (Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations); this contained sixty antiphons, responsories, sequences, and hymns, appropriate to the many feasts of the liturgical year. Hildegard would say of her musical gift that she acquired it "*...Not through human lips, nor through human intelligence and ingenuity, nor through a desire for human composition, but through God alone.*" Hildegard's musical works are preserved in two manuscripts: Wiesbaden, Hessische Landesbibliothek Ms. 2, the 'Riesencodex' (1177-79), and the Dendermonde Bibliotheek der St.-Pieters-&-Paulusabdij Ms. 9 (ca. 1175). The music is notated in Sangallian, or Hufnagel neumes on a four-line staff, thus indicating precise pitch, but giving no indication of rhythm.

For many years, Hildegard's music was regarded by Gregorian Chant specialists as a kind of late, florid, and excessively manneristic corruption of 'classical' Chant, and was ignored (largely) by them. In the 1980s, however, German musicologist Helga Weber,⁴ British musicologist Christopher Page,⁵ and the ensemble, Sequentia⁶ all released recordings of Hildegard's music (with varying degrees of musical and commercial success), and it became apparent that, not only was Hildegard's music unique within the context of Chant *per se*, but unique in the history of music itself. A composition by Hildegard is immediately recognizable as hers, even when it is subjected to the monstrosity of synthesizer accompaniment, or other tasteless horrors of the sort that occurred in recordings in 1998, the nine-hundredth anniversary of her birth.

Despite her inimitability, Hildegard herself would repeat musical motifs throughout her life. The most typical is probably the use of wide intervals: Often, the first three notes of a phrase will incorporate a leap from the root to the fifth, and then to the octave; often, a Hildegard

composition will employ the full *authentic* and *plagal* range of a mode, and upon occasion, a few notes above and below these limits as well. This is unprecedented within the idiom of Gregorian Chant.

Hildegard was known to bend, and sometimes to ignore, the perimeters and intervals of the Church Modes (Where a half-step appears in a scale is the defining characteristic of a mode). She often employed the extremely rare (and often plaintive) Phrygian mode (In this program, *Cum processit, O orzchis Ecclesia*, and *In principio* are Phrygian). Nearly half of all the songs in the *Symphonia* are Phrygian; sometimes she would insert a 'phrygianized' cadence into a Dorian composition as well.

According to Marianne Richert Pfau, "*In the Symphonia, the position of the Marian chants is curious. They hold second place within the heirarchical arrangement of the song cycle. Given that this heirarchical arrangement reflects Hildegard's cosmology, the position of the Marian chants seems remarkable, as in that place, they interrupt the chants for the Trinity, in effect falling between those for God the Father and those for the Holy Spirit. By way of tradition, chants for the Son could be expected instead, but Hildegard does not write any songs for Christ. Rather, Christ appears as Mary's son, whom, as the Mother of God, she elevates to a place within the Trinity. In all songs for the Virgin, Hildegard celebrates Mary as the second Eve, the Mother of God who has made good what Eve has thrown into confusion. She is as pure as a resplendent jewel and as luminous matter. Because God has chosen her for the incarnation of his Word, Mary stands among the Trinity. We may conclude that Hildegard met the new Marian cult that developed so strongly in France during the twelfth century, where a host of new church buildings was dedicated to "Nôtre Dame". Hildegard's work on Mary, and particularly the prominent position allotted the Blessed Virgin within the Symphonia, can be taken as the German correlative to that movement.*"⁷

For the reasons stated above, Hildegard's sixteen chants for the Blessed Virgin Mary (six of which are included in this program) constitute one of the more significant elements of her œuvre. In these works, Hildegard uses images of nature as symbolic of the Virgin, the mother of Christ, the personification of the fertility of the earth, and the image of God. Marian songs address the Virgin as *virga* (branch) and *flos* (flower), and modify these nouns with luscious adjectives that evoke the vernal explosion of new life.

The question of whether instruments should have any rôle at all within Hildegard's œuvre (or, for that matter, *any* medieval liturgical or para-liturgical music) is a matter akin to debate over how many angels can dance upon the head of a pin, and is unlikely ever to be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. In the liner notes to Sequentia's second recording of *Ordo Virtutum*,^{8 9} however, Peter Dronke quotes Hildegard directly on the subject,¹⁰ and also cites a tenth-century Aquitanian sequence, *O Muse Sicelides* (You Muses from Sicily) persuasively.¹¹ Illustrations from an illuminated *Scivias* produced under Hildegard's supervision show angels and saints playing instruments, as do countless other manuscripts of the era.

We end this program with the processional hymn that concludes *Ordo Virtutum*, and constitutes the melodic climax of the play, *In principio*. Not only does its content synopsis tidily Hildegard's cosmology (as well as providing a foil for the apocalyptic imagery of *Judicii signum*), but it is so effective in concluding *Ordo Virtutum* that we hope it will be equally so in this concert.

John Hillenbrand

¹ A Provençal version of the song emerged in the thirteenth century.

² Her family's name has not come down to us, unfortunately.

³ This is a paraphrased excerpt from a passage in Norman F. Cantor: *Medieval Lives*, HarperCollins Inc., New York, N.Y., 1994.

⁴ Instrumentalkreis Helga Weber: *Hildegard von Bingen: Lieder und Antiphonem*, 1980, Christophorus 0041-2.

⁵ Gothic Voices: *A Feather on the Breath of God*, 1984, Hyperion CDA66039.

⁶ *Sequentia: Ordo Virtutum*, 1982, Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 77051-2-RG, and *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphoniae*, 1985, Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 77020-2-RG.

⁷ Introduction to: Marianne Richert Pfau, editor and translator, *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationem*, Volume II, Hildegard Publishing Co., Bryn Mawr, Penna., 1997.

⁸ *Ordo Virtutum* (The Play of the Virtues) is the earliest datable work among Hildegard's surviving compositions (It is referred to in the ca. 1151 *Scivias*), although she had begun to compose liturgical and para-liturgical works quite a bit earlier.

⁹ *Sequentia: Ordo Virtutum*, 1998, Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 05472-77394-2.

¹⁰ "...Even if instrumentation on the Rupertsberg was rather less ambitious than this, the spiritual importance of instrumental as well as vocal music to Hildegard emerges vividly in her impassioned letter of 1178 to the prelates of Mainz, when her convent, in conflict with Mainz, was punished by being denied the sacraments, and the right to sing the liturgy. Holy prophets, such as David and Solomon, she writes, "...Not only composed psalms and canticles to be sung...but invented musical instruments of diverse kinds with this in view, by which the songs could be expressed in multitudinous sounds, so that the listeners, aroused and made adept outwardly, might be nurtured within the forms and qualities of the instruments, as well as by the meaning of the words performed with them." That is why, "...in accordance with the material composition and quality of instruments, we can best transform and shape the performance of our inner being towards praises of the Creator."

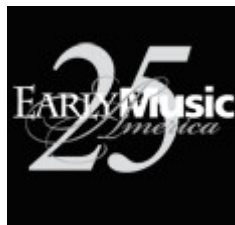
¹¹ "...Each strophe summons one or more groups in the choir to sing and one or more musicians to play: the instruments used in the performance of this virtuoso piece are, explicitly, lyre, zither, portable organ, tambourine, horn and flute."

“The goliards took their name from one Bishop Golias, a debauched priest who is featured in many of their poems (and who may never have existed). While many students and clerics wandered from university to university to satisfy their thirst for knowledge, the goliards, it seems, wandered simply to satisfy their thirst. They sought pleasure and adventure, and delighted in drinking, loving freely, and gambling away what little money they had.”*

"One of the class of educated jesters, buffoons, and authors of loose or satirical Latin verse, who flourished chiefly in the 12th and 13th centuries in Germany, France, and England."

*From Norman F. Cantor, General Editor, *The Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, Viking Press, N.Y., 1999.

**From *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1971.



This performance is one of more than one hundred concerts taking place nation-wide during the 2010-2011 season celebrating the 25th anniversary of
Early Music America
(www.earlymusic.org)