Hildegard von Bingen

Hill-duh-gahrd fun Bing-en

Name: “von Bingen” refers to the town where Hildegard lived. “von” means “from” in German, and Bingen is a town. She is referred to as Hildegard, not “von Bingen”

Born: 1098, Bermersheim vor der Höhe, Germany

Died: September 17th, 1179, Bingen am Rhein, Germany

Period of Music: Medieval Era

In singing music, Hildegard believed that Christians integrate mind, heart, and body, heal discord, and celebrate the heavenly.

Biography:

Hildegard von Bingen lived around 900 years ago. Even though she lived so long ago, we know quite a bit about her since she kept journals and exchanged many letters with others. Both her father and mother were nobility. Hildegard was their 10th child, and tradition required that the 10th child should be dedicated to the church. When Hildegard was 8, her parents sent her to a convent which was part of a monastery. There she joined a religious order led by a nun, known as Jutta, who had dedicated her life to God. Many believe Jutta was a psychic and mystic. Jutta trained Hildegard and taught her about the church. Hildegard became a nun at age 15.

When Jutta died in 1136, Hildegard succeeded her as the Mother Superior of the order when she was only 38 years old. Within a few years, she claimed to have visions from God. Jutta taught Hildegard how to read and write in Latin, which allowed her to understand language and write down her visions. The church considered her a prophetess and visionary, and many church members began to seek her advice on both personal and religious matters.

Sometime between 1147 and 1150, Hildegard founded a new monastery near Rudesheim, Germany. She wrote at great length on many subjects, and she exchanged letters with popes, kings, dukes, archbishops, and politicians. Many important and powerful men consulted her on matters of church and state. She also wrote poems and set nearly 80 of them to music.

During Hildegard’s time, music for the church consisted mostly of chants that were sung by male monks. Hildegard, however, composed her music to be sung by the female nuns of her order. No other composer of the period wrote music for female voices.

Hildegard seemed to write music and text endlessly. She composed much of her music between 1150 and 1160. In addition to her music, she wrote an encyclopedia describing various herbal medicines she had developed. She wrote biographies of several saints, numerous religious books, and even a play.
At age 60, Hildegard began traveling and preaching throughout Germany. She was controversial during her lifetime because she claimed to have mystical powers, but not everyone believed her. In 1165, she moved her order of nuns to Bingen, Germany. After her death at age 81, there were several efforts to officially make her a saint, but they all failed.

Hildegard’s music is known as “plainsong chant,” the type of music sung in churches during the Middle Ages. But Hildegard’s compositions are unique because they were written for female voices. She often claimed that she received her music from God. Because of her many writings, Hildegard is considered one of the greatest women of the Middle Ages.

Quick Facts:
- 10% of everything a family had was given to the church, Hildegard was given to the church as 10% of her family’s children.
- Despite many people trying to officially make her a saint, she has not yet become one, so calling her Saint Hildegard von Bingen is not quite correct.
- She lived in a one-room cell in a Benedictine monastery and only communicated with the outside world through a single window.
- Hildegard invented her own language to use in many of her poems and song lyrics.

Selected Compositions for Listening:

Selected Compositions for Listening:

Spotify Playlist URL: [https://tinyurl.com/hildylisten](https://tinyurl.com/hildylisten)

- Alleluia, O virga mediatrix
- Ave generosa, hymn
- Kyrie, eleison
- O eucharis in leta via, sequence
- O Frondens Virga, antiphon
- O quam mirabilis est, antiphon
- Ordo Virtutum, liturgical drama
  - Finale: In principio omnes
  - Prologue: Qui sunt hi, ut sub nubes?

Other Suggested Listening:

Learn More about Hildegard von Bingen