

***Sibyl of the Rhine* – the life and music of Hildegard of Bingen**

24 November 2001, Jacqueline Du Pré Building, St Hilda's College, Oxford (OUDCE subscription concert)

past and present members of Oxford Girls' Choir
directed by Richard Vendome and Penelope Martin-Smith



Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) experienced visions whose dazzling imagery spans the centuries between her time and ours. They are set out in great detail and illustrated with painted miniatures contained in the three manuscripts entitled *Scivias* "Know the ways of the Lord" (1141-1151), the *Liber vitae meritorum* (1158-1163), and the *Liber divinorum operum* (1163-1173).

She tells us also that these visions were accompanied by heavenly music: "Then I saw the lucent sky, in which I heard different kinds of music, marvellously embodying all the meaning I has heard before".

This programme reveals the whole gamut of her output, from the musical play written for the edification of novices at her Benedictine community to ecstatic melodies which still astonish us today.

Kyrie eleison [RV]

From my earliest days, even in my mother's womb God raised me up with the breath of life. He fixed this vision in my soul ... and in the third year of my life I saw so great a brightness that my soul trembled; yet because of my infant condition I could express nothing of it. But in my eighth year I was offered to God, given over to a spiritual way of life



Deus enim in prima muliere [SW] (Victoria Couper)



...This vision remained with me until my fortieth year. Then I was forced by a great pressure of pains to manifest what I had seen and heard ... I also brought forth songs complete with their melody, in praise of God and the saints, without being taught by anyone; I sang them too, even though I had learned neither musical notation nor singing.

O nobilissima viriditas [RV] (Penelope Martin-Smith) †

I saw the image of a woman as large as a great city, with a wonderful crown on her head, and arms from which a splendour hung like sleeves shining from heaven to earth... I could not make out her attire, except that she was arrayed in great splendour, and on her breast shone a red glow like the dawn, and I heard a sound of all kinds of music singing about her, "Like the dawn, greatly sparkling".



O orzchis ecclesia [SW] (Clemmie Franks)



And after these things I saw the Son of God hanging on the cross, and the image of a woman sprinkled by the blood from his side, joined with Him in happy betrothal and endowed with His body and blood. "Blessed are you roses in the streaming of your blood, fragrant with supreme delight, distilling the purchase that flowed from the innermost heart of Him who abides before time".

Vos flores rosarum [RV]

O splendid jewel, serenely infused with the Sun!... O sweet green branch that flowers from the stem of Jesse!... That Most High Father sought a Virgin's candour, And willed that His Word should take in her His body.



Hodie aperuit [SW] (Emily Levy)



Then I saw the lucent sky, in which I heard different kinds of music, embodying all the meanings I had heard before. I heard the praises of the joyous citizens above, steadfastly holding to the ways of Truth. And their song, like the voice of a multitude, making music in harmony, praising the ranks of Heaven.

Nunc gaudeant [SW]

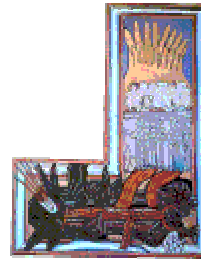
[A letter from Hildegard to the Abbot Adam of Ebrach]

He Who Is says: the sun shines and sends forth its rays. And a certain man, a friend of the sun, had a garden in which he desired to plant many herbs and flowers. And the sun sent heat upon those herbs and flowers, and the dew and the rain gave the moisture of greenness to them.



Then from the north appeared a contorted figure with black hair and a horrible face, but at the same time from the east came a handsome young man with bright shining hair and a comely face...

Now you, Father Abbot, well understand these words. Do not trust in your powers alone, but flee to the grace of God, lest the treacheries of the Devil tempt your people into all sorts of vices through negligence.



Ordo virtutum (sections IV-end) [RV]



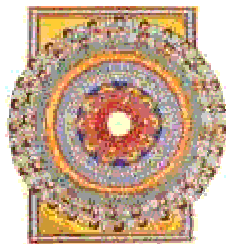
The true and ardent lamp of Charity was lit when God sent his only-begotten Son to save mankind. She is a deep blue like a hyacinth. The Son of God inflamed his faithful people with Charity so that they might assist the needy. As scripture says: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and your neighbour as yourself."

Caritas habundat [SW]

Then I saw a most great and serene splendour, flaming with many eyes. And I saw the image of a woman who had a perfect human form in her womb. By the secret design of the Supernal Creator that form moved with vital motion, so that a fiery globe possessed its heart and touched its brain and spread itself among all its members.



Unde quocumque [SW] (Victoria Couper, Louise Eekelaar)



Then I saw in the vault of Heaven armies of angels who shone with a great brightness, arrayed in the shape of a crown. The two outermost armies had wings on their breasts, the third had a human form, and the fourth shone with such brightness that I could not look at them. The fifth had the appearance of white marble, and the sixth wore helmets on their heads. The seventh had nothing human in their appearance, but shone red like the dawn. The eighth were full of eyes and wings, and the innermost burned like fire

*and had many wings. And all these armies were singing with
marvellous voices all kinds of music, and by this God was
magnificently glorified.*

O vos angeli [RV]

editions © Stevie Wishart [SW] and Richard Vendome [RV]

singers: Katie Birtill, Victoria Couper, Louise Eekelaar, Clemmie
Franks, Emily Levy, Felicity Lingard, Hannah Nye, Louisa Nye,
Charlotte Roberts, Penelope Martin-Smith

Texts and images from Hildegard's *Scivias* and other sources
read by Hannah Nye and projected by John Nye