

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN MUSIC, HARMONY AND THE COSMOS

Twelfth century nun, Hildegard of Bingen, is becoming increasingly familiar to modern audiences as a mystic, healer, composer and theologian. Her unique cosmology of wholeness and harmony, her positive images of the feminine and her highly individual music have made her an icon of sorts in both popular culture and scholarly circles. Though it was Hildegard's visionary experience that enabled her to acquire a public voice in an era that denied women the right to speak and write, she took full advantage of the opportunities that her role as God's prophet made available to her. She wrote three books of theology, two books of medicine, a song cycle, and the first musical morality play. Her advice was sought by secular and ecclesiastical leaders and by a host of other religious and laypersons. Toward the end of her life she even undertook a series of preaching journeys, an unheard of activity for a woman.

Though Hildegard generally accepted the tenets of orthodoxy and was always careful to officially remain within its bounds, she also developed an alternative and exuberant cosmology that celebrated life as the earthly reflection of the divine. In her theological books she relied heavily on allegory to articulate its themes. In the medical writings, for which she claimed no divine inspiration, she displayed her knowledge of contemporary medical theory, which she reworked in support of a more positive, biologically based view of the feminine. And in her music, she devised an individualistic style that was idiosyncratic but not random. It was a carefully crafted union of lyrics and musical structure that together served as a devotional discourse. In addition to articulating certain tenets of orthodoxy, Hildegard's music also expressed the most salient themes of her alternative, holistic and harmonious theology.

Biography

Hildegard was born near Alzey in what is now Germany in 1098. She was the tenth child of noble parents, Mechtild and Hildebert von Bernersheim. As a child, she displayed an unusual spiritual sensitivity and a physical frailty that would have detracted from her marriage value. Thus, it is likely that these factors played a role in her parents' decision to dedicate her to the religious life at the age of eight.¹ She was entrusted to the care of Jutta of Spanheim, the reclusive daughter of a local aristocrat who had entered an un-vowed religious life in the home of Lady Uda, a widow of Gollheim, and for whom an anchorite's cell was later constructed at the Benedictine monastery of St. Disibod. In 1112, Hildegard and Jutta, along with several other young women who had joined them in the enclosure over time, professed their vows as Benedictines. This small female community, with Jutta as *magistra*, operated under the auspices of the monks.

In these early years, Jutta taught Hildegard the basics of Latin and to play ten-stringed psaltery.² Though Hildegard would proclaim her 'ignorance' as a woman and lack of formal education throughout her life, her writings reveal a solid understanding of Scripture, the works of the Church Fathers and the codes of devotional rhetoric that informed the theological discourse of that period. As an enclosed religious in the Benedictine tradition, she learned the conventions of the liturgical chant that formed the fundament of monastic life. Hildegard downplayed her formal knowledge because of the prohibitions against public speech/writing by women, but her

¹ Child oblation was a common practice in the premodern period. Because marriages were arranged according to political ends that often required large dowries, the religious life offered a more affordable alternative for some of the daughters of noble families. Certainly, those who displayed unusual proclivities, such as Hildegard did, would have been less desirable as marriage candidates.

² Gottfried of Disibodenberg and Theodoric of Echternach, *The Life of the Saintly Hildegard*, trans. Hugh Feiss, OSB (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1966), 26.

books, letters and songs reveal that her understanding of theology, medicine and music was far from superficial.

Despite her abilities, Hildegard was only able to acquire a voice through divine intervention. Though she had visionary experiences since early childhood, she had confided them only to Jutta and to her confessor, Volmar. It was Volmar, who would become Hildegard's life-long assistant and confidant, who encouraged her to record them. After Jutta's death in 1136, Hildegard was elected *magistra* of the community. In 1141, she had a vision in which she was commanded by God to speak and write what she had seen:

And behold! In the forty-third year of my earthly course as I was gazing with great fear and trembling attention at a heavenly vision, I saw a great splendor in which resounded a voice from Heaven, saying to me, "O fragile human, ashes of ashes, and filth of filth! Say and write what you see and hear. But since you are timid in speaking, and simple in expounding, and untaught in writing, speak and write these things not by a human mouth, and not by the understanding of human invention, and not by the requirements of human composition, but as you see and hear them on high in the heavenly places in the wonders of God. Explain them in such a way that the hearer, receiving the words of his instructor, may expound them in those words, according to that will, vision and instruction. Thus, therefore, O human, speak these things that you see and hear. And write them not by yourself or any other human being, but by the will of Him Who knows, sees and disposes all things in the secrets of His mysteries."

It happened that, in the eleven hundred and forty-first year of the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, when I was forty-two years and seven months old, Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart and my whole breast . . . And immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures, namely the Psalter, the Gospel and other catholic books of both the Old and the New Testaments, though I did not have the interpretation of the words or their texts or the division of the syllables or the knowledge of cases or tenses.³

Overcome by this command, she became physically ill. This was a pattern that would be repeated whenever she was confronted with overwhelming difficulties or opposition to her plans.

Ultimately, Volmar and Abbot Kuno of St. Disibod's made Hildegard's writing available to Pope

³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, with an introduction by Barbara J. Newman (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), Declaration, 59.

Eugenius III, who was attending a synod in nearby Trier. The Pope dispatched an investigative team to Disibodenberg, which sanctioned the authenticity of her visions and the orthodoxy of her writing, and she was granted papal permission to continue. Hildegard would always remain cognizant of the fact that she was not allowed to speak as a woman but rather as God's prophet and the authority of her visions.

As Hildegard's fame as a theologian, visionary and healer began to spread, an increasing number of pilgrims made their way to St. Disibodenberg, and new entrants joined the women's community. When Hildegard announced that she had received a divine command to move the nuns to a remote location thirty kilometers away at Rupertsberg, she encountered strenuous opposition from the monks. Not to be deterred, she took to her bed, where she remained immobile until the Abbot's agreement was secured. She acquired the property with the assistance of Archbishop Henry of Mainz and the mother of one of her nuns, the Marchioness Richardis von Stade. In 1150, Hildegard and eighteen of her sisters moved to Rupertsberg, and by 1165, the community had grown so large that a daughter house was founded across the river at Eibingen.⁴

Though the circumstances of the move to Rupertsberg are documented, Hildegard's intentions are not. On one hand, there was a conflict between the nuns and the monks over control over the nuns' dowries, which was not even resolved until 1158, and then only through the intervention of the Archbishop Henry again. On the other, it is possible that Hildegard's intent was to achieve communal and spiritual independence from the monks. Certainly some of the practices she encouraged among the nuns suggest this as a plausible assumption. They included unusual dress for ceremonial occasions, in which they wore their hair unbound, white

⁴ The original monastery was destroyed during the Thirty Years War, but the house at Eibingen still stands. It houses a community of Benedictine nuns and a research institute dedicated to Hildegard. Sabina Flanagan. *A Visionary Life*, 2d ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 9.

veils, gold rings and jeweled tiaras. Hildegard justified these diversions in a powerful encomium to the glory of the feminine.

The Living Fountain says: Let a woman remain within her chamber so that she may preserve her modesty, for the serpent breathed the fiery danger of horrible lust into her. Why should she do this? Because the beauty of woman radiated and blazed forth in the primordial root, and in her was formed that chamber in which every creature lies hidden. Why is she so resplendent? For two reasons: on one hand, because she was created by the finger of God and, on the other, because she was endowed with wondrous beauty. O, woman, what a splendid being you are! For you have set your foundation in the sun, and have conquered the world.⁵

Hildegard's defense of these individualistic practices has led Gerda Lerner to observe: "She explained and defended these innovations on theological grounds, so that we may deduce they were deliberate."⁶ She also developed a secret alphabet [*litterae ignotae*] and language [*lingua ignota*], the uses of which remain unknown.⁷ Finally, the rhetorical construction of her music and certain texts of the songs, especially the Marian repertory, suggest the intent to affect the consciousness of the enclosed women in a positive feminine direction.

Hildegard's advice was sought by Popes, the Emperor, political and ecclesiastical leaders, and by a variety of religious and laypersons. Her vast correspondence has been preserved and serves as an additional source of her spiritual and moral thought. The confidence with which she speaks at times is indicative of the extent to which she, despite regular proclamations of unworthiness, transcended the constraints upon feminine speech. Finally, their stylistic features demonstrate her familiarity with the codes of medieval rhetoric despite her lack of formal schooling. Toward the end of her life, she undertook a series of preaching journeys. Again we see the magnitude of Hildegard's achievement as a woman. Not only was preaching expressly

⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, "Letter to a Congregation of Nuns, 52r, 1148-50," in *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 1, trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 128.

⁶ Gerda Lerner. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 59.

⁷ Flanagan, 7.

off limits to her sex, the direct manner in which she openly admonished the clergy to reform violated all codes of allowable feminine speech.

Hildegard's theological consists of three books: *Scivias* (short for *Scito vias Domini* or *Know the Ways of the Lord*), completed in 1151; the *Liber vitae meritorum* (*Book of the Merits of Life*), written between 1158 and 1163; and the *Liber divinorum operum* (*Book of Divine Works*), also known as *Liber operatione Dei* (*The Activity of God*), which spans the years between 1163 to 1173/4. She is also the author of two books of medicine, the *Causae et curae* or *Book of Compound Medicine* and the *Physica*, the *Book of Simple Medicine*. Her musical compositions include the *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum* (*Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations*) and the first musical morality play, the *Ordo virtutum* or *Play of the Virtues*. Finally, her writings also include a biography of St. Disibod, her autobiography as recorded by Gottfried and Theodoric and contained in their biography of her, and other miscellany.

After Hildegard's death in 1179, canonization proceedings were begun, but were never completed. Nevertheless, she was venerated as saint in some areas, and in the century after her death, her name and feast days began to appear in the martyrologies. In the fourteenth century, Pope John XXII gave permission for her 'solemn and public cult' to be celebrated, and her inclusion in Baronius' *Roman Martyrology* in the sixteenth century "ensures her status as a saint." According to Flanagan, her cult remains active until today, as is evident from the shrine in her church at Eibingen.⁸

⁸ Flanagan, 12.

Music *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum*

Music held heightened significance for Hildegard as the earthly manifestation of mankind's prelapsarian voice, as the speech of angels and as the ultimate means of communication between humans and the divine. Hence, it is not surprising that she would have turned her considerable creative talent to composition. For Hildegard, music was an integral component of the medieval devotional arts, and as such, it would have had implicit didactic and rhetorical functions. The *Symphonia* song cycle departs from convention in certain significant ways that are motivated by an intent to unite words and music for this specific purpose. To suggest that Hildegard's music was designed for an expressly rhetorical end, that is, to persuade her auditors toward greater spiritual perfection, is to raise two questions. First, how would an unschooled abbess have learned the principles of eloquence? And second, how would she have understood music on rhetorical terms in an era that predated an articulated concept of musical rhetoric?

Though religious leaders such as Hildegard would not have been formally schooled in the *trivium* arts, they would have been intimately familiar with the procedures of the devotional arts [*ars praedicandi* and *monastic meditatio*] whose methods derived from classical Ciceronian rhetoric. As St. Augustine pointed out, the incorporation of rhetoric into preaching and teaching was due in part to empower "untrained" but inspired preachers. Certainly Hildegard fit this prescription. As Augustine advised, she and other abbesses and abbots would have acquired a command of eloquence through informal study and imitation.

For those with acute and eager minds more readily learn eloquence by reading and hearing the eloquent than by following the rules of eloquence. There is no lack of ecclesiastical literature, including that outside of the canon established in a place of secure authority, which, if read by a capable man, even though he is interested more in what is said than in the eloquence with which it is said, will imbue him with that

eloquence while he is studying. And he will learn eloquence especially if he gains practice by writing, dictating, or speaking what he has learned according to the rule of piety and faith.⁹

Close examination of the format of Hildegard's theological writings, her letters and her activity as a preacher indeed reveals a close correspondence to the underlying rhetorical codes of the *ars praedicandi* and the *ars dictamen* [art of letter writing]. Given her immersion in the monastic discourses of prayer, preaching and teaching, Augustine's description of the untaught speaker as "unlearnedly learned" describes her most accurately.¹⁰

As far as the relationship between rhetoric and music is concerned, treatise authors make no clear or explicit connections between music and eloquence in this period. Though they identify connections between the syntactical structures of music and linguistic grammar, they speak only in general terms about the correspondence between harmony/melody and the meaning of the text. However, the medieval understanding of the inherently affective powers of music per se is in effect an acknowledgement of its implicitly rhetorical potential. This idea derived from Plato's doctrine in which music was conceived as an energetic/moral force. Its power over the soul issued from the underlying, numerically ordered cosmic harmony from which all worldly consonance [and dissonance] emanate. Its affective force of music resided in the correspondence between musical harmonies and states of the soul/mind that was implicitly persuasive. Plato writes:

Of the harmonies . . . I want to have one warlike, to sound the note or accent which a brave man utters in the hour of danger and stern resolve . . . and another to be used by him in times of peace and freedom of action, when there is no pressure of necessity, and he is seeking to persuade God by prayer, or man by instruction and admonition, or on the other hand, when he is expressing his willingness to yield to persuasion or entreaty or admonition, and which represents him when by prudent conduct he has attained his end.¹¹

⁹ St. Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. by D.W. Robertson, Jr. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1997), IV.III.4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.VII.11.

¹¹ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), III.397.

Medieval theorists accepted and reiterated the Platonic view, as John Affligemus' words demonstrate.

It should not pass unmentioned that chant has great power of stirring the souls of its hearers, in that it delights the ears, uplifts the mind, arouses fighters to warfare, revives the prostrate and despairing, strengthens wayfarers, disarms bandits, assuages the wrathful, gladdens the sorrowful and distressed, pacifies those at strife, dispels idle thoughts, and allays the frenzy of the demented . . .

Music has different powers according to the different modes. Thus, you can by one kind of singing rouse someone to lustfulness and by another kind bring the same man as quickly as possible to repentance and recall him to himself. Since music has such power to affect men's minds, its use in the Holy Church is deservedly approved.¹²

It would seem that the ecclesiastical writers conceive of the affective power of music independently of the words and that they align it with the potential for abuse similarly to the way they understood the association between oratorical excess and persuasion to falsehood. Yet they make no explicit rhetorical connections, and they are silent on just how the structures of music actually produce their transformative effects. They assert that rationally constructed harmony assists the listener to apprehend the spiritual truths embodied in the words, but they confine their discussions of the relationship between music and text to grammatical parallels.

The author of the *Scolica enchiridis* and Guido of Arezzo suggest a direct correspondence between the letters and syllables that make up words and the musical *phthongi*, or sounds, that are grouped together as neumes to comprise the harmony.

Here we call tones *phthongi*, that is, the agreeable-sounding tones (*voculae*) of song, which constitute the foundation of harmony. For just as a word consists of letters, so does harmony consist of *phthongi*.¹³

¹² John, *De musica*, in *Hucbald, Guido and John: Three Medieval Treatises*, ed. and with an introduction by Claude V. Palisca, trans. Warren Babb (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), Chapter 17.114-15.

¹³ *Scolica enchiridis*, in *Musica enchiridis and Scolica enchiridis*, ed. By Claude V. Palisca, trans. by Raymond Erickson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995),60 (page 34 of translation). The original source markings are unclear in the opening section of this work.

Just as in verse there are letters and syllables, ‘parts’ and feet and lines, so in music there are *phthongi*, that is, sounds, of which one, two, or three are grouped in ‘syllables’; one or two of the latter make a neume, which is the ‘part’ of music; and one or more ‘parts’ make a ‘distinction,’ that is, a suitable place to breathe. Regarding these units it must be noted that every ‘part’ should be written and performed connectedly, and a musical ‘syllable’ even more so.¹⁴

The neumes are further organized into larger phrase units that are analogous to the grammatical equivalents of the comma, colon and period, and they are demarcated through association with specific modal tones. “So the phrases that are members of a song, the colons or commas, ascending or descending, nearly always seek out these tones associated with the final, and the melody, whether ascending or descending, seeks to reach them.”¹⁵

In prose, where one makes a pause in reading aloud, this is called a colon; when the sentence is divided by an appropriate punctuation mark, it is called a comma; when the sentence is brought to an end, it is a period. . . . Likewise, when a chant makes a pause by dwelling on the fourth or fifth note above the final, there is a colon; when in mid-course it returns to the final, there is a comma; when it arrives at the final at the end, there is a period.¹⁶

As far as the relation of musical design to meaning is concerned, the sources speak in only the most general terms about the importance of congruence between music and the sense or intent of the text. Guido writes:

Let the effect of the song express what is going on in the text, so that for sad things the neumes are grave, for serene ones they are cheerful, and for auspicious texts exultant, and so forth.¹⁷

In a similar vein, the author of *Musica enchiridis* requires melodies to conform to the affects of the subject matter that is being sung about.

¹⁴ Guido of Arezzo. *Micrologus* in *Hucbald, Guido and John: Three Medieval Treatises*, ed. and with an introduction by Claude V. Palisca, trans. Warren Babb (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), Chapter 15.162-3.

¹⁵ *Scolica enchiridis*, 82 (49 in translation).

¹⁶ John, 10.79. According to Leo Treitler, John reverses colon and comma. Where he says colon there is a cadence on the dominant. Where he says comma there is a cadence on the final. *Periodus* refers to the last cadence on the final. Leo Treitler, *With Voice and Pen: Coming to Know Medieval Song and How It Was Made* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 443.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 15.168.

[A]ffections of the subjects that are sung [about] correspond to the expression of the song, so that melodies [neumae] are peaceful in tranquil subjects, joyful in happy matters, somber in sad [ones], [and] harsh things are said or made to be expressed by harsh melodies.¹⁸

John Affligemus offers a similar view of the general correspondences between mood and modal style, possibly with the intent to focus on effect.

The first precept [for composing chant] we give is that the chant be varied according to the meaning of the words. We showed earlier what mode in singing suits what material when we said that different people are pleased by different modes. We showed that some are suitable for courtly ceremony, some for frivolity, and some even for grief. Just as anyone eager for a poet's fame must take pains to match the action by the words and not to say things incongruous with the circumstances of the man he is writing about, so the composer eager for praise must strive to compose his chant so aptly that it seems to express what the words say . . . a composer can be censured if he employs for sad subject-matter a dancing mode, or a mournful mode for joyful words. Therefore the musician must see to it that the chant is so regulated that for inauspicious texts it is pitched low and for propitious ones it is pitched high.¹⁹

Though the theorists only specifically delineate the grammatical relationships between words and music, as educated men, they certainly would have known rhetoric. And while they clearly understood the performative import of the musical-syntactical relationship, the associations they draw between meaning and music are confined to intent on general terms.²⁰

In this context, then, the close correspondence between words and musical structures in Hildegard's *Symphonia* is a radical development. Moreover, in an age in which musical and vocal excess were associated with [feminine] carnality and lust, and in which women were simultaneously equated with loquacity and denied a public voice, Hildegard's ornate musical style was transgressive indeed. The uncharacteristically wide pitch ranges, large and consecutive intervallic leaps, lengthy and ornate melismatic statements, and unusual modal finals made for a style that far exceeded the accepted boundaries of ecclesiastical chant. These elaborate

¹⁸ *Musica enchiriadis*, 19.58.

¹⁹ John, Chapter 18.117.

²⁰ John Stephens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama 1050-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 297.

constructions were not the random product of an unlearned woman, however. Rather, they represent a conjunction of poetry and melody that is jointly ordered according to grammatical and *meaningful* intent of the text. It is through the alliance of specific musical devices with the words at the level of signification that the repertory enters the domain of the rhetorical, and it is in service to this end that Hildegard's innovative musical style is best understood.

The rhetorical import derives from a compositional strategy in which the persuasive force of the texts is underscored and expanded by the musical delivery. The rhetorical form of the lyrics, which Hildegard also composed, is congruent with the codes of the *ars praedicandi* and the *ars dictamen*, even if they are not applied literally. In keeping with the practices of the *lectio divina*, in which individual words or images are offered for meditation, the song texts are permeated with rhetorical figures such as personification, ambiguity, vivid description and comparison. Rhetorical musical gestures deliver, emphasize and enhance the primary themes of the poetry. These include melodic repetition that is deployed to link ideas; ornamentation, leaps and extensive melismas placed on significant words; referential high pitches that cohere with thematic significance; and use of key modal tones for punctuation and emphasis in conjunction with meaning.

The normal range of the plainchant genres that Hildegard would have known rarely exceeded the interval of a ninth, and many chants remained within the space of a fifth or sixth.²¹ Melodies proceeded primarily by step, with skips of a third in either direction providing the most common form of disjunct motion. Fourths are relatively common, and fifths less so, especially in downward progressions. Some melodies begin with an upward leap of a fifth, and successive

²¹ Richard Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 74-75. Hoppin notes that certain exceptions obtain and these are found primarily among a highly ornate group of Alleluias, which encompass the entire plagal and authentic ambitus of the mode, and in certain Graduals in which the range exceeds the octave from a third to a fifth. It is to be noted, here, however, that though more elaborate works exist in the Gregorian repertory, they are exceptional rather than the norm. Hoppin, 93.

thirds appear frequently.²² Overall, the effect was restrained, and when ornamental devices [such as melisma appeared], they remained within the bounds of musical [moral] decorum that were required by the ecclesiastical authors.

In contrast to the limited range, conjunct movement and unadorned melodies of the Gregorian repertory, the range of the *Symphonia* songs commonly exceeds the octave by a fourth or fifth. According to Marianne Richert Pfau's review of the entire cycle, over half of the pieces transcend the modal ranges specified by the theorists.²³ Several span two octaves, and one, *O vos angeli*, traverses the entire medieval gamut.²⁴ In addition to their large ranges, the melodic motion in Hildegard's songs tends to favor the tonal space above the final and to exploit the uppermost pitch register. In keeping with [rhetorical] preaching codes, less important themes are articulated before more potent ones, and the melody ascends progressively to various referential high pitch points in tandem with the persuasive import of the words.

Hildegard's compositional style is characterized by the strategic use of repeated melodic motives that are specific to each mode. They are almost never repeated literally from song to song, but rather are varied to fit the individual texts. In this way, each piece acquires a unique character though its architecture is built from a common pool. While it is true that melodic repetition sometimes functions in a purely structural manner, it is more often deployed as a means of underscoring text messages. Repeated motives are not randomly assigned but carefully placed on key words or phrases. This strategy serves to not only to emphasize individual themes or images but to link units of meaning as well.

²³ Marianne Pfau. "Hildegard von Bingen's *Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum*." Ph.D. diss, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1990, 128.

²⁴ Catherine Jeffreys. "*Melodia et rhetorica*." Ph.D. diss., University of Melbourne, 2000. 52.

Hildegard's melodies are also characterized by leaps the fourth and fifth in both directions that engage the important modal tones - octave, fifth, fourth and final. Upward skips of a fourth and a fifth are often associated with the opening gesture of a piece and typically serve several rhetorical ends. In some cases they serve as components of a [rhetorical] ascent to a referential high pitch. In others, they are part of a repeated melody that opens successive phrases, and in this context they function as emphatic gestures. They are also used to demarcate and emphasize particular words within a phrase of text.

In general, the treatment of the final and the fifth of the mode as text punctuating devices is consistent with the grammatical precepts of the theoretical writings, but Hildegard expands upon them as well. In addition to their usual function as indicators of complete and incomplete pauses, the final, and to a lesser extent, the fifth [and occasionally other tones] are deployed as outlining devices that serve to separate and thereby highlight key words or entire phrases. This strategy would have had rhetorical significance as an element of delivery, in which the separation of certain words would underscore them for the ears of the audience. In addition, the fifth also sometimes functions as the fulcrum of a temporary tonal shift that is almost always affiliated with a change in ideas or images in the lyrics.

Hildegard's melodies also contain extensive melismatic statements. Certain works, such as antiphons and responsories, are entirely melismatic in their construction. In settings that are primarily neumatic or syllabic, melismas are used to highlight significant themes and images. In pieces that are set almost entirely melodically, emphasis is obtained through the placement of longer and more melismas, often exceeding fifty pitches, on key words. In addition to the effect of holding the auditor's attention for a longer period of time on a given idea or image, this ornate device also embodies emphatic effect in several other ways. Melismas are usually outlined by

the final or fifth of the mode, they frequently ascend to the highest pitch registers, and they are affiliated with the rhetorically significant melodic motives that also attain the registral high tones and which are strategically placed for persuasive effect. In addition, certain works conclude with extensive melismatic statements that are composed of all previously articulated motives in a purely musical form of the rhetorical *peroratio* or recapitulation.

Finally, though Hildegard's melodies generally adhere to modal classifications of *protus*, *deuterus*, *tritus* and *tetrardus*, modal assignment in the *Symphonia* is not always straightforward. The exceedingly large range of certain chants makes a definitive determination of plagal or authentic status difficult to ascertain. In addition, twenty-five songs [eleven in C and fourteen in A] have use the unconventional finals A or C. Though these pitches were not accepted as finals in the standard system, they did serve as alternative sites for transposed chants. Hildegard's C and A final songs are difficult to classify as plagal modes, transpositions or experimental tonalities. The appearance of B-flat in the C and A final pieces might be an indicator of transposition, but it is notated inconsistently, which complicates the assessment. In both the C and A 'modalities' when the melody rises to the octave above middle C, the B-flat is signed only in the lower register. In addition, the pitch B frequently occurs a number of times before the first signed flat appears, sometimes within similar melodic contexts. To date, this aspect of Hildegard's music has not been sufficiently investigated and represents a fertile area for further research. Do these pieces represent experiments with mixed modes transposed, new tonalities, unusual extension of the range and ending of plagal modes or some combination of these possibilities?²⁵

²⁵ This author is currently working on a full transcription of the *Symphonia* songs and a full-scale study of their musical structures.

In conclusion, Hildegard's innovative musical style can be understood as an early example of musical rhetoric even if it is not specifically identified as such. The departures from the normative conventions of contemporary plainchant are carefully designed constructions that provide heightened emphasis to key themes and ideas contained in the words. The lyrics articulate her individualistic cosmology of wholeness and harmony that stands in opposition to the predominant dualistic thinking of her age. In contrast to the separation of the mind from the body, the masculine from the feminine, and the earthly from the divine realm, Hildegard musically celebrates the presence of divinity in the material and celestial spheres. Of special importance to her all-female audience, the Marian songs represent a clear intent to recover the original sacrality of the feminine, including its divine aspects.²⁶ Thus, the rhetorical aim of the *Symphonia* cycle, which was achieved through a unique and inextricable union of text and melody, was to persuade devotees toward spiritual perfection in a positive, life-affirming direction.

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²⁶ See my dissertation for a detailed discussion of the positive feminine in Hildegard's *Symphonia*. "Music, Rhetoric and the Creation of Feminist Consciousness in the Marian Songs of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)." Florida Atlantic University, 2006.