

In August, 2015 Vajra Voices will record their first CD of music of Hildegard von Bingen with Shira Kammen (vielle & harp). We will record in St. Ignatius Catholic Church in San Francisco and expect to release the CD by summer 2016. To help raise funds for this recording, Vajra Voices has launched a KickStarter campaign which **ends on August 5, 2015**. As of today's concert we are just over the halfway marker toward reaching our goal.

If you would like to help support Vajra Voices and this project and want to learn more, please visit the **Vajra Voices KickStarter** page online at: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1270240623/vajra-voices-records-music-of-hildegard-von-bingen>  
(Or google Vajra Voices, KickStarter)

Vajra Voices would like to convey our sincere gratitude to our audience, friends, and family members. We thank Good Shepherd Episcopal Church for hosting us for this concert and the previous week's rehearsals. And, we are grateful to have received funding from the San Francisco Friends of Chamber Music Musical Grant Program which made possible our preparations for this concert and our upcoming recording sessions.

On behalf of Vajra Voices: I thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,  
Karen R. Clark, Director

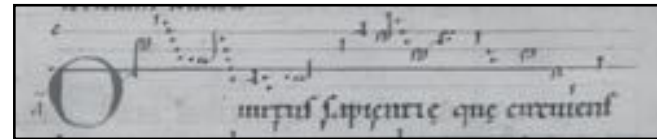


## Hildegard von Bingen Music to Celebrate the Divine Feminine



**Vajra Voices**  
with Shira Kammen, harp & vielle  
Karen R. Clark, Director

Good Shepherd Episcopal, Berkeley  
July 31, 2015



Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) was the tenth child born into an aristocratic family in Bermersheim bei Alzey (Rheinland.) At the age of eight, Hildegard became an oblate of the local Benedictine hermitage, Disibodenberg, where she came under the tutelage of Jutta von Sponheim (1091-1136). Hildegard learned the Psalter, and to read in Latin and it is thought that she also assisted Jutta in attending the sick. Between 1112-1115 Disibodenberg became a monastery and it is during this time that Hildegard received the veil from Otto, Bishop of Bamberg. In 1136, Abbess Jutta died and Hildegard was elected her successor. Throughout her life, Hildegard experienced visions but it is not until—at age 43— after receiving prophetic instruction to "write them down" that Hildegard begins work on her book *Scivias* (Know the Ways of God.)

Thus begins the life of a prolific woman who was well-known— as the Sibyl of the Rhein— and well-traveled throughout Germany, who founded and built the Abbey at Eibingen, who was sought after by royalty, clergy, and lay people for her knowledge of medicine—gem stones and herbs, her wisdom, and for her gift and love of music.

Since, in the Benedictine Abby, the Divine Office is celebrated with an estimated four hours of singing per day, we are mindful that the function and purpose of Hildegard's music is solely for devotion and praise. The texts of Hildegard's musical compositions are in a style known as *Kunstprosa*— prophetic speech which is between poetry and prose.

This evening's program includes the main chant forms used by Hildegard: antiphons, hymns, responsories, and sequences. Two types of antiphons— Psalm (*Spiritus Sanctus*) and votive (*O Virtus Sapientiae*)— are short songs that would be sung before and after a Psalm chant. The hymn *Ave Generosa* differs from our modern hymn in that it is through-composed, with little to no rhyme and no repeated refrains, though with distinct verses. The responsory (*Rex noster promptus est*) would have been sung at Offices after the Bible reading. The sequence (*O Ignis Spiritus Paracliti*) consists of paired versicles (same music with different text) and would be sung for Mass.

Only two settings of Mass propers set by Hildegard exist: a *Kyrie*, and an *Alleluia*.

We are fortunate that two extant collections of her music —*Dendermonde ms.*, and *Riesen Kodex*— are accessible to us today. The 12th century neumatic notation of Hildegard and her contemporaries uses a four-line staff and two clefs (c and f) which indicate mode and avoids the problem of ledger lines. Since rhythm is not indicated—as far as is known— the declamation of the text is the overall organizing principle. An expansive vocal range results from Hildegard's effusive and rhapsodic phraseology, often expanding to two octaves within a single piece.

For example, in the votive antiphon for Divine Wisdom: *O Virtus Sapientiae* the Divine Feminine entity known also as *Sapientiae* or *Sophia* is described in mystical imagery as having "three wings, encompassing, comprehending all." The opening melisma on "O" begins with the interval of a perfect fifth before leaping up the next perfect fourth to expand to the octave before descending again for the word *virtus*. The rise and fall of the melodic gesture throughout this piece ascends in line six to the word "alta" (meaning high or in the heights.) The next phrase contains the lowest note in the piece as the second wing "exudes from the earth."

The perfect— or pure— fifth appears to be a significant declamatory gesture in Hildegard's music. For example, of the pieces we sing this evening, the perfect fifth is the opening interval in no less than eight of the songs in this concert. Multiple verses begin with this "pure" interval. (Listen to the verses of the hymn *Ave Generosa* and the sequence *O Ignis Spiritus Paracliti*.)

In another votive antiphon to Divine Love (which in Hildegard's Celestial hierarchy is sister and equal to Divine Wisdom) Hildegard reverses the text and melodic relationship. Thus, the lowest tones in the piece are in the lines: "super sidera" or "above the stars," and "in omnia." Later as Divine Love gives the high King "summo regis" the kiss of peace: we are back in the heavenly spheres and in the highest range of the piece.

A musician in the Renaissance period would think of this as text painting. But, with Hildegard it is important to consider how she hears the text spoken, inflected on pitch, and according to her visions and perceptions of the Celestial hierarchy. There is a distinction to be made between hearing and then recording the neumes to reflect the language and meaning apart from intentionally "setting" a text. Recall that Hildegard's music is an aural tradition. Heard first, written down later. For Hildegard, the word, the tone, and the meaning are inextricable.

Consider also that neumatic notation originated out of a need to indicate language inflection and motion in order to convey meaning. As Christopher Page points out in his book, *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years*, "modern linguists have repeatedly confirmed what competent speakers of a language intuitively know, namely that patterns of intonation play a vital role in the creation of meaning."

\_\_\_\_ Karen R. Clark