

SINGING HILDEGARD

Hildegard's music is not only music. Her sacred repertoire is a place of culture, theology, poetry and a precious casket of sounds and words heard from heaven, written then in neumes so that even today we could listen to it and sing it.

In Hildegard's thought, music is at the center, like a directing light bringing women and men back to their original harmony.

Naturally, the importance of the role of music is part of the Benedictine monastic rule, *ora et labora*, according to which she had been educated at Disibodenberg, the monastery in which she entered very young (about 1105/6), entrusted to the spiritual mother Jutta von Sponheim.

The rule combines the needs of daily life – manual maintenance and organization of the convent spaces and functions, cultivation of land products and cooking, management of the guesthouse, assistance to the sick people – with the needs of the spirit and religious practice – study of sacred books, meditation and prayer, singing, artistic activities like *ars illuminandi* and painting, copying of ancient texts to the *scriptorium*.

Although she defines herself as a *paupercula femina* (Ep. 149R), Hildegard is a culture woman, with a wide knowledge of Platonic-Christian theology, including Hugh of St. Victor, and promotes culture and awareness of her nuns, who generally came from noble families. This intent, like a life-project, was best done when she founded, in 1147, the monastery of St. Rupert, at the confluence of the Nahe and the Rhein, in Bingen am Rhein; so Hildegard founded with some nuns an autonomous female community, established in 1150. Here, in addition to playing the role of abbess, she was able to respond fully, encouraged by St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Pope Eugene III, to her divine calling as a visionary and prophetess, then dictating the contents which she saw and heard inspired by the *living Light*. Her writings are in Latin, the language of the Church, and two of the three theological texts are illuminated: *Scivias* (1141-1151, miniatures made at Rupertsberg *scriptorium*) and *Liber divinorum operum* (1163-1173), illuminated about forty years after Hildegard's death, in *Codex Latinum 1942*, I-Lucca, State Library.

The musical repertoire includes about seventy *carmina* and one liturgical drama, *Ordo Virtutum*; it's entitled *Symphonia harmoniae caelestium revelationum* and is noted in gothic neumes, on tetragrammaton. The main codes are Rupertsberger Riesenkodex: Wiesbaden Handschrift n. 2, and Codex Dendermonde: Sint-Pieters-en Paulusabdij– ms. 9. It was certainly composed starting from 1141, as the latest vision of *Scivias* demonstrates; in fact, some of the texts of the *Symphonia* and some passages of the *Ordo virtutum* are there reported, although without music.

Since different music and sounds accompanied the visions, it is likely that Hildegard dictated his compositions together with the writing of her texts, which were not only theological but also scientific and medical, and that she wrote until late maturity.

Hildegard's music and sacred lyrics, always of her composition, reflect the vastness of her being, perceiving, thinking; contents sound like a poetic theology, absolutely original but never in conflict with the doctrine of the church.

Her message, although so far in time, is still recognizable today, especially by people sensitive to themes such as divinity of the human creature, purity and original power, micro and macro cosmos, and by people listening and searching for sacred, beauty and harmony as true nourishment (*pabulum*) for soul, mind and body, in a holistic vision.

Hildegard's actuality is confirmed by the renewed interest that her proclamation as Doctor of the Church, on 7th October 2012, rekindled.

Actual ambient emergencies have also highlighted her thinking, due to the acute attention she had devoted to nature and the relationship between man and nature, already compromised at that time according to what she wrote: in fact, in *Liber vitae meritorum* (1158-1163) the elements complain about the way humanity treats them. Between her favorite themes, now really topical, is music. Without music, without musical harmony between different aspects of the human creature,

humanity is depressed, degraded, debased. At Rupertsberger music was so important that Hildegard composed a proper repertoire, enclosed in *Symphonia harmoniae*. Music from heaven for the abbess and her nuns, music to make more united the monastic community; but also music for her soul and heart, as documented in the Acts of the canonization process: Hildegard sang the Marian sequence *O virgo ac diadema* with a radiant face, inspired by Holy Spirit, walking in the cloister (Acts of the canonization process, XIII century).

Hildegard's *carmina*, being poetry, summarize theological themes – specially the same as *Scivias*, *Liber vitae meritorem*, *Liber divinorum operum* - linking them to the destiny of humanity. So she calls everyone back to the best condition of soul and body within the nature to which we belong and the interior of God's creatural project. An example of this unique poetic style is when she sings the purity and virginal strength of Mary comparing them to the beauty of nature, the luxuriance of vegetation, the heavenly song of birds, the budding of plants and flowers. The attention to the Marian theme, as well as to the local Saints, characterizes her repertoire; in fact, in the same years St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote the Praise to the Blessed Virgin (*In laudibus Virginis Matris*), recognizing to Mary a centrality in the role of saving humanity, unknown to the sacred texts.

Hildegard von Bingen is the first voice, into the Christian era, who declared how important music is for human life as a whole. A life without music is a life that lacks its wholeness, because human psychic and corporeal system is like a musical ensemble, a vibrating set of pitches, sounds and tunes that harmonize mind and heart with each other. Silence, which characterizes monastic life, is systematically alternated with “ruminant” reading (*ruminatio*, the practice of reading in a low voice to oneself) and singing; silence prepares it by creating the space that listening needs.

The cloistered silence is the preliminary condition for the soul to seek in the stillness within itself; Hildegard suffered from the ban on singing imposed on his community in 1178 by the Diocese of Mainz for the accusation of having buried a man suspected of heresy within the convent walls. Like she wrote to the prelates of Mainz, to impose silence by removing the possibility of singing the Office of Hours and the Mass was like making a deal with the devil, who neither sings nor speaks more rationally because of his fall – the loss of the original condition of angel. Thus, singing is the first way to preserve health and to save soul and body in life on earth and in heaven, prefiguring the life of angels.

Hildegard's message is the same as what neuroscientists said in the XX century: a society without music does not die, but gets sick, loses strength, goes into depression. Singing Hildegard inspires and sustains, like her sacred poetry about Christian truths and figures. Hildegard's lyrics elevate human thinking and feeling, in all those who live seeking and practicing goodness and beauty; for Hildegard, acting in favor of life. The depth of the texts, the spaces of beauty at its disposal, the very high value of the musical repertoire – as human heritage in all – the image of the sacred that today Hildegard gives us back should be a model of a life in fullness.

Hildegard's style speaks to many people for the personality, the intense impulses, and the sensations of wonder for the divine and natural beauty: therefore, it sounds modern inside our historical time, which needs of silence, stillness, interiority to restore the connection between human and divine.

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INUNUM ENSEMBLE

Elena Modena

voice, romanian harp, bells, gothic harp

Ilario Gregoletto

fiddle, medieval organ, organistrum, recorder

Sacred carmina by Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)

Symphonia harmoniae caelestium revelationum

INUNUM ENSEMBLE was founded in 2003 for the dissemination of the medieval repertoire, in particular the sacred monodic and polyphonic production from the twelfth to the fifteenth century; it belongs to the Centro Studi Claviere of Vittorio Veneto (TV). The members of the ensemble come from a broad academic background, which includes functional vocality, performance practice with ancient instruments, musicological research. The ensemble has concerts in sacred places of artistic importance and spiritual significance, so far in Italy, Austria and Germany.

Thematic programs include: *The Invisible revealed. The Manifestation of the prophetic Sanctity of Hildegard of Bingen*, on the integral projection of the Lucca-Kodex's miniatures (ms. 1942, Biblioteca Statale, Lucca); *The mystical Sound*, presented on the occasion of the conference "On the mysticism of the ancients and the moderns", Ca' Foscari University, Venice; *Monos. At the Roots of sacred Singing*, with the patronage of the Academy of Choral Art V.S. Popov, Moscow; *Aurea Materia*, on the projection of miniatures from the Scivias-Kodex (Bingen, Abtei St. Hildegard); *Laude iocunda. Music that heals*, as a corollary to the recent exhibition of illuminated plates from the *Tacuinum sanitatis (codex vindobonensis series nova 2644*, Austrian National Library, Vienna). The group participated in the recording by the Schola Aquileiensis, director Claudio Zinutti, *Canamus cum modulo*, the discants of Cividale del Friuli (Note, 2022).

In duo formation, Elena Modena and Ilario Gregoletto, InUnum ensemble has recorded two CDs with music by Hildegard von Bingen, published by the Centro Studi Claviere: *Divina dulcedo et laudatio*, annexed to the Proceedings of the Conference "Mistica, Musica e Medicina. Hildegard between her and our time" (Treviso, CSC, 2013); *Hildegard's song*, annexed to the Proceedings of the Conference "Illuminating the Present" (Treviso, CSC, 2020). In October 2022 the ensemble was invited from St. Hildegard Akademie to perform in Rome, church of Santa Maria dell'Anima, and in Eibingen, Abtei St. Hildegard, on the occasion of the Jubilee of Saint Hildegard of Bingen, in the tenth year since her proclamation as Doctor of the Church.

In formation of four members, Caterina Chiarcos, Elena Modena, Anna Passarini, Ilario Gregoletto, InUnum ensemble has recorded for Tactus (2021, TC220002) *The Legend of Victor and Corona in the Codes of the Middle Age*, very well reviewed in the magazines «Musica» (October 2021); «Music web international»; «Early Music Review» (April 2022).



CENTRO STUDI CLAVIERE
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SINGING HILDEGARD has been recorded in Sanctuary Saints Victor and Corona
Feltre (Belluno), Italy
Video by Sebastiano Mescolotto
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