

# Body & Soul in Medieval Song

## Vajra Voices

Allison Zelles Lloyd, Amy Stuart Hunn, Caroline Jou Armitage, Celeste Winant  
and Karen R. Clark, Director

with Shira Kammen, vielle/harp & voice

Friday, June 14, 2024 at 2 o'clock pm

St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church, Berkeley, CA

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Antiphon to the Virgin: O Frondens Virgo	Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)
Instrumental Kyrie	Arr. by Shira Kammen (b. 1961)
Chant: Lucis Creator	Pope St. Gregory the Great (540-604)
Antiphon to the Creator Spirit: O quam mirabilis est	Hildegard von Bingen
Antiphon to the Virgin: Quia Ergo Femina	
Lament: Ar ne kuth	Anonymous (c. 1250)
Instrumental Ar ne kuth	Arr. Margriet Tindemans (1951-2014)
Conductus: Mundo Salus Gratie	St. Martial Ms. (c.1150)
Antiphon: Cum erubuerint	Hildegard von Bingen
Instrumental: Ispariz	Shira Kammen
Antiphon: O coruscans lux stellarum	Hildegard von Bingen
Hymn to the Virgin: Ave Generosa	
—Brief Interval—	
Reverdie: Voulez vous que je vous chant	Anon. (c. 1300)
Instrumental: Nouvelle Amour	Arr. by S. Kammen
Canso: A Chantar m'er	Comtessa de Dia (c. 1175 - c. 1212)
Bien doit chanter	Guillaume le Vinier (1190-1245)
Motet: Quant en moy/Amour et biauté/Amara valde	Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1376)
Instrumental: Liement me deport	Arr. S. Kammen
Motet: Tous corps/De Souspirant Cuer/Suspiro	
Virelai: Je vivroie liement	

“The body is the vestment of the spirit, which has a living voice,  
and so it is proper for the body in harmony with the soul, to use its voice to sing praises to God.”  
Hildegard von Bingen

Each time I return to the singing of medieval music from 11th century Aquitanian polyphony to the florid chant of the Abbess Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179); to the monophonic chanson of the troubadours and trouvère and the intellectual motets of the French cleric Guillaume de Machaut (14th century), I have to wonder what draws us, Vajra Voices, to this music? And me, in particular—a child of the 60s born near Chicago into a blue-collar steel working family out of the coal country hills of Appalachia; a modern woman in the 21st century who got to go to college and was lucky to live in a state with a great university music program. As an actor prepares for a role, I consider the similarities and the differences between me and the words and meaning, the context, function and purpose of the particular repertory or song. Perhaps, there is congruence between my affinity for medieval song and the fervent twang of southern white gospel hymns I sang with my family. The songs of our ancestors, I know, still resonate in our bones.

In the performance of medieval monophonic music, whether singing in unison or organum, the emphasis is on tuning— pure vowels, clear tone. Tuning the octaves, unisons, and perfect fifths is the human's opportunity to commune and resonate with the Divine, the cosmos. I remember reading the musicologist, Gustave Reese (1899-1977) writing that Hildegard von Bingen's songs are 'a bridge between chant and folksong.' I especially like Hildegard's advise for singers— "your singing must be clear, sweet, and strong!"

I was studying for my masters in opera when Thomas Binkley (1931-1995) came to Indiana University to form the Early Music programs. It was in the fall semester's (1979) cattle call choral auditions when we first met. According to Binkley I was one of three female singers who could sing without vibrato (much to my voice professor's dismay). Binkley invited me to sing with his Pro Arte Singers. A couple of years later I sang the modern day premiere of his reconstruction of the medieval passion, The Greater Passion Play from the Carmina Burana Manuscript. (I performed a version of this in the first ever Berkeley Festival, 1990.) In my first coaching with him on my first ever Marian lament, "Awe, Awe mich hiut unde immer we" to his sparse, improvised lute accompaniment, I left his studio feeling stunned and was only able to utter: "That is other-worldly." What I think I experienced in that moment was the calming of my central nervous system. There is currently some research into the healing aspects of singing chant and my hunch is that the medieval modes are a large component. I also think that from my Kentucky relatives and my attending tent revival meetings and many funerals, I understood lamentations and the longing for jubilation and the promise of Heaven.

The sounds of words— ordered, nuanced to convey meaning and intrigue— brought entertainment to the 13th and 14th century French Courts. Medieval French poets delighted in form, structure, versification, syllabification, the rhyme and reason. The early 14th century English writer, poet and rhetorician, Geoffrey Vinsauf spent time in the courts of France and wrote a manual for writers titled, *Poetria Nova* (The New Poetry). In it, Vinsauf offers detailed guidelines on the five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. As for the delivery, or performance, Vinsauf states: "Let the voice be a reflection of the subject. Imitate genuine fury, but do not be furious. Yet, suggest, as is fitting, the emotion itself."

In the manuscripts only the first verse of these long poems is notated with melody. We modern singers must analyze the text for syllabification and rhyme to find the phrasing and flow—in medieval French pronunciation— where a flexible rhythmic pulse may alternate with more speech-like declamation and with, perhaps, a dash of improvisation. It's helpful to remember that our English words for eloquence, elegance, finesse, nuance, derive from the French language. This form and structure— math and music— blooms in the imagination of the last masterful trouvère, Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1376). He created songs on the poetic formes fixes: virelai, ballade, rondeau, lai, and motets. The construction of the motet is based on a pre-existing tenor: the top two lines (motetus and triplum) sing two completely different poems and are composed in relation to the tenor line. All meet at the cadences forming landmarks of perfect fifths, octaves, unisons.

My dear friend, Helge Rinholm (1942-1990) while finishing his PhD dissertation in linguistics (Baltic languages) shared an apartment with me in Bloomington Indiana. I loved hearing him talk about the sounds of consonant combinations, sounds that enact their meaning, such as spit, spew, disperse. The same sound with similar meaning is common across a number of languages. In his work Helge applied a branch of phenomenology (Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)) that asserts that in any given moment one's perception can include the knowledge of another's completely different experience of the same moment. For instance, in this concert, there's an unspoken understanding that each one present has a history dating back to birth (or beyond) and a future (long may it be). And, if the 4th century philosopher, Calcidus's translations of Plato ring true, may our singing be "intelligible speech in the senses of the listener, announcing what is present as well as absent and, calling our souls back to their original state of harmony."

Karen R. Clark  
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