The Music of Hildegard von Bingen: A Categorical Overview of Her Complete Oeuvre

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By far the most important woman composer of the medieval era is the Benedictine abbess Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179). One of the great thinkers of her day, her achievements went well beyond musical and poetic endeavors and encompassed many other disciplines, including theology, hagiography, medicine, and science. The importance of Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) in the history of music—let alone European intellectual thought—also cannot be overstated. Among musicians, she is best known for her dramatic play, *Ordo virtutum* (*Play of Virtues*), and for her collection of seventy-seven chants, all gathered under the title *Symphonia armoniae celestium revelationum* (*Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations*). This article—which represents the first-ever featured article on Hildegard in the *Choral Journal*—will provide an overview and introduction to Hildegard's complete musical oeuvre and will advocate for the inclusion of her works in choral settings.[1]

One of the best concise summaries of Hildegard's extraordinary impact on theology, literature, sciences, and the arts is by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Debra L. Stoudt, who write the following:

> No other medieval woman, and indeed few medieval men, achieved the level of Saint Hildegard of Bingen's literary and artistic production. This fourth female Doctor of the Church composed a trilogy of visionary treatises (*Scivias, Liber vite meritorum,* and *Liber divinorum operum*); the *Ordo virtutum,* the first extant morality play; the lives of Saints Disibod and Rupert; the *Expositiones evangeliorum,* fifty-eight homilies on the gospels; the liturgical songs of the Symphonia; commentaries on the Rule of Benedict and the Athanasian Creed; the *Solutiones triginta octo quaestionum*; an original language—the *Lingua ignota*; more than three hundred letters addressed to a range of audiences from popes to lay people; and at least portions of the *Cause et cure*, a medical work on the humors, and the *Physica,* a description of the characteristics of plants, elements, trees, stones, fish, birds, animals, reptiles and metals, and in some instances their medicinal properties.[2]

Hildegard von Bingen: A Brief Biography

The youngest of ten children, Hildegard was born in 1098 in Bermersheim, near Alzey in Rheinhessen. When she was eight, her parents—Hildebert and Mechthild of Bermersheim—promised her to the church. After taking her vows at the age of fourteen, Hildegard was moved to the newly built Benedictine monastery at Disibodenberg, West of the Rhine, where she shared a stone cell with Jutta von Spanheim (1091–1136). Jutta was to become Hildegard's mentor, confidant, and closest friend. In fact, both Hildegard's and Jutta's vows were received on the same day, All Saints Day in 1112, thus increasing the bond between them.

Jutta instructed Hildegard in Latin, liturgy, and the psalter. Jutta's theology, however, differed from Hildegard's. While Jutta favored austerity and self-mutilating acts such as flagellation, Hildegard believed that the body was a temple and should be treated as if it were holy. Hildegard also believed that earthly intellectual and artistic achievements would pave the way to heaven, and she sought to learn and create as much as possible, all for the glory of God.

After Jutta's death in 1136, Hildegard was elected *magistra* (prioress) of the abbey at Disibodenberg, essentially becoming its leader, although she was still supervised by the abbot. Hildegard eventually sought to establish her own convent, and with endowments from the noble community she purchased land at Rupertsberg near Bingen in 1147. Hildegard moved her community there after construction was completed in 1150, and the Archbishop of Mainz issued founding documents in 1152. By 1158, Hildegard secured financial in-

dependence from Disibodenberg, and in 1163 she was given the title of "abbess" by Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa. In 1165, she founded the abbey at Eibingen, a daughter house near Rüdesheim, after Rupertsberg outgrew its confines. The Abbey of Saint Hildegard still stands in Eibingen today (Photo 1).

Photo 1. The Abbey of Saint Hildegard in Eibingen.

Hildegard's collected musical works were assembled between 1151 and 1158 into a cycle that she called *Symphonia harmoniae caelestium revelationem* (*Symphony of the Harmony of Heavenly Revelations*). This was the largest scale liturgical cycle yet written, rivalled only by that of Peter Abelard in the 1130s. The title, *Symphoniae harmoniae celestium revelationum*, is intended to indicate that these pieces were divinely inspired, as well as the idea that music is the highest form of human activity, mirroring the heavenly spheres and celestial choirs of angels. These chants were intended to be sung by sisters at the convent and other liturgical functions.

In the final decades of her life, Hildegard corresponded with intellectuals all over Europe. She became famous for her prophesies and miracles, and in the centuries after her death on September 17, 1179, she became known as the the "Sibyl of the Rhine."[3] In 1223 a protocol was issued for her possible canonization, but neither Pope Gregory IX nor Pope Innocent IV granted approval for her sainthood. Finally, on May 10, 2012—almost eight hundred years later—Pope Benedict XVI canonized her, and on October 7 of the same year, he designated her as a "Doctor of the Church," a title given to those whose writings or teachings have had a particularly strong impact. She is one of only four women saints in history to hold that title.[4] Hildegard's feast day is celebrated each year on September 17.

Hildegard's Poetry and Writings

Although the primary focus of this article is on Hildegard's music, she is equally accomplished as a poet and woman of letters. She was also famous for her visions, which she began experiencing at the age of five. She recorded these visions in one of her most famous works, *Scivias* (1141), which took her ten years to write and comprised twenty-six revelations. In this large vision cycle, Hildegard "reveals a mystic universe in which the history and workings of cosmic forces often take the form of allegorical figures."[5] This work also contained fourteen lyric texts that were later set to music. *Scivias* is the first of three books on religious doctrine and ethics; the other two are *Liber vite meritorium* (1163) and *Liber divinorum operum* (1173). Ian D. Bent and Marianne Pfau write that these "three visionary tomes have been described as a trilogy of apocalyptic, prophetic, and symbolic writings."[6] (Photo 2 on page 21)

Other important prose works of Hildegard included *Physica* (on natural science) and *Causa e cure* (on medicine), both of which were written between 1150 and 1160. In 1172, she completed biographies of Saint Disibod and Saint Rupert, the patron saints of the respective convents she served. It was Hildegard's poetry, however—almost all of which is preserved, with music, in the *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationem*—that has endured as perhaps her greatest achievement. The originality and complexity of Hildegard's poetry continues to fascinate both academics and musicians. Medieval Latin scholar Peter Dronke writes the following:

A Categorical Overview of Her Complete Oeuvre

Photo 2. Hildegard with Her Amanuensis (Illumination from Scivias)

Hildegard's poetic language is among the most unusual in the medieval European lyric. She shows herself aware of the imagery of mystical love in the *Song of Songs*, as well as of certain traditional figural relationships elaborated by the Church Fathers. Thus for instance both Ecclesia and a virgin martyr can be portrayed as the bride of the divine Lamb; Mary is seen as the healer of Eve's guilt, or as the flowering branch of the tree of Jesse, or as the dawn in which Christ the Sun rises. But in developing such images and expressions Hildegard delights in poetic freedom, and in taking diverse kinds of language to new limits. I would signal especially her daring mixed metaphors, her

Hildegard: A Timeline

1098: Hildegard born at Bermersheim, near Alzey in Rheinhessen

1106: Hildegard becomes a novice at Disibodenberg; entrusted to Jutta von Spanheim

1112: Hildegard takes vows with Jutta on All Saints Day

1136: Jutta dies; Hildegard becomes *Magistra* at Disibodenberg

1141: *Scivias* completed

1147: Hildegard purchases land at Rupertsberg near Bingen

1150: Hildegard moves her cloister to Rupertsberg

1151–58: *Symphonia armonie celestirum revelationum* collected

1163: *Liber vite meritorium* completed

1165: Hildegard establishes daughter abbey at Eibingen near Rüdesheim in Hesse

1173: *Liber divinorum operum* completed

1179: Hildegard dies on September 17

2012: Pope Benedict XVI canonizes Hildegard and makes her a Doctor of the Church

insistent use of anaphora, superlatives, and exclamations, her intricate constructions in which several participles or genitives depend on one another (Photo 3).[7]

Hildegard's Genres and Compositional Style

Before discussing Hildegard's music, it is helpful to review the medieval plainchant genres in which she composed, namely antiphons, responsories, sequences, hymns, alleluias, and *symphoniae*—a genre unique to Hildegard's oeuvre. These genres—all of which are sacred—are primarily distinguished from one another based on their specific role in liturgical worship.

Photo 3. An Illumination from Liber Divinorum Operum.

Medieval Plainchant Genres

Antiphons are usually sung before or after a canticle, psalm, or psalm verse.[8] Antiphons are the most frequently encountered genre in the medieval plainchant repertory. Over half of Hildegard's compositions are antiphons, and antiphon texts cover a wide variety of topics, ranging from the Trinity to the Virgin Mary to venerating specific saints. In Hildegard's oeuvre, antiphons are sometimes (but not always) paired with responsories. Each antiphon ends with "EUOUAE" (*saeculorum, amen*).

Responsories are usually sung as musical postludes after a lesson is read. They are typically introduced by a solo cantor and repeated by a full choir, with several additional repetitions within the liturgy.[9] In the medieval plainchant repertory, responsories are bountiful in number, surpassed only by antiphons. They are most commonly heard at Matins or Vespers as opposed to Mass, where graduals or alleluias are usually heard instead. Like her antiphons, Hildegard's eighteen responsories cover a wide variety of topics and—as in the case of the responsories she composed for patron saints—are sometimes paired with specific antiphons. Responsories are also often more elaborate than antiphons in their poetic language, melodic style, and formal structure. Marianne Pfau writes that "Hildegard's responsories are her most lofty compositions and are quite unparalleled in their melodic decoration by any other medieval composer of monophony."[10]

Sequences are poetic and musical additions to the liturgy, usually sung in the Mass immediately after the alleluia, to which the sequence often relates melodically. Poetically, sequences are also more formulaic than antiphons and responsories with verses always occurring in double-versicle pairs: AA, BB, etc. Because of the fact that little liturgical action occurs at this point in the service, there was ample opportunity for plainchant composers to elaborate musically, thus making sequences more adventurous than antiphons and responsories in their melodic content and structure. Hildegard's seven sequences take advantage of this opportunity for compositional complexity:

> [The sequences] are so profoundly motivated by Hildegard's devotional life that it is hard to

> tell whether she is exploring music and poetry through spirituality or vice versa. The songs are conceived on a large—sometimes a massive—scale; it is in superabundance that Hildegard found herself both as poetess and composer. Profligacy of imagination relieved the intensity of her impressions whilst validating her as a visionary in the eyes of her contemporaries. The corresponding musical resources are immense, ranging from the most tranquil melody to an almost obsessive declamation at high pitch. Everywhere we sense a movement of the mind in music. This is the work of deeply engaged artistry: in Hildegard's words, of "writing, seeing, hearing and knowing all in one manner."[11]

Hildegard's seven sequences include one for the Blessed Virgin Mary (19. "O virga ac diadema"), one for the Holy Spirit (28. "O ignis Spiritus paracliti"), four for patron saints (44. "O beata infantia" for Saint Disibod; 49. "O Jerusalem" for Saint Rupert; 53. "O Euchari in leta via" for Saint Eucharius; and 54. "Columba aspexit" for Saint Maximin), and one for Saint Ursula (64. "O Ecclesia"). Each sequence ends with "amen."

Medieval *hymns* are defined by their texts as opposed to their stationing within the liturgy.[12] In the medieval Christian tradition, hymns are songs of praise, often composed for specific saints on their feast days. Hildegard categorizes four of her chants as hymns: one for the Blessed Virgin Mary (17. "Ave Generosa"), one for the Holy Spirit (27. "O ignee Spiritus"), one for Saint Matthew (50. "Mathias sanctus"), and one for Saint Ursula (65. "Cum vox sanguinis").

Hildegard labels two of her compositions as *symphoniae,* which an interesting designation because it seems to invent a new genre—no other medieval composers recognize this term as a genre associated with their compositions. Marianne Pfau speculates that "as a genre, Hildegard may have appropriated the term *symphanos* for a hymn-like piece to be sung in unison, as distinct from *antiphonos,* which specified singing in octaves."[13] Hildegard's two symphoniae include a chant for virgins (57. "O dulcissime amator") and a chant for widows (58. "O Pater omnium"). As the alleluia, the seven sequences and the two *symphoniae* are the only chants composed by Hildegard that were used in Mass (as opposed to the daily office), it is possible that she was using the term to designate pieces written for the Mass that did not fit the double-versicle mold of the sequences.

"O virga mediatrix" (No. 18) represents Hildegard's lone venture into the *alleluia* genre. In the Mass, the alleluia—along with its proper-specific verse—occurs immediately before the reading of the Gospel in all seasons except for Lent, when a tract is sung instead.[14] Hildegard's poem likens the Blessed Virgin Mary to a branch from which "the beautiful flower came forth in purest integrity," which is of course a reference to Jesus Christ (Photo 4).[15]

Photo 4. An Illumination of Hildegard with Richardis von Stade and Her Scribe

Hildegard's Compositional Style

Hildegard's compositional oeuvre distinguishes itself amidst other twelfth-century chant repertories through its artistic ambition and compositional complexity. In the words of Karin Pendle:

> Hildegard's elaboration and embellishment of melodic formulae resulted in more continuous, through-composed musical lines. Musical stability arises from organic melodic unity, rather than from external factors such as strophic form or regular poetic meter. Hildegard's songs often encompass a wide range of two octaves or more, and in some cases reach nearly three octaves. Melismatic elaboration in her responsories reaches exceptional levels, with frequent melismas [sic] of thirty to forty notes on carefully selected words. Her habitual use of as-

Hildegard von Bingen: Complete Works

Hildegard's complete oeuvre includes 37 (44) antiphons[1], 18 responsories, 7 sequences, 4 hymns, 2 *symphoniae*, 1 alleluia (with verse), and 1 kyrie. The morality play *Ordo virtutum* contains an additional 82 melodies. The following is a complete list of Hildegard's chants, which are organized in eight volumes according to liturgical hierarchy. All eight volumes are edited by Marianne Richert Pfau published by the Hildegard Publishing Company. The *Ordo virtutum* and *Kyrie* are published separately.

***Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum* (1151–58)**

Volume I: Chants for the Trinity: Father and Son

1. O vis eternitatis (responsory)
2. O virtus Sapientie (antiphon)
3. O quam mirabilis (antiphon)
4. O Pastor animarum (antiphon)
5. O cruor sanguinis (antiphon – fragment)
6. O magne Pater (antiphon)
7. O eterne Deus (antiphon)

Volume II: Chants for the Blessed Virgin Mary

8. Ave Maria (responsory)
9. O clarissima mater (responsory)
10. O splendidissima gemma (antiphon)
11. Hodie aperuit (antiphon)
12. Quia ergo femina (antiphon)
13. Cum processit (antiphon)
14. Cum erubuerint (antiphon)
15. O frondens virga (antiphon)
16. O quam magnum miraculum est (antiphon)
17. Ave generosa (hymn)
18. O virga mediatrix (alleluia)
19. O viridissima virga (unlabeled by Hildegard)*
20. O virga ac diadema (sequence)
21. O tu suavissima virga (responsory)
22. O quam preciosa (responsory)
23. O tu illustrata (antiphon)

Volume III: Chants for the Trinity: Holy Spirit

24. Spiritus sanctus vivificans (antiphon)
25. Karitas habundat (antiphon)
26. Laus Trinitati (antiphon)
27. O ignee Spiritus (hymn)
28. O ignis Spiritus paracliti (sequence)

Volume IV: Chants for the Celestial Hierarchy

29. O gloriosissimi (antiphon for the angels)
30. O vos angeli (responsory for the angels)
31. O spectabiles viri (antiphon for the patriarchs and prophets)
32. O vos felices radices (responsory for the patriarchs and prophets)

*Pfau categorizes this chant as an antiphon.

cending or descending leaps of a fifth is also exceptional for chant.[16]

Hildegard's melismata are noteworthy not only for their length, but also for their frequency and range; many span large ranges of the voice, sometimes up to two octaves. A high level of skill is expected of the singer, and perhaps this speaks to the level of musical training amongst the sisters in Hildegard's convent. Like all composers, there are also certain stylistic "thumbprints" that are characteristic of Hildegard's melodic lines, one of the most famous being a rising fifth followed immediately by a perfect fourth to the reach the octave in a mere span of three notes.[17]

Hildegard's Compositions

Hildegard's music is remarkably well preserved in two

33. O cohors milicie (antiphon for the apostles)
34. O lucidissima (responsory for the apostles)
35. O speculum columbe (antiphon for Saint John the evangelist)
36. O dulcis electe (responsory for Saint John the evangelist)
37. O victorissimi (antiphon for the martyrs)
38. Vos flores rosarum (responsory for the martyrs)
39. O vos imitatores (responsory for the confessors)
40. O successores (antiphon for the confessors)

Volume V: Chants for the Patron Saints

41. O mirum admirandum (antiphon for Saint Disibod)
42. O viriditas digiti Dei (responsory for Saint Disibod)
43. O felix anima (responsory for Saint Disibod)
44. O beata infantia (antiphon for Saint Disibod)
45. O presul vere civitatis (sequence for Saint Disibod)
46. O felix apparicio (antiphon for Saint Rupert)
47. O beatissime Ruperte (antiphon for Saint Rupert)
48. Quia felix puericia (antiphon for Saint Rupert)
49. O Jerusalem (sequence for Saint Rupert)
50. Mathias sanctus (hymn for Saint Matthew)
51. O Bonifaci (antiphon for Saint Boniface)
52. O Euchari columba (responsory for Saint Eucharius)
53. O Euchari in leta via (sequence for Saint Eucharius)
54. Columba aspexit (sequence for Saint Maximin)

Volume VI: Chants for Virgins, Widows, and Innocents

55. O pulchra facies (antiphon)
56. O nobilissima viriditas (responsory)
57. O dulcissime amator (symphonia)
58. O Pater omnium (symphonia)
59. Rex noster promptus (responsory)

Volume VII: Chants for Saint Ursula and 11,000 Virgins

60. Spiritui Sancto (responsory)
61. O rubor sanguinis (antiphon)
62. Favus distillans (responsory)
63a. Studium divinitatis (antiphon for matins)
63b. Unde quocumque (antiphon for matins)
63c. De patria (antiphon for matins)
63d. Deus enim in prima (antiphon for matins)
63e. Aer enim volat (antiphon for matins)
63f. Et ideo puelle (antiphon for matins)
63g. Deus enim rorem (antiphon for matins)
63h. Se diabolus (antiphon for matins)
64. O Ecclesia (sequence)
65. Cum vox sanguinis (hymn)

Volume VIII: Chants for Ecclesia

66. O virgo Ecclesia (antiphon)
67. Nunc gaudeant (antiphon)
68. O orzchis Ecclesia (antiphon)
69. O choruscans lux stellarum (antiphon)

manuscripts, usually labeled by musicologists as "D" and "R."[18] When reconciled, these manuscripts represent a total of seventy-eight distinct works, including forty-four antiphons, eighteen responsories, seven sequences, four hymns, two *symphoniae,* one alleluia verse, one kyrie, and one full-length morality play.[19] All are monophonic plainchants that set Latin poetic texts by the composer, the Greek *Kyrie* being the lone exception. Seventy-six of these works—all but the *Kyrie* and her morality play *Ordo virtutum*—are grouped under the collective title *Symphonia armonie celestium revelutionum*.

Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum

The *Symphonia* is the largest chant repertoire of the medieval era by a single author and a product of what scholars call the "twelfth-century Renaissance"—an age in which intellectual vigor, philosophic depth, and aesthetic brilliance characterized the monastic arts. Hildegard compiled the *Symphonia* during the years spanning 1151 to 1158, organizing her seventy-six chants into eight hierarchical categories. Pfau writes notes that Hildegard "offers [the chants] in groupings that reflect the heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchy, from the divine to the mundane, ranging from the persons of the Trinity at one end of the spectrum to widows and innocents at the other."[20] Women saints were of particular interest to Hildegard: fifteen of the chants are addressed to Saint Mary and thirteen to Saint Ursula.

The term symphonia appears to be carefully selected by Hildegard. Peter Dronke writes:

> *Symphonia* is a key concept in Hildegard's thought, and one that she discusses in early as well as late works. It designates not only a harmony of diverse notes produced by human voices and instruments, but also the celestial harmony, and the harmony within a human being. The human soul, according to Hildegard, is "symphonic" (*symphonialis*), and it is this characteristic that expresses itself both in the inner accord of soul and body and in human music-making.[21]

The contents of the *Symphonia* are best understood when examined within their hierarchy and according to the groupings laid out by Hildegard. The reader of this article is encouraged to examine the scores when reading this commentary. The most current and widely available resource is the eight-volume collection published by the Hildegard Publishing Company and edited by Marianne Richert Pfau.[22]

Volume I: Chants for the Trinity: Father and Son

The highest order in the celestial hierarchy is given to the Holy Trinity, and this first group consists of chants devoted to the Father and Son: God and Jesus Christ. Interestingly, however, Hildegard does not write any chants for Christ alone. He is always one and the same with the Father. All are antiphons except for the first chant, "O vis eternitatis," which is a responsory. The fifth chant, the antiphon "O cruor sanguinis," exists only as a fragment, although we do have the complete text preserved. Each of these seven chants belongs to the daily office as opposed to the Mass. The eight daily monastic prayer services were devoted to reciting the 150 psalms each week, and antiphons would have been used to frame these psalm recitations.

Volume II: Chants for the Blessed Virgin Mary

The fact that Hildegard interrupts the Holy Trinity, devoting the second highest tier in her cosmology to the Blessed Virgin Mary before proceeding onward to the Holy Spirit, is significant and deliberate. As Mary is the mother of Christ, her stature is elevated, occupying a place that is of equal status to the Holy Trinity. Pfau observes the following:

> Hildegard celebrates Mary as the second Eve, the Mother of God who made good what Eve had thrown into confusion. 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 "Notre Dame." Hildegard's work on Mary, and particularly the prominent position allotted to the Blessed Virgin within the Symphonia, can be taken as the German correlative to that movement.[23]

Indeed, Hildegard devoted more chants to the Blessed Virgin Mary than to any other saint. At sixteen in number, Volume II is the largest in the entire *Symphonia.* It is also the only volume in the symphonia that includes examples of every genre in which Hildegard wrote; there are eight antiphons, four responsories, one sequence, one hymn, and one alleluia (with verse). There is also one uncategorized chant (19. "O viridissima virga") that Pfau identifies as a ninth antiphon.[24]

Volume III: Chants for the Trinity: Holy Spirit

Hildegard's five chants for the Holy Spirit were all written for the holy day of Pentecost, which takes place on the Sunday that is fifty days (or seven weeks) after Easter. The volume comprises two psalm antiphons (24. "Spiritus sanctus vivificans" and 25. "Karitas habundat"), one short votive antiphon (26. "Laus Trinitati"), a thirteen-verse hymn (27. "O ignee Spiritus"), and a sequence of five couplets for Mass (28. "O ignis Spiritus paracliti"). Pfau writes the following about this short collection:

> The Holy Spirit emerges variously as life giver, healer, divine love, as companion to the virtuous, fighter of temptation and sin, and as world soul inspiring peace, bringing together the micro and macrocosm in one harmonious universe…. In these poetic meditations on the Holy Spirit, Hildegard evidently struggles with a notion almost too changing, fluent, and all-encompassing to comprehend and express in mere human language. The poetry of the hymn and the sequence in particular is even more dense with enigmatic images than most of her other texts, and clearly she is vying for a sense of the inexpressible, ever vital presence of the spiritual force she envisions and in whose shadow she as a deer lived, a force that works transformation and change within a human soul that embarks on a relationship with it.[25]

Also worth noting in this volume is the personification of the Holy Spirit as Karitas in the antiphon "Karitas habundat." Karitas appears in many of Hildegard's visions. She is depicted as an all-encompassing figure who offers charity and peace to the universe.

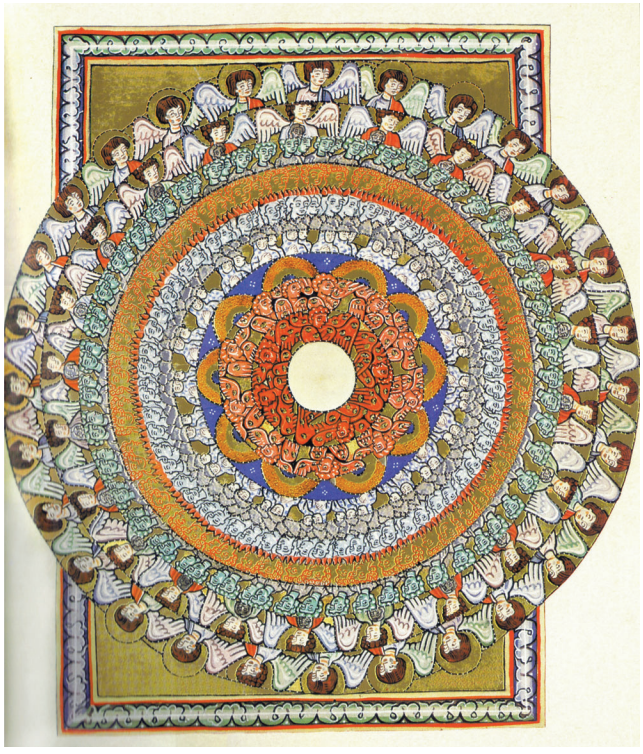

Photo 5. Illumination of a Multitude of Angels (from Scivias)

Volume IV: Chants for the Celestial Hierarchy

Hildegard's "celestial hierarchy" in this volume includes angels, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, evangelists, martyrs, and confessors. All but two of the twelve chants contained in this volume were published in her 1141 work *Scivias,* albeit without music. Pfau comments on the important connection that exists between *Scivias* and the *Symphonia*:

> This affinity of *Scivias* and *Symphonia* underscores the important role music holds in Hildegard's cosmology. It is twofold: the divine palpably reveals itself through music, and humankind is able to participate in the celestial hierarchy through singing and listening to music which praises the divine. For Hildegard, the human soul is in its essence symphonic, and music is humanity's life line, especially in so far as it allows people to join the celestial hierarchies in their eternal praises (Photo 5).[26]

Particularly noteworthy of this volume is Hildegard's organization of these twelve chants into six antiphon-responsory pairs: one pair each for the angels, patriarchs and prophets (as one entity), apostles, evangelists, martyrs, and confessors. As both the antiphon and responsory are chants for the daily office, these pairs were likely sung within the same service on specific liturgical feast days.

Volume V: Chants for the Patron Saints

The fourteen chants of this category devote special attention to Saint Disibod and Saint Rupert, the patron saints of Hildegard's respective convents at Disibodenberg and Rupertsberg. Saint Didibod receives five chants (two antiphons, two responsories, and a sequence), and Saint Rupert receives four (three antiphons and a sequence). The remaining five chants are devoted to Saint Eucharius (who receives a responsory and a sequence), Saint Matthew (a hymn), Saint Boniface (an antiphon) and Saint Maximin (a sequence). This volume is particularly noteworthy for its inclusion of four of Hildegard's seven sequences. Pfau writes about the historical importance of these saints within Hildegard's social context of twelfth-century Germany:

> The songs in this volume are dedicated to six saints who held historical significance in central Germany during the Middle Ages: Boniface, Mathias, Eucharis, Maximin, Disibod, and Rupert. Saint Boniface, also known as the "Apostle of Germany," served as the first archbishop of Mainz, the diocese to which Hildegard's religious houses belonged. He founded many Benedictine monasteries east of the Rhine, including the famous abbey at Fulda where his bones are buried. According to Hildegard, he effected the move of Disibod's relics to Germany. Boniface became a martyr when he was killed in 755 by a Friesian mob, and was adopted as patron of the Benedictine order. Saints Mathias, Eucharius, and Maximin were all venerated in Trier, a city closely tied to Hildegard's public voice of the church. Saint Disibod was the seventh-century founder and patron of the Disibodenberg monastery where Hildegard grew up. Finally, Saint Rupert was the patron, later, of her Rupertsberg convent.[27]

The reader is encouraged to consult Pfau's lengthy essay which precedes the contents of Volume V in the Hildegard Publishing Company's edition of the *Symphonia* for in-depth information about these saints and their importance to sacred music composers during this era.

Hildegard on Film

Hildegard von Bingen has been the topic of several documentaries as well as a full-length feature film. James Runcie's forty-seven-minute *Hildegard of Bingen* (1994) is one of the first, offering a basic but solid overview of Hildegard's life and work. Michael Conti's five-episode *The Unruly Mystic: Saint Hildegard of Bingen* (2014) provides a thorough overview of Hildegard's life and contributions to art, music, and theology with particular emphasis on her research into natural medicine, which has experienced a resurgence in Europe in recent years. Mezzo-soprano Lynn Maxwell, together with director Kerry Rasikas, produced two one-woman plays about Hildegard's life: *Hildegard of Bingen and the Living Light* in 2012 and *Saint Hildegard: Trumpet of God* in 2015. Both feature Maxwell singing Hildegard's music. Perhaps most interesting is the 2009 full-length feature film *Vision*, directed by the celebrated German auteur Margarethe von Trott. This biopic devotes special attention to Richardis von Stade, Hildegard's secretary, advisor, and close friend in later life, and speculates into the exact nature of their relationship. All of these films are worthy of viewing and widely available on Amazon Prime Video and other streaming services.

Volume VI: Chants for Virgins, Widows, and Innocents

The five chants comprising this small grouping honor different modes of purity; in particular, that of "chaste widows, penitent virgins, and inculpable innocents" (the innocents being those children slaughtered by King Herod in Matthew 2:16–18).[28] Because they personify Holy purity, these figures rank within the medieval order of Saints and serve as models for a virtuous life on earth. Pfau notes that "here Hildegard does not laud particular women, but rather the more universally meaningful states of monastic Virginity and Widowhood, as well as the condition of blessed Innocence."[29] The virtue of virginity was especially important to Hildegard's religious ethos. Pfau continues:

> The quest for a virtuous life is a dominant theme for Hildegard. She chose the monastic veil for herself, we might presume, in affirmation of a meritorious life. Such voluntary, perpetual choice for the "Kingdom of Heaven," professed in the vow of chastity, was believed to foreshadow the bliss of eternal life. Accordingly, virginity, although not the highest of virtues, was considered more excellent than other sacraments. Thus, because it strives for divine good, it was ranked above even marriage by the medieval church."[30]

Photo 6. Basilica of Saint Ursula in Cologne

Hildegard's chants in this volume include the two *symphoniae* listed above, two responsories (56. "O nobilissima viriditas" and 59. "Rex noster promptus") and an antiphon (55. "O pulchra facies").

Volume VII: Chants for Saint Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins

Saint Ursula was extremely important to Hildegard, so much so that only the Blessed Virgin Mary has more chants devoted to her. The legend of Saint Ursula of Cologne contends that she was a young woman who—along with her cohort of 11,000 virgins, was martyred by barbarian soldiers in 383 CE. A cult soon formed as a result of her death, spreading throughout Europe from its center, a church in Cologne that still bears her name. During Hildegard's lifetime, there was renewed interest in Saint Ursula due to the discovery of an old Roman burial ground near the Church of Saint Ursula that purportedly contained the bones of the slaughtered women. In addition, another visionary mystic with whom Hildegard was communicating, Elisabeth of Schönau, began receiving visions of the life and martyrdom of Ursula. However, it was Hildegard's role as an abbess that most likely was the primary reason for her infatuation with the saint. Barbara Thornton writes:

> Hildegard's strong identification with this figure goes beyond the enthusiasm demonstrated in her lifetime; as the leader of a spiritual community for women, as the model of purity and love for the Divine, as bearing up to the vicissitudes of outside opposition and the responsibilities of inspired leadership, as a *figura* for the apotheosis of the human soul within the sacred space of Ecclesia, and for the ultimate realization of that sacredness in eternal space and time, she found in the future of Ursula a thematic complex around which her fondest poetic fictions could freely pivot. Musically, she was able to achieve something like a "song-cycle" which begins with the simple image of the redness of shed blood and ends in the grand visions of Ecclesia in all the tragedy and magnificence which tradition bestows on this figure.[31] (Photo 6)

The sixteen chants in this volume—all to Saint Ursula and the 11,000 virgins—include two responsories, a sequence, a hymn, and nine antiphons, eight of which are for matins and all gathered under one catalog number (No. 63). This grouping of eight is unique to Hildegard's catalogue can be a source of confusion; some resources list thirty-seven antiphons when in actuality she wrote forty-four.

Volume VIII: Chants for Ecclesia

The eighth and final volume of the *Symphonia* contains only four chants, all of which are antiphons to Ecclesia. In Hildegard's world, "Ecclesia" is a feminine figure who represents the Church. In Greek, *ecclesia* is a place where the spirit is received. It can either be a physical building, like a temple, or within the heart of a human being. It is thus synonymous with the Hebrew *synagoga.* Although Ecclesia occupies the bottom rung of Hildegard's hierarchy, she was nevertheless an extremely important figure to Hildegard. In her *Scivias,* five of Hildegard's twenty-six visions were devoted to her, and she is always depicted as a formidable entity.

Ordo virtutum

Hildegard's *Ordo virtutum* (*Play of Virtues*) is earliest surviving example of the medieval genre known as the morality play. Hildegard's work is also often called a liturgical drama due to the fact that it combines sacred music with both narrative and ritual. Modern performances often add either an organ or harp, both of which would have been appropriate instruments for use in liturgical venues. *Ordo virtutum* chronicles the temptation and fall of a soul and her return from sin to grace. This fascinating musical drama is a sprawling ninety-minute work that is divided into eighty-seven distinct parts, eighty-two of which are set to music.

Most of the story is narrated by the seventeen Virtues; all of these roles would have been assumed by sisters living in Hildegard's convent.[32] The other five are passages spoken by the Devil, and Hildegard assigned this role to one of the priests from the monastery. Hildegard believed that since music is sacred, the act of singing is in and of itself a holy activity. Thus, the Devil, who has fallen from grace, is unable to sing. Barbara Thronton of Sequentia comments upon this:

> [Hildegard] often mentions the cosmic role of music, singing and musical instruments throughout her works. She states that the goal of Creation is that every creature unite its voice in singing the praises of the Creator—such as is done in Heaven, where choirs of angels sing to Him eternally. Before the fall of Adam, she says, when man still lived in perfect harmony, his voice expressed this harmony, and he could sing like the angels, "with the sound of the monochord." She believes that musical tone enhances the holiness of words when combined in sung speech, arousing sympathetic vibrations in the body and allowing the sense of the words to enter directly into the soul. In the *Ordo,* the devil is denied musical characterization; in his very being, he is the enemy of harmony and seeks to steal from humans. His shrill speaking, specified by Hildegard, is always experienced as an interruption of the blessed world created by music.[33]

Peter Dronke adds to this sentiment, stating that "music is at the same time earthly and heavenly—produced by earthly means, but able to evoke for mankind, at least briefly and partially, the heavenly consonance (*Stimmung*) that they possessed fully in Paradise before the Fall."[34]

Kyrie

The final composition to be discussed, Hildegard's *Kyrie,* is unique in several respects. First, it is apparently the only text that she ever set to music that does not feature original poetry of hers, the kyrie of course being a text that is part of the Mass ordinary and thus omnipresent in the liturgy. Second, the *Kyrie* does not feature original music by Hildegard; rather, she recycles the melodic content of one of her earlier chants, the responsory for the apostles "O lucidissima" (Volume IV, No. 34).[35] Hildegard's kyrie, however, is more elaborate. Like many twelfth-century kyries that have been preserved, Hildegard writes two more elaborate settings of the "kyrie" section that are intended to be sung as the fourth and sixth utterance of the "kyrie eleison" text. (Each section is sung three times for a

total of nine phrases of music.) Unlike other settings, however, is the range and complexity of these elaborated melodies: the fourth phrase spans the range of a tenth and the six phrase an octave and a fifth. In the words of scholar Michael Klaper, "clearly at work then are the principles of repetition, variation, and intensification."[36] Probably one of her later works, the *Kyrie* provides an excellent window into understanding Hildegard's compositional process and the complexity of her mature works (Figure 1).

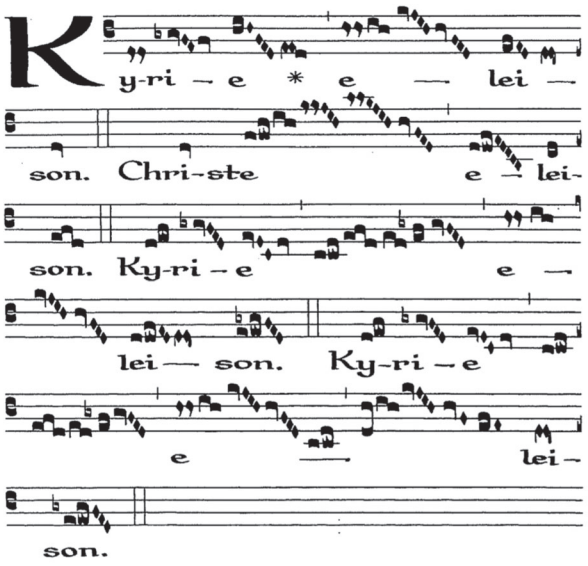

Figure 1. Hildegard's Kyrie

Listening to Hildegard: Experiencing the *Symphonia*

Hildegard scholarship and performance has proliferated over the past several decades. One of the foremost advocates for Hildegard's music has been the early music group Sequentia, founded in 1977 by Benjamin Bagby and Barbara Thornton. Beginning in 1982, they began the ambitious project of recording the complete works of Hildegard, a project they completed twenty-one years later in 2013. At the time of the writing of this article, Sequentia is the only major early music group that has recorded Hildegard's oeuvre in its totality. Their Hildegard discography, still available for purchase in both CD and digital format, is as follows:

Ordo virtutum (1982; rerecorded in 1998 for Hildegard's 900th birthday)
Symphoniae: Spiritual Songs (1985)
Canticles of Ecstacy (1994)
Voice of the Blood (1995)
O Jerusalem (1997)
Saints (1997)
Celestial Hierarchy (2013)

These seven albums on nine CDs—both *Ordo virtutum* and *Saints* are double albums—comprise all of Hildegard's compositions, making it possible to listen to and digest all of her music in a reasonably short amount of time. It is significant to note that while their groupings bear some resemblance to Hildegard's hierarchical categories in the *Symphonia,* Sequentia made the deliberate choice to explore new juxtapositions as well.

In preparation for writing this article, I pulled all of the albums except *Ordu virtutum* into a single playlist and reordered the tracks according to the Hildegard/Pfau catalog order, following along with score so I could experience the entire *Symphoniae* sequence. Listening to Hildegard in this way—while observing the wide latitude of stylistic interpretations offered by Sequentia—provides a fascinating introduction to this unique and adventurous composer. Listening to Sequentia's realization of Hildegard's music reveals the many options that performers of early music have at their disposal when bringing life to a medieval score. Some chants are performed by a solo singer throughout the entire chant with no accompaniment. Others, particularly the responsories, alternate between soloist and full ensemble. Drones or pedal tones—usually with the help of a medieval fiddle (vielle) or portative organ—are frequently played along with the chant and are sometimes joined by voices.

Occasionally, Sequentia records a chant twice, and it is fascinating to listen to the differences between each version. The antiphon "O splendissima gemma" (Vol. II, No. 10), for instance, appears on both the *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ordo virtutum* albums. The former is a ten-minute performance that is unaccompanied throughout its entirety, whereas the latter is half the length (i.e., sung faster) and accompanied by a hurdy-gurdy. Similar differences can be heard on their respec-

tive recordings of the responsory "Spiritui Sancto" (Vol. VII, No. 60). In the case of "O Ecclesia "(Vol. VII, No. 64), Sequentia's two renditions are sung at different pitch levels and tempi. In other words, there are many choices that are left up to the performer when realizing Hildegard's music.[37]

Final Thoughts

The seventy-eight works of Hildegard von Bingen provide a rich and fascinating trove of music that is worthy of exploration and study. We are indeed fortunate that the works of this twelfth-century genius have been so well preserved, allowing us to experience her music over eight centuries later. We would be remiss not to be listening to this music, studying it, and—

Further Reading

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Butcher, Camren Acevedo. St. Hildegard of Bingen, *Doctor of the Church: A Spiritual Reader.* Orelans, MA: Paraclete Press, 2013.

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most important—*performing* it. Anyone who sings or conducts a choir has the opportunity to perform Hildegard. It is the author's hope that in the coming years we will be actively singing Hildegard's oeuvre with ever-increasing frequency and appreciation. CJ

NOTES

[1] This article is something of a companion piece to "Choral Music Composed by Women," coauthored with Linda Lister, which appeared in the May 2019 issue of the *Choral Journal.* That article began its survey with the polyphonic music of the late Renaissance era; the monophonic plainchants of Hildegard were not included. Merriam-Webster, however, defines "choral" as "of or relating to a chorus or choir." Therefore, although choral music is usually thought of as a polyphonic genre, monophonic works can and should be included on choral programs, particularly ones as interesting and sophisticated as those composed by Hildegard. It should be noted, however, that Hildegard's plainchants are just as frequently sung by soloists. With the lone exception of *Ordo Virtutum,* Hildegard does not specify how many singers are required to sing her plainchants, and it is likely that many of them—especially the responsories—were performed with some combination of solo and unison singing.

[2] Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and George Ferzoco, eds. *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1.

[3] The sibyls were oracles of Ancient Greece, usually thought to be ten in number.

[4] The other three women Doctors of Church are as follows: Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), canonized in 1461, recognized as doctor in 1970; Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) canonized in 1622, recognized in 1970; and Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897), canonized in 1925, recognized in 1997.

[5] Barabra Thornton, "The Content of *Ordo virtutum,*" liner notes for *Ordo virtutum*, by Hildegard von Bingen, with Sequentia (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, 1982, compact disc), 8.

[6] Ian D. Bent and Marianne Pfau, "Hildegard of Bingen," *Grove Music Online,* Oxford Music Online, accessed December 20, 2019, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.spot.lib.auburn.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/.

[7] Peter Dronke, "Symphoniae," liner notes for *Symphoniae: Sacred Songs,* by Hildegard von Bingen, with Sequentia (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, 1985, compact disc), 9.

[8] A typical use of antiphons within the liturgy is as follows: antiphon—psalm—antiphon (repeated)—doxology—antiphon (repeated).

[9] A typical use of responsories within the liturgy is as follows: responsory (cantor)—responsory (choir)—lesson—responsory (repeated)—doxology—responsory (repeated). Due to these repetitions, responsories often can take up to ten minutes to perform.

[10] Marianne Richert Pfau, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum—Volume II: Chants for the Blessed Virgin Mary* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1997), front matter.

[11] Christopher Page, liner notes for *A Feather on the Breath of God: Sequences and Hymns by Saint Hildegard of Bingen* (Hyperion Records, 1984, compact disc), 4.

[12] The word hymn has pagan origins, deriving from the Greek term *hymnos,* which was a song in praise of gods or heroes.

[13] Marianne Richert Pfau, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum—Volume VI: Chants for Virgins, Widows and Innocents* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1997), front matter.

[14] Alleluias are also not sung on Ember days, which are four separate sets of three days of fasting: Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Ember Days occur between the third and fourth Sunday of Advent, between the first and second Sunday of Lent, between Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, and in the week following Holy Cross day (September 14).

[15] Translation by Mariannce Richert Pfau.

[16] Karin Pendle, *Women and Music: A History,* 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 47.

[17] Audrey Ekdahl Davidson, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Ordo virtutum* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2002), front matter.

[18] The "D" manuscript is the Villers Codex in the Benedictine Abbey in Dendermonde, Belgium, and the "R" manuscript is the Riesencodex in the

Landesbibliothek in Wiesbaden, Germany. The "R" codex, which was compiled later, is more complete and comprehensive and is generally considered to be Hildegard's *opera omnia.*

[19] The eight antiphons for matins (catalogue No. 63 in volume VII) are grouped under one catalog number. For this reason, the total number of works is sometimes cited as 71 instead of 78.

[20] Marianne Richert Pfau, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum—Volume I: Chants for the Trinity: Father and Son* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1997), front matter.

[21] Peter Dronke, "Symphoniae," liner notes for *Symphoniae: Sacred Songs,* by Hildegard von Bingen, with Sequentia (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, 1985, compact disc), 8–9.

[22] Pfau's editorial organization mirrors that of Barbara Newman, who published the definitive critical edition of the *Symphonia*'s text in 1988. This edition is published by Cornell University Press.

[23] Marianne Richert Pfau, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum – Volume II: Chants for the Blessed Virgin Mary* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1997), front matter. The Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris was the most high-profile example of twelfth-century Marian structures. Although groundbreaking occurred in 1163, the cathedral was not completed until 1345.

[24] Marianne Richert Pfau, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum—Volume II: Chants for the Blessed Virgin Mary* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1997), 27.

[25] Marianne Richert Pfau, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum—Volume III: Chants for the Trinity: Holy Spirit* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1997), front matter.

[26] Marianne Richert Pfau, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum—Volume IV: Chants for the Celestial Hierarchy* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1997), front matter.

[27] Marianne Richert Pfau, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum—Volume V: Chants for the Patron Saints* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1997), front matter.

[28] Marianne Richert Pfau, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen: Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum—Volume VI: Chants for Virgins, Widows and Innocents* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1997), front matter.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Barabra Thornton, "Ursula and Ecclesia: Myths and Meaning," liner notes for *Voice of the Blood,* by Hildegard von Bingen, with Sequentia (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, 1995, compact disc), 8.

[32] The seventeen Virtues are the following: Charity, Fear of God, Obedience, Faith, Hope, Chastity, Innocence, Comtempt of the World, Celestial Love, Discipline, Modesty, Mercy, Victory, Discretion, Patience, the Soul, and Humility, Queen of the Virtues.

[33] Barabra Thornon, "The Musical Conception of *Ordo virtutum,*" liner notes for Ordo Virtutum, by Hildegard von Bingen, with Sequentia (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, 1982, compact disc), 15.

[34] Peter Dronke, "Symphoniae," liner notes for *Symphoniae: Sacred Songs,* by Hildegard von Bingen, with Sequentia (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, 1985, compact disc), 9.

[35] There is some debate as to which composition may have been written first.

[36] Michael Klaper, "Hildegard von Bingen" in *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women,* ed. James R. Briscoe (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994), 15.

[37] The performance practice of medieval music is a topic too complex and expansive to cover in this article, which is intended to be a survey of Hildegard's music for the choral director. A separate full-length article would be required to adequately discuss these issues. Perhaps a future article in the *Choral Journal* could be devoted to an exploration of this rich and fascinating topic.