

Australian Brandenburg Orchestra

ON PERIOD INSTRUMENTS

Universal Woman

CAST & CREATIVES

Paul Dyer AO Artistic Director, Chamber Organ, Percussion

Kate Box Narrator

Michael Costi Script

Melissa Farrow Medieval Flute/Recorder

Chloe Lankshear Soprano

Amy Moore Soprano

Josie Ryan Soprano

Lauren Stephenson Soprano

Adria Watkin Soprano

HILDEGARD VON BINGEN

Hildegard was born into a prominent Rhineland family in 1098. Her parents dedicated her to the church at the age of eight as a 'tithe' and entrusted her to Jutta, a noblewoman who was seeking a life of holy reclusion. Jutta took Hildegard with her to the Benedictine monastery of Disibodenberg where young Hildegard took up the veil and never looked back.

Hildegard had been experiencing prophetic or mysterious light-filled visions from the age of five. Not until she was 43 did she submit to an increasing inner urge to put these visions into writing, along with her own theological interpretations of them. Hildegard heard 'voices' and her mystical experiences were overwhelmingly visual: complex, colourful scenes of fantastic elements and beings in marvellous settings.

Hildegard quickly became a spiritual celebrity when her first collection of mystical visions *Scivias* received the support of Pope Eugenius III. In addition to her visionary-theological works, Hildegard also produced an encyclopaedic collection of writings on medicine and the natural world. Her correspondence was vast and ranged wide—her advice was sought by Pope Eugenius III, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and King Henry II of England, as well as bishops, abbots, abbesses, monks, nuns, and laypeople both noble and common.

At the age of 60, she began to travel extensively in Germany, preaching and advising, interpreting dreams and signs—unheard of for a woman, let alone a cloistered Benedictine nun. By the 1140s, Hildegard had begun composing chants for the liturgy, eventually collected under the title *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum*. Her compositions would almost certainly not have been sung consecutively in any service; they would have occurred occasionally and must have seemed like exotic creatures alongside the everyday monastic chant. Hildegard was not a trained musician or composer, but there is really no way to compare her style, unique and unforgettable, to any other music of her time. The Sibyl of the Rhine died at the age of 81 in one of her monasteries near Bingen.

Australian Brandenburg Orchestra
in association with Sydney Festival
presents *Universal Woman*

SYDFEST 2021



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Australian Brandenburg Orchestra

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2021

SYDNEY

ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL CRYPT

MON 18 JAN 7:00PM

TUE 19 JAN 7:00PM

WED 20 JAN 2:00PM & 7:00PM

THU 21 JAN 2:00PM

SAT 23 JAN 7:30PM

Performance duration
approximately 60 mins.

Australian Brandenburg Orchestra acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which we are performing and we pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

PROGRAM

Hymn Veni creator spiritus

PROLOGUE

Antiphon Deus enim rorem in illas misit

SCENE ONE - Young Hildegard

Antiphon O quam mirabilis est

SCENE TWO - Enclosed

Responsory Laus Trinitati

SCENE THREE - The Abbess of the Natural World

Sequence O Ecclesia oculi tui

SCENE FOUR - Finding The Light

Antiphon Caritas habundat in omnia

SCENE FIVE - Visions of the World

Hymn O ignee spiritus

SCENE SIX - The Silence

Antiphon O Pastor animarum

EPILOGUE

Antiphon Caritas habundat in omnia

ABOUT THE CREATIVES



THE BRANDENBURG FOUNDATION

Supporting the future of the
Australian Brandenburg Orchestra
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Script by: Michael Costi

PROLOGUE

Hymn

Veni creator spiritus

Come, Creator Spirit

The text and tune of *Veni Creator Spiritus* have been preserved and performed for more than a thousand years, making it one of the finest and most venerated examples in the Latin language. This hymn was most likely written by Rabanus Maurus, an important cleric in the time of Charlemagne and his successors.

Listen.

Silence.

Sacred.

Solemn.

We revere it. We fear it. It can bring joy and pain, and in sacred spaces such as these our silence becomes a means of reflection. The gentle rhythm of our breath guiding our thoughts and prayers.
And yet,

Listen.

Sound.

Music.

When we hear a song, we breathe deeply. We sigh. Music stirs our hearts and engages our souls in ways we cannot describe. When this happens, we are taken beyond our earthly banishment back to the divine melody Adam knew when he sung with the Angels, when he was whole in God, before his exile. But still...

Listen.

Voices.

I heard the deafening din of a shipwrecked world. Corrupted and tormented. Yearning for someone to speak. Someone to stem the flood of sin and fear. But I was only one soul.
My silence was my prison.

It is not far from the shores of silence to the boundaries of speech. The path is not long, but the way is deep. You must not only walk there, you must be prepared to leap.

For even my name signalled a duty greater than myself. For *Hild* is to fight and a *Gard* is a place where great battles might occur. So I was called Hildegard...one who goes to battle for the human spirit.

Antiphon

Deus enim rorem in illas misit

So God watered them with dew

Short and musically straightforward, *Deus enim rorem* would often have been paired with Psalm 149 (*Cantate Domino*) at festal Lauds, the Office of daybreak and symbolic of Christ's resurrection. This instrumental arrangement of Hildegard's chant comes from the Brandenburg's Aaron Brown, a specialist in Medieval music.

SCENE ONE: YOUNG HILDEGARD

Antiphon **O quam mirabilis est**

How wonderful it is

Through her visionary works, Hildegard projects an image of humanity as the summit of all creation, astride the world and participating in it as a smaller part of the greater universe. The antiphon *O quam mirabilis est* describes both textually and musically this unique place bestowed on humanity by God.

It began with a cow.

A great big fat cow standing in a field.

The Rhine was full of lush pastures and meadows. The perfect place for a six year old to explore.

I approached the cow, slowly, softly, not wanting to scare it. I saw its belly. I suddenly realised that this great big fat cow was pregnant! I turned to tell nurse of my discovery when -

Lights. Thousands of lights. Swirling and shifting and shimmering on the surface of my mind. And in this heavenly kaleidoscope a shadow appeared. A calf. The unborn calf - its gender and markings clear. A living spark.

And just as soon as my vision had come...it vanished.

My mind returned to the field and the cow and Nurse. I didn't tell anyone. I was afraid. I stayed silent, as would perhaps any six year old. But the divine does not take heed of age. I remember my fathers words:

"As you are our tenth and youngest child we are offering you as a tribute to the church. You will pack your things and be sent to a Benedictine Monastery in Disibodenberg. May God bless you and keep you!"

I left my childhood home on All Saints Day.

SCENE TWO: ENCLOSED

Enclosed.

That's what they called it.

I was enclosed in a cell attached to the monastery.

Locked away.

Buried alive.

Eight years old.

Silence.

My journey of devotion began alone.

My thoughts echoed around ancient walls. If I listened hard enough I could hear the rituals of the monastery above. The faint singing of the clergy became my lullaby. Their footsteps and chanting my only link to the outside world.

And then...Jutta.

Her pale skin and sunken eyes shining through the haunted darkness.

Jutta. My anchoress. My teacher. Only six years older than I but ageless in her wisdom. Two young souls locked together in their own endless universe.

I learnt to read and write. I learnt psalms and songs. I learnt sacrifice. And though our cell was small, my mind travelled over uncharted lands and oceans of knowledge.

At night, my visions persisted. I dreamt of holy souls. Of Ursula the young Martyr killed by the arrow of the Hun. Of the Saviour shrouded in terrifying and blinding light. I saw the multitude of Saints who were burdened with visions like mine.

I confided in Jutta. She said she did not see what I saw. I felt cursed. I felt afraid. I begged her not to let them cast me out! I would speak of it again.

Buried alive in my thoughts.

I closed my eyes.

And in my prayers I heard once more the lullaby of the clergy above. Songs of the blessed. Songs of the living.

Responsory **Laus Trinitati** *Praise to the Trinity*

While the task of describing the mystery of the Trinity through text and music is impossibly difficult, in *Laus Trinitati* Hildegard uses sound, life and creativity to represent the Holy Trinity, the source of all life.

SCENE THREE: THE ABBESS OF THE NATURAL WORLD

Sisters.

Whilst we mourn the passing of our beloved Jutta we must look to the future.

If we are to have a new Magistra let her not be appointed, but elected by the nuns of this monastery. And if the superiors of the church object then let them answer to a higher power.

We are the sinful daughters of Eve. Each of us arrived here seeking devotion but we must not shut out the world. And I propose that we consider how we might further our works outside these walls.

The vote was unanimous. In 1137 I was to be the new Magistra.

I emerged to take stock of the world.

In many ways, we humans are just like plants, sustained by the four elements and it takes a caring gardener to make sure our patients flourish. I began by diagnosing the members of the monastery. Now...let's see...

You seem to be suffering an imbalance of the humours. Rose is cold, and this coldness contains moderation which is useful. In the morning pluck a rose petal and place it on your eyes.

Take some Bertram, with a little less bramble, add even less oregano than all of these. Add honey, and cook it thoroughly in good wine. Then strain it through a piece of cloth, After you are full of wine, drink more wine.

Cloves are excellent for hiccups.

The greening bought such peace.

Whilst in the garden one day I was struck with an inexplicable terror. The ground seemed to shake. Even in the splendour of nature, my visions persisted.

Thunderstorms menaced. The air belched ash subject to such fierce fire that it glowed and seared like red hot iron. The wailing cries of barren creatures, their soul ablaze, desperate for relief. And in this terror I knew that I was not in hell. This was our earth, our world, thrown to a fleshy horde of wild boars, ripping its beauty to pieces.

Surely this future would not come to pass?

Sequence

O Ecclesia oculi tui

O Beloved, your eyes

O Ecclesia oculi tui is a commentary on the legend of Saint Ursula who was martyred along with eleven thousand virgins at Cologne in Germany for rejecting earthly marriage for one with Christ. Much of the song's imagery comes from the Song of Songs in the Old Testament, which medieval Christians interpreted as a metaphor for the love between Christ and the Church (*Ecclesia*).

SCENE FOUR: FINDING THE LIGHT

Life continued in the monastery.

I mostly kept to myself, my only confidant a monk, Volmar. He urged me to write of my visions. I refused.

In my forty third year I was struck by a sickness so strong I was unable to move. Was this to be my punishment? My penance for being a wasted vessel?

Lord, let another take this burden and release me!

In this affliction I lay thirty days while my body burned with fever.

Lord, why have you chosen my soul to torment!?

I watched a procession of angels innumerable fight against the dragon,

Lord, I am insignificant! I am an unworthy servant!

The battle raged above my bedside in fire and light.

“How fragile you are human! Made of dust and grime! Articulate what you see and hear! Let the will of Him who guides the universe, guide you in this work.”

I understand. My visions are light.

Light that is far, far brighter than a cloud which carries the sun. I can measure neither height, nor length, nor breadth in it but it is the reflection of the living light. And as the sun, the moon, and the stars appear in water, so writings shall take form from me.

And so I wrote. Words now flowing from me. Forty years worth of visions pouring forth. Volmar and I worked tirelessly. Without stopping, possessed.

I wrote of the remedies of the natural world. I wrote of my visions of living light. Words became pages; pages became books. Books that would challenge understanding of science and language and the universe itself.

And...I wrote music. Music. Music full of light and glory.

Music that filled the air of the monastery and lifted our hearts in celebration.

Antiphon **Caritas habundat in omnia**
Love abounds in all

The connection between Divine Love (*Caritas*) and the Holy Spirit is rooted in Christ's promise of the Paraclete's coming in the Last Supper discourse. *Caritas* (or *Karitas*) is a favourite figure for Hildegard and plays a large role in her theological books. Here *Caritas habundat in omnia* is performed as an instrumental arrangement with Paul Dyer on glockenspiel and Melissa Farrow on flutes.

SCENE FIVE: VISIONS OF THE WORLD

Sybil of the Rhine.

The mystic.

The prophetess.

I had transformed - ready for battle. My visions were now my armour.

I am a sword. I am steel, making all arms ready for God's unconquerable wars.

And let juvenile fools take heed of the word of the Divine!

For the church had become consumed with greed and ensnared by the wicked. I stood as a rock in a creek - solid against the raging stream of heretics.

I journeyed across the Rhineland with the breath of God at my back. When I was forbidden from the churches, I preached on the streets. When I was forbidden from opening a Monastery in Rupertsberg I told the Abbott that the inward shame of his soul would be his ruin, he yielded. We built.

I did not end with the Church.

I turned my gaze toward those in seats of power. To those in gilded towers so far removed from the world. Let them be judged the same as those holy men who led their flocks into sin.

Letters arrived. From Kings and Queens. From Dukes and Noblemen, all seeking counsel and the wisdom of the mystic. For word had spread. There was a woman, a woman of fire who spoke of prophecies and visions.

All the while, music echoed in my head. The music of change.

Marching our way to the light.

Hymn

O ignee spiritus

O fiery spirit

Perhaps less characteristic of Hildegard's hymns with its terse themes and lack of melismas, *O ignee spiritus* is a sparing meditation on the Holy Spirit's role in animating and then rescuing the human psyche.

SCENE SIX: THE SILENCE

They banned us from singing.

After all I had done.

They banned us from singing.

I received a letter.

*Dear Hildegard Von Bingen,
We have received word that you and members of your monastery have buried an excommunicated member of the church on your grounds. You have gone against our teachings. We now have no choice but to ban you from singing your divine office as penance for your misstep. May God grant you the wisdom to see the error of your ways.*

Music.

To silence.

We were silenced.

The churches words were clear. But they did not understand. The man had been forgiven, he received his sacraments before death, we buried him as we would do for any seeking to make amends.

I refused to move the body. I protested. I wrote:

“those who without just cause, impose silence on a church and prohibit the singing of God’s praises . . . will lose their place among the chorus of angels”

But it was no use. After all my years of shouting and yearning and crying out for change I had been struck down by the one thing I had fought so hard to protect. The Church.

It was not until mere months before my death that the ban would be lifted and the members of the monastery would be able to raise their voices once more.

And so,

We sang.

One final time.

Antiphon

O Pastor animarum

O Shepherd of our souls

O Pastor animarum focuses intensely on the spoken relationship between us and God. Here Hildegard describes God’s voice calling us into being, and us crying to him to free us from our self-imposed weakness. Aaron Brown has carefully arranged Hildegard’s music to to emphasize these themes.

EPILOGUE

Silence.

Sacred.

Solemn

Hildegard was a woman of many voices. Her words filled so many books and letters and songs. She was a Abbess; a philosopher, a polymath with knowledge of topics so diverse and unique. Some people would even call her a mystic, a mysterious prophet whose predictions ring true even today, here, in this very church.

She spoke not only of the degradation of the natural world and the environment but also of the corruption of those in power and a society driven mad by overwhelming consumerism and greed so far from our true nature. She obsessed over the future and, at times, felt helpless at the direction she saw the globe heading.

Regardless of faith or religion it is clear that the change that Hildegard looked for, her yearning for harmony and balance and connectedness is something that we too seek in this time of distance and uncertainty.

She challenged the elite to see a world beyond themselves, for politicians to be humble and truly listen, to not only the people they govern, but to the land they inhabit. While this seemed, at times, like a futile exercise, she continued to reach out...until her last breath.

As we leave here today, as we emerge to take stock of the world, lets take comfort in the fact that there once existed a universal woman, who found her voice in the silence.

Antiphon

Caritas habundat in omnia

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The connection between Divine Love (**Caritas**) and the Holy Spirit is rooted in Christ's promise of the Paraclete's coming in the Last Supper discourse. **Caritas** (or **Karitas**) is a favourite figure for Hildegard and plays a large role in her theological books.

END