

# HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

*Life, Writings, Music*



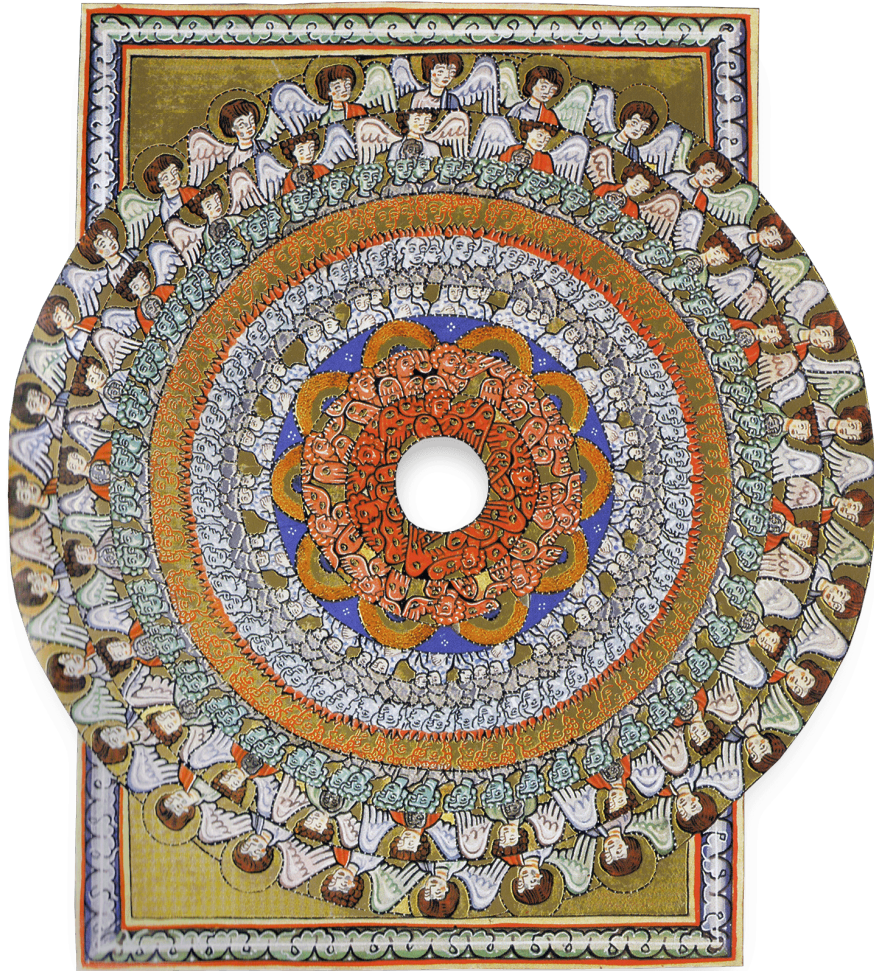
## HILDEGARD: A LIFE

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- ▶ Lived c. 1098–1179, the youngest child of a lower noble family
- ▶ Benedictine Abbess known as the “Sibyl of the Rhine” for her visions and prophecies; built (and fought for) a large, independent community of spiritual women
- ▶ Essentially self-taught, but a ‘polymath’: poet, musical composer, playwright, and author of works on botany, theology, medicine and more
- ▶ Named one of the 36 “Doctors of the Church” in 2012 (Augustine, Aquinas, etc.)

## HILDEGARD: TODAY'S IDEAS

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- Experiences mystic visions from a young age (as early as three, but certainly by five)
- Clear *sui generis* cosmology
- Unusually positive view of human beings (*not* Augustine) in the cosmic order
- Unusually “embodied” philosophy-theology (stresses corporeal and sensuous dimensions of knowledge)
- A recurrent image of *viriditas*, or greenness—a universally present power of life that infuses everything
- Music
- The *lingua ignota*



## THE MYSTIC VISION

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- ▶ A form of knowledge and expression available to all, including the unlearned and women (numerous female mystics in the Middle Ages: Joan of Arc, Saint Catherine of Siena, Margery Kempe, etc.) — *if* they made it past gatekeepers, and were legitimized.
- ▶ Typically the vision, followed by the *exegesis*, or explanation
- ▶ Understood as a bodily experience rather than a mental one (hence, permitted to women)
- ▶ Hildegard's visions are in *excess* of their explanations — that is, the explanations do not exhaust the content of the vision

“

Then I saw an extremely bright light and in the light the figure of a man the color of sapphire, and it was all burning in a delightful red fire. And the bright light flooded through all the red fire, and the red fire through all the bright light, and the bright light and the red fire shone together through the whole figure of the man so that they were one light in one strength and power. And again I heard the living light speaking to me.

“Therefore you see ‘an extremely bright light’, which signifies the Father, who is without the stains of illusion, failure or deceit. And in the light is ‘the figure of a man the color of sapphire’, which represents the Son, who is without the stains of hard-heartedness, envy or evil... And ‘it was all burning in a delightful red fire’; this is the fire without the stains of aridity, mortality or darkness, which represents the Holy Spirit, by whom the Only Begotten of the Father was conceived in the flesh, born in time of the Virgin and poured out his light, truth and brightness over all the world.



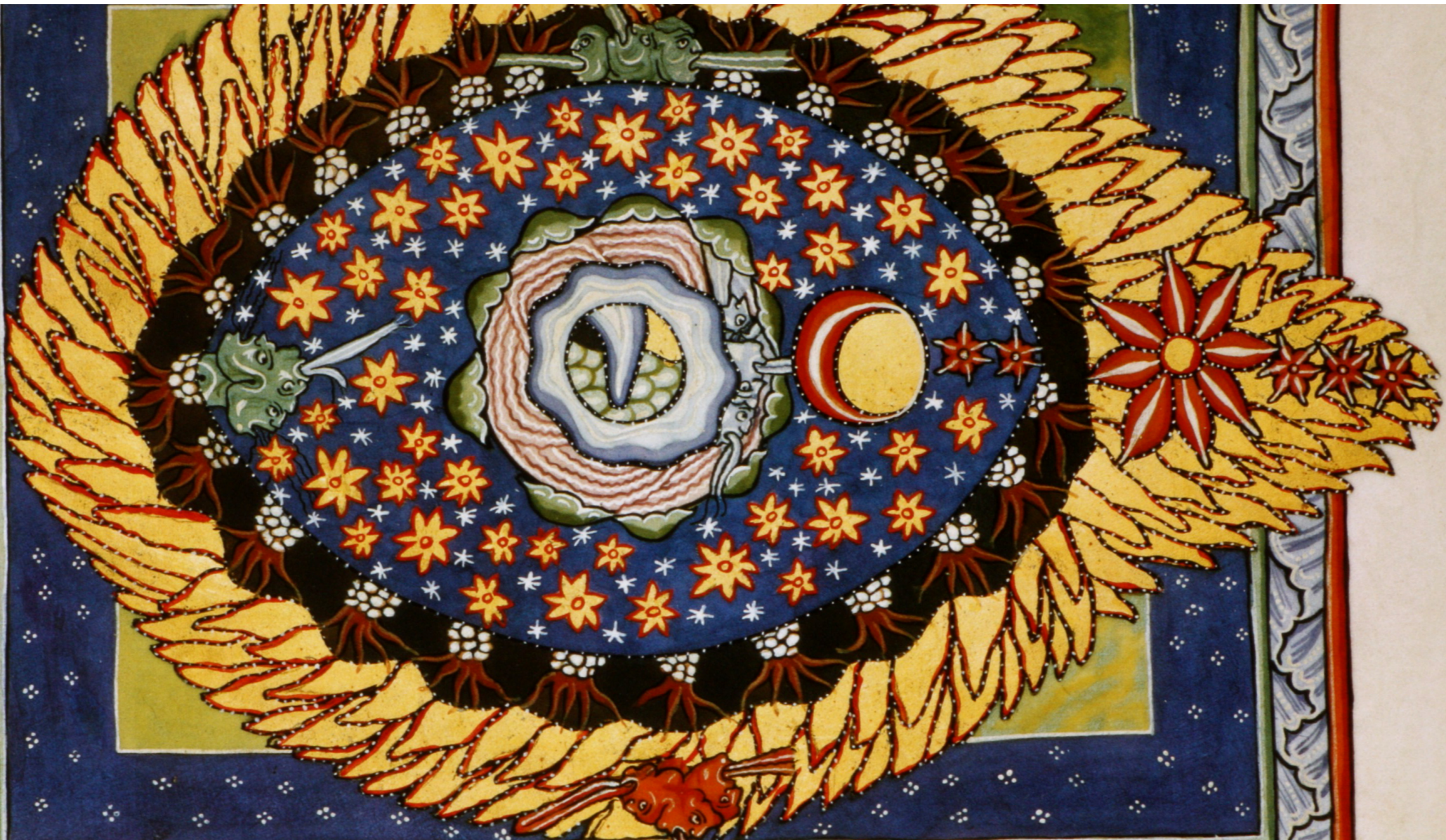


## COSMOLOGY

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- ▶ A limited number of elements: lights, fire, membranes, winds, water, sand, a mountain
- ▶ “A sandy ball of great size... so surrounded by these elements it could not move in any direction.”  
Identical to the Greek philosopher Anaximander — the world is a sphere suspended in space, held in place by the *indifference* of the space around it.
- ▶ Exegesis: the universe is shaped like an egg because “the first human activity was naive and simple” — hence pointy, like the top of an egg, because there is less of it, it is less meaningful
- ▶ The middle period (Biblical) is thick with meaning; Hildegard believed, of course, she was at the end of history. Almost everyone who ever lived believed this.







## HUMAN +

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- ▶ Emphasizes the capacity of human will and understanding, using a corporeal metaphor; body, soul and senses work together, like the fingers of a hand
- ▶ Emphasizes that we are essentially spiritual, not material (“therefore, human being, you are not a bundle of veins; pay attention.”)
- ▶ But emphasizes the capacity of the will to lead to *correct* action, like heat baking a loaf of bread: “the will directs [the action] stage by stage [in a human life] and brings it to perfection.”
- ▶ The “12th century Renaissance”

“

But it was in eternity that God wished to create his great work — the human being — and when he had completed that work he entrusted human beings with all creation so that they could create with it in the same way that God created his work, that is, humanity.

“

God, who created all, made humanity in his own image and likeness, and in them he marked out both the higher and lower creatures. He had such love for humanity that he destined them to take the place from which the falling angel [Lucifer] had been ejected, and he ordained them for the glory and honor which the angel in his bliss had lost.



## EMBODIED THINKING

- ▶ Hildegard uses a series of bodily metaphors to describe our immaterial dimensions (will and understanding), and argues that the soul's capacities are revealed by and through the body
- ▶ “The body attracts the soul to it” and “opens the senses”; “the senses touch the body and draw the soul to them” — it is not simply body and soul, but also the senses, an interface between them; a sensual theology in which the senses occupy the place of the Holy Spirit
- ▶ The senses are not condemned, but praised, and sight (*viriditas*) and sound seem particularly important for Hildegard's spiritual world



## VIRIDITAS (GREENNESS)

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- ▶ *Viriditas* seems to be something like a primal life force; like the soul, it is associated with the position of God the Father (strength and the body are with Christ; senses and energy with the Holy Spirit)
- ▶ It is found everywhere, from the human body (“like the sap of a tree”) to the heart of stones (surprisingly: “moist greenness”)
- ▶ Just as a garden could be well-tended and increase its vitality, so could the universe, and everything in it. Particularly the soul. Much New Age medicine.



The soul reveals her capabilities according to the capabilities of the body, so that in childhood she brings forth simplicity, in youth strength, and in the fullness of age, when all the veins of the human being are full, she brings forth her greatest strength in wisdom. In the same way a tree in its first growth brings forth tender shoots, goes on then to bear fruit and finally ripens that fruit to the fullness of utility. But afterwards in old age when a human being's bones and veins incline to weakness, then the soul reveals gentler strengths. In the same way, at the onset of wintertime, the sap of the tree withdraws from the leaves and branches as the tree begins to incline towards old age.



# HILDEGARD AND MUSIC





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### Save Your Tears - The Weeknd (Bardcore | Medieval Style Cover)

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Hello again! I hope this finds you all healthy and happy. Life is not back to anything resembling normal yet, but I've been working on a handful of covers and I'm excited to share this...

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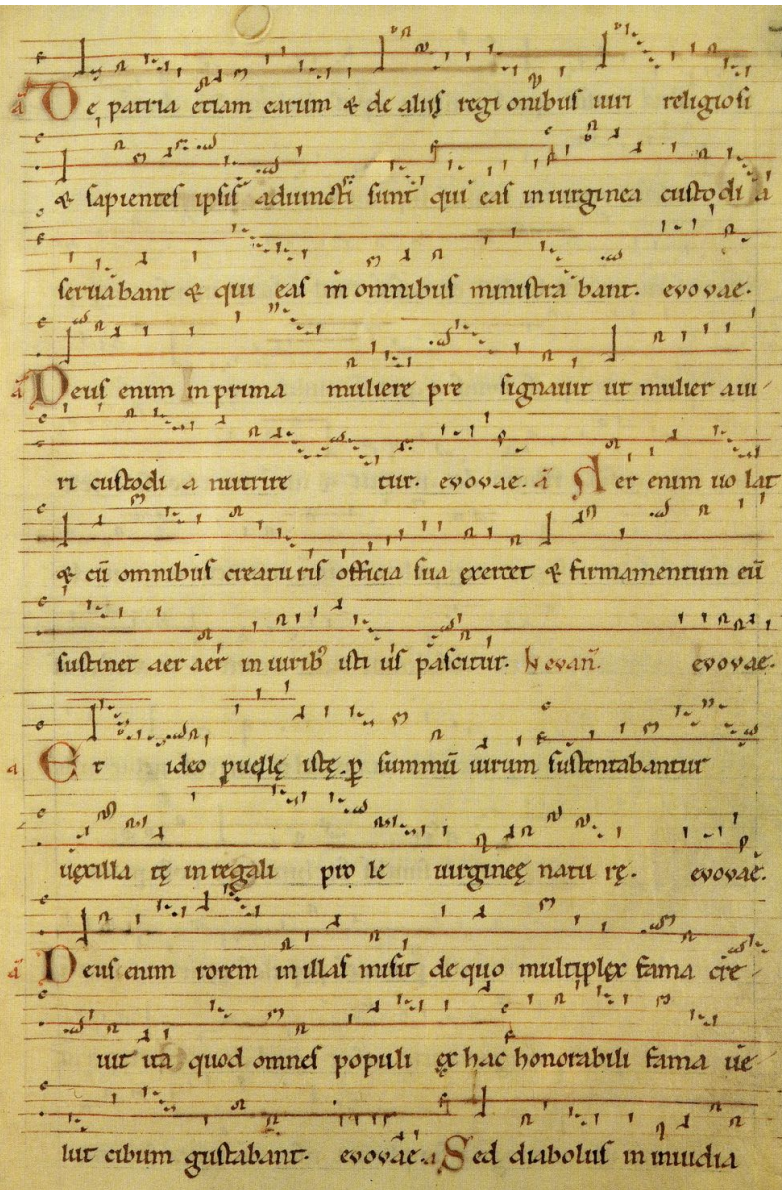
Pumped Up Kicks (Bardcore | Medieval Style with Vocals)

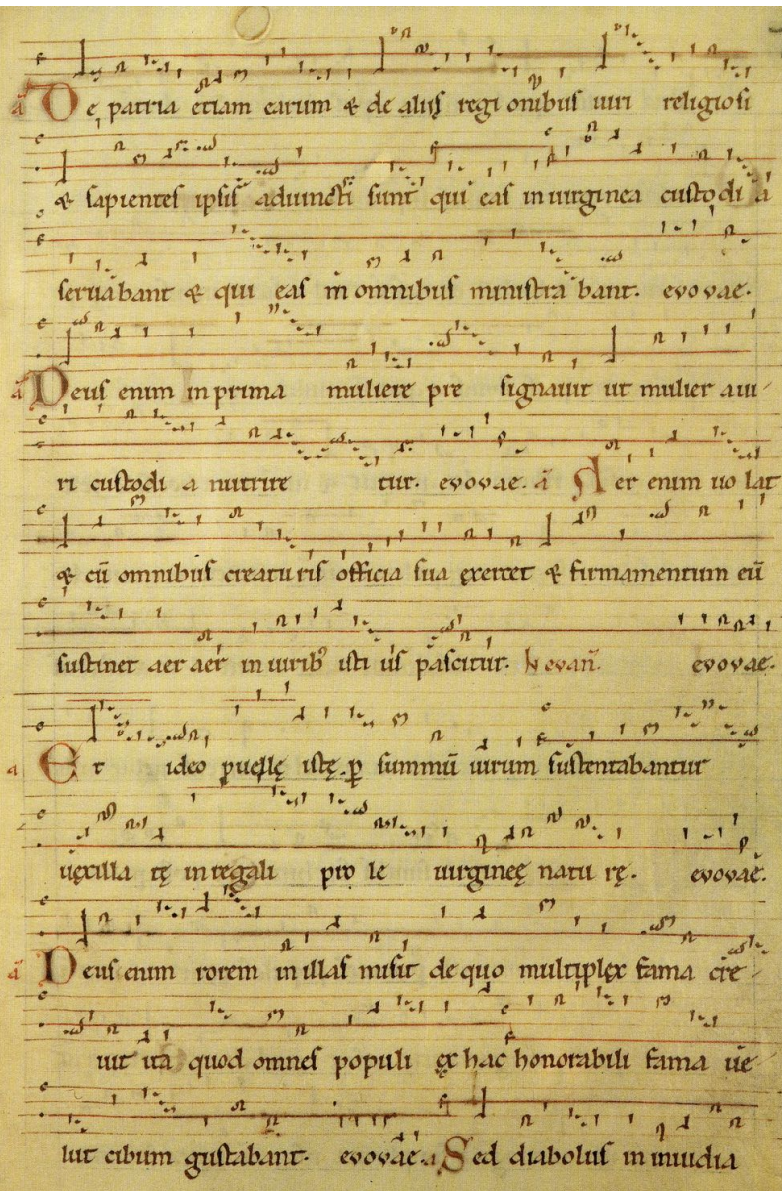
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# MUSICAL HISTORY

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- ▶ We have numerous treatises on musical *theory* from ancient Greece on — unfortunately, most actual *music* was not written down until the Middle Ages: there was no widely accepted system to write it down *in*.
- ▶ Fortunately for us, about 50-80 years before Hildegard, Guido d'Arezzo invented the musical staff (only four lines at first) and notes
- ▶ He used the first syllables from a well-known Latin hymn (*ut re mi fa sol la*; *si/ti* was added later, and *ut* was changed to *do* in the Renaissance) in order to teach young monks the notes. The system spread quickly.
- ▶ On the left, Hildegard's notation (a transitional phase that used Guido's staff but kept the old neumatic notation style); shows pitch, but not note length

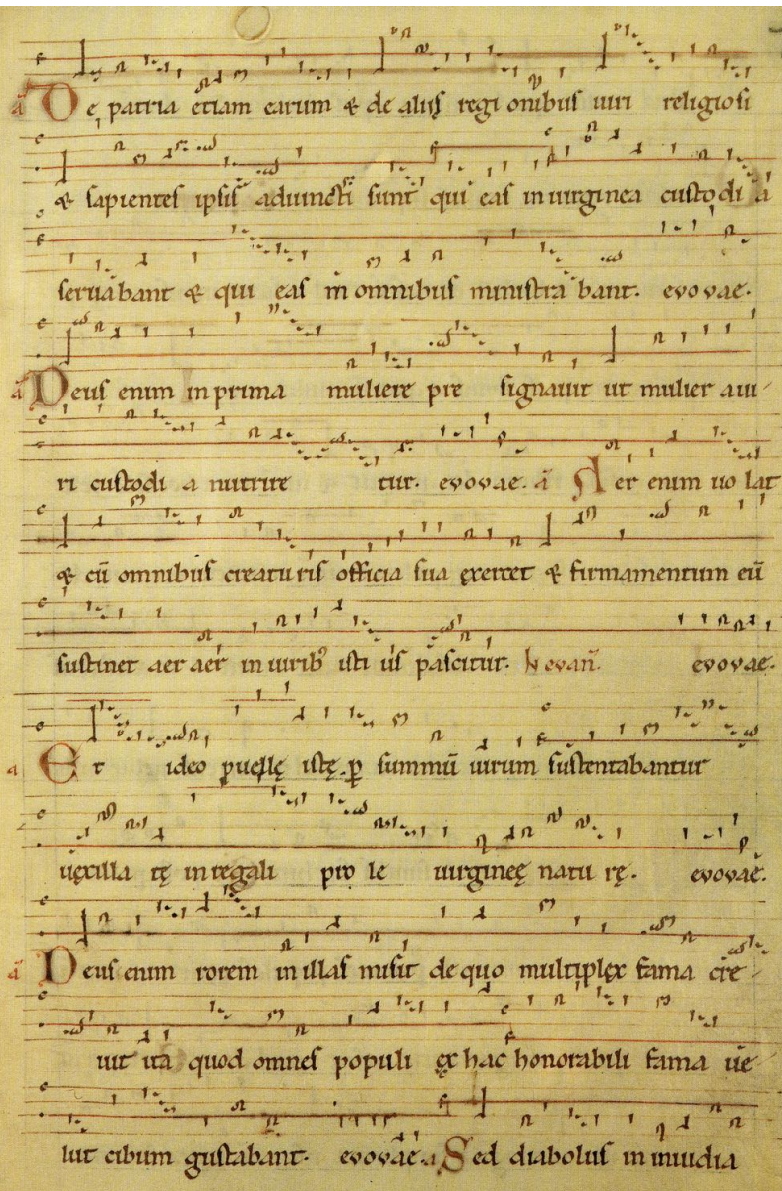




## MUSICAL HISTORY

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- ▶ Hildegard's music, as most Medieval Church music, was essentially *monophonic* (one note at a time), sometimes against a drone note (*biphony*), sometime in parallel fifths (*heterophony*)
- ▶ Music becomes more and more *polyphonic* (more than one voice) during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, eventually becoming *contrapuntal* in the Baroque (multiple independent melodies at the same time, as in Bach, or in a simple canon)
- ▶ After the Baroque, *homophonic* music emerges, which is what we usually expect today: a melody line (like a singer) supported by chords (like on a guitar or piano)



## HILDEGARD'S MUSIC

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- ▶ Hildegard's music pushed the envelope
- ▶ The *range* called for often stretches what the voice can reach, generating leaps that create audible tension in the singer's voice
- ▶ Her music is also unusually *melismatic*, each syllable sung over many notes
- ▶ Arguably, these techniques make us aware of (a) the singer's "bodily capacities" and (b) the sensual quality of the sound (look out, Augustine!)
- ▶ Melisma is not the norm. Let's have Sister Maria explain, using Guido d'Arezzo's rules of *do re mi, one per syllable*. Note the bodies, between freedom and compliance; "pushed" vocal range calls our attention

“One word [actually, one syllable] for every note” — no melisma.



*The Sound of Music*, “Do Re Mi”

Extended range and the body: final high B $\flat$ , almost two octaves above middle C; steps and scale



*The Sound of Music*, "Do Re Mi"

Now for some melismatic singers  
(and a “stretched” vocal range):

“Why?” Listen for the high A, almost two octaves above middle C



David Bowie and Queen, “Under Pressure” (1981)



Beyoncé, “Fever” (2010)



*Fever-Beyonce*

Hildegard is *way* more  
melismatic than Beyoncé or  
Freddie, however:



Ex. 2

tu glo - ri - o - sa in pre - pa - ra - ti - o

6

12

18

ne de i

literally 50 notes later...

In fact, Hildegard's music is so melismatic that curious effects of melisma becomes apparent; it dilates time, and *it disconnects sound from sense* (Augustine rolls over in his grave).

Listen for the high A $\flat$  on *quasi* and *purissimo*

O Ecclesia, oculi tui similes saphiro sunt,  
et aures tue monti Bethel,  
et nasus tuus est sicut mons mirre et thuris,  
et os tuum **quasi** sonus  
aquarum multarum.

In visione vere fidei  
Ursula Filium Dei amavit  
et Virum cum hoc seculo reliquit  
et in solem aspexit  
atque pulcherrimum iuvenem vocavit, dicens:

In multo desiderio  
desideravi ad te venire  
et in celestibus nuptiis tecum sedere,  
per alienam viam ad te currens  
velut nubes que in **purissimo** aere  
currit similis saphiro.

O Church, your eyes are like sapphire,  
and your ears like Mount Bethel,  
your nose is like a mountain of myrrh and incense,  
your mouth the sound  
of many waters.

In a vision of true faith,  
Ursula loved the Son of God,  
she abandoned husband and worldly life  
and gazed at the sun,  
calling the fair youth and saying:

'I have eagerly desired  
to come to you  
at the heavenly nuptials and sit with you,  
running to you on the pilgrim way  
like a cloud racing through  
the purest air like a sapphire.'

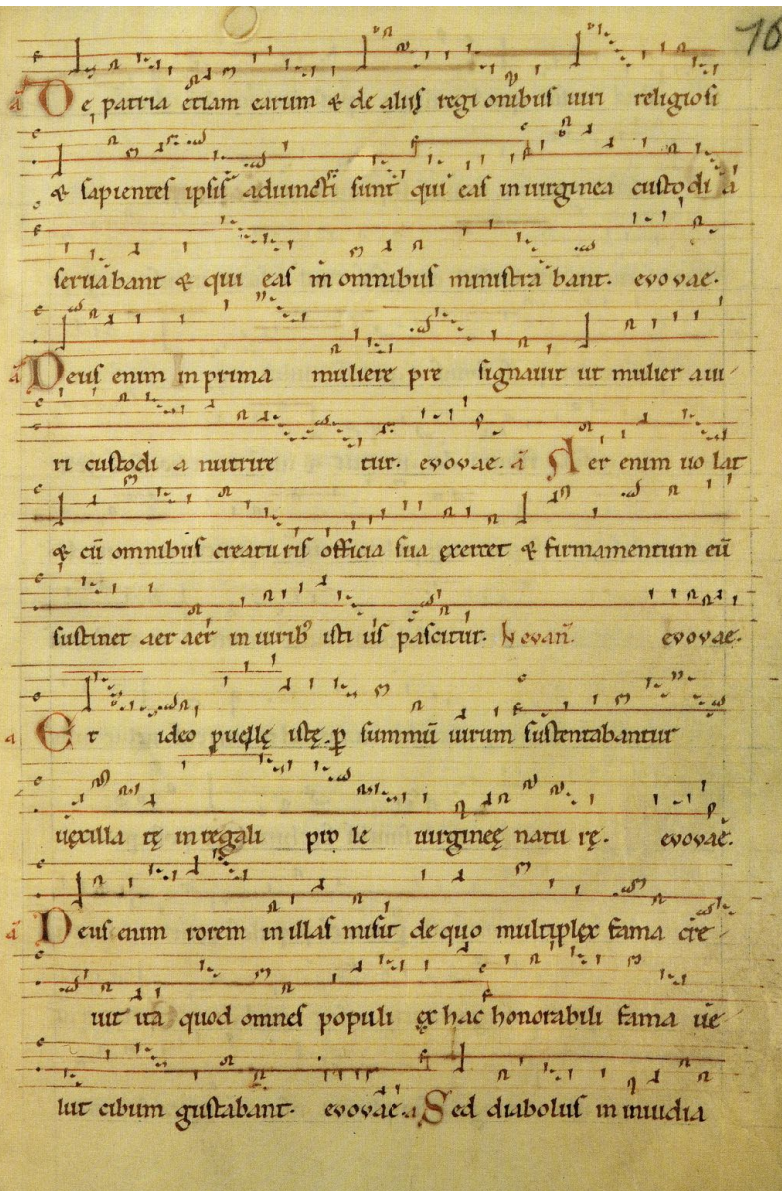
Listen for 1) drone harmony, 2) extra, almost microtonal melisma

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## HILDEGARD'S MUSIC

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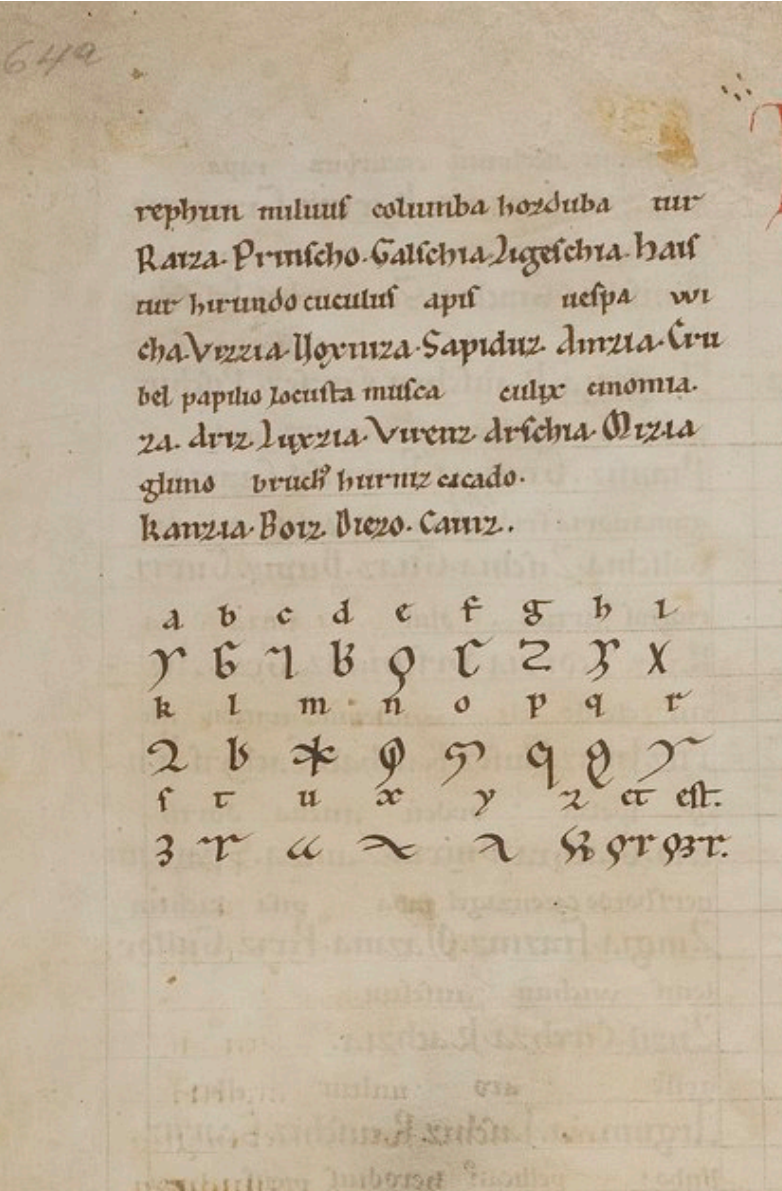
- ▶ Music is an important part of Hildegard's vision of the world
- ▶ She frequently refers to a “sacred sound” that reverberates throughout the structure of the universe; it appears to be the sonic equivalent of *viriditas*
- ▶ See, for example, her explanation of the three dimensions of the human word: sound (Father), force (Son) and breath (Spirit); this “sacred sound” is ultimately the Word that God speaks which brings the universe into being—it is, on some level, the universe



caberis. festinans penitendo. descen-  
de idē humiliare ut a peccatis tuis  
abluaris. quia hodie cū te requiro in  
domo tua scilicet in corde tuo oportet si sal-  
uari desideras me manere idē in te  
glorificabor scā mansione. Et festinās  
penitendo descendit quia homo ille p  
humilitatē peccata sua dimittere inci-  
pit. & excepit illū in suspirio suo gau-  
dens in lacrimis saluationis. Et cū ui-  
derēt om̄s scilicet turba malon suon mur-  
murabāt irruendo in illū. dicentes  
in seipsis p̄ indignationē qd̄ ad hominē  
peccatorē diuertisset. ita qd̄ nec iustū  
nec dignū eēt ut d̄s illū suscipet. qm̄  
multa mala p̄petrasset. Stans autē in ui-  
ctoria stabilis zacheus a t̄nsgressione iu-

**A** deus. Angls. sc̄s. Saluator.  
Igonz. Aieganz. Zuuenz. Iuionz  
diabolus. Sps. homo. vir. femina.  
Viuueliz. Ispartz. Inimous. Iur. Vanix.  
Patarcha. prophā. uates. Apls.  
Peuearrez. Korzinthio. Falschin. Son-  
marit. confessor. uirgo. uirgna.  
Lmschiol. Zanruer. Vrrzoil. Iugi-  
penitens. Attauus. auus.  
za. Pangro. Kubzphazur. Phazur.  
pater. mat̄. uirricus. nouer  
Pererz. Nazbz. uirpeuz. Iuz  
ca. fuit. p̄t. qm̄. i. d̄. p̄. e.  
rz. Scrrzin. Hilscurrz. Iimzkil. Zaniz.  
iuuenis. adolescens. senex. frat̄.  
Zimzial. Bschinz. Malkunz. Frony.  
soror. patruus. auuncul. amita.  
Michila. Peuors. Fanschol. Pienza.

# LINGUA IGNOTA



# THE LINGUA IGNOTA

- ▶ An invented vocabulary (about 1,000 words) and alphabet; grammar identical to Latin
- ▶ A secret code for the nuns, possibly to amplify the sense of community and solidarity
- ▶ Sounds possibly inspired by, or taken directly from, her visions — a suggestion that she has access to a truth that is beyond language
- ▶ At least since Tolkien, the desire to “conlang” is a desire to creatively remake the world: cosmology, history, philosophical principles, language and all