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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Department of Music

THE LATE 20TH-CENTURY COMMERCIAL REVIVAL
OF HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

by

Laura Colleen Patterson

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

May 2010

Saint Louis, Missouri

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Between 1982 and 1998 enthusiasm again mounted for the music of Hildegard of Bingen, a German nun who lived from 1098 to 1179. This most recent revival, which significantly surpassed previous peaks of interest in Hildegard, began with an increase in scholarly publications and two new recordings of her music: Gothic Voices' *Feather on the Breath of God* (1982), an album of her sequences and hymns, and Sequentia's *Ordo Virtutum* (1982), a rendering of the eponymous morality play.

Prior to the 1980's there had been other notable revivals of Hildegard's works, primarily driven by German academics. In a scathing review of the late 20th-century revival, British musicologist Richard Witts notes that in the mid-1950s, "a renewal of German Catholicist academicism...produced four separate studies of [Hildegard]."¹ The 17th and 19th Centuries had also seen increased interest in Hildegard's works, most visible during various attempts to push her canonization. In 1929 and 1979 scholars observed the 750th and 800th anniversaries of her death, respectively.

Although the fin-de-siècle interest in Hildegard was far from unique, the 1982-1998 revival exhibited several traits that distinguish it from the previous Hildegard revivals. Rather than her death, the most recent attraction to Hildegard culminated in the celebrations surrounding the 900th anniversary of her birth in 1998. Moreover, although previous Hildegard advocates had been religious or German nationalist figures, now they were from literary and musical circles. Hildegard's fame also spread beyond Germany; as

¹ Richard Witts, "How to Make a Saint: On Interpreting Hildegard of Bingen," *Early Music* 26:3 (August 1998), 480.

Sabina Flanagan notes, in the last twenty years of the twentieth century there was a huge increase in English-language publications.²

This increased global reach also affected the popular reception of the revival. No longer solely the province of German academics, Hildegard became popular with a much wider audience who in turn created demand for more Hildegard-themed consumer products. By August 1998, Richard Witts had tallied the Hildegard output:

14 popular titles in 33 editions, more than 120 features and reviews in general papers and magazines, as well as 21 scholarly dissertations. Her poems and letters have been translated into the major and minor languages of Europe--including German (22 publications), for the texts ascribed to the 'Sybil of the Rhine' were composed in Latin. We may add to these no fewer than 15 different CD and cassette recordings of her songs listed in the main catalogues at present.³

While this final aspect is arguably the most striking, it does not make the 1982-1998 revival unusual in comparison to music revivals more broadly.

Ethnomusicologist Tamara Livingston has created a set of six characteristics common to music revivals:

1. An individual or small group of "core revivalists."
2. Revival informants [meaning heritage performers in the case of "folk" revivals] and/or original sources (e.g., historical sound recordings).
3. A revivalist ideology and discourse.
4. A group of followers which forms the basis of a revivalist community.
5. Revivalist activities (organizations, festivals, competitions).
6. Non-profit and/or commercial enterprises catering to the revivalist market.⁴

² Sabina Flanagan, "Preface" to *Hildegard of Bingen: a Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1998), xiiiv.

³ Witts, 479.

⁴ Tamara E. Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory" *Ethnomusicology* 43:1 (Winter 1999), 69.

The latest Hildegard revival exhibits all of these traits but is unusual because the commercial element played a major, indeed predominant, role in the presentation of the mystic nun. Below I will investigate the musical packaging of Hildegard from 1980 through 1998, focusing on four recordings of her morality play *Ordo Virtutum*: Sequentia's 1982 and 1998 albums, Vox Animae's 1995 recording, and the 1998 production *Electric Ordo Virtutum* by the Hildegurls.

I am borrowing the term "packaging" from literary scholar Richard Watts, and am using it to mean the targeting of an audience by the reshaping of the Hildegard product so that it emphasizes a commercially successful message. Watts applies the concept to books:

The titles, covers, illustrations, promotional summaries, epigraphs, dedications, and, most significantly, prefaces that make the unadorned text a book are the ritualized forms of the publishing world, of the *literary* institution. What Gérard Genette terms the paratext announces the text, situates it, and imposes, or...suggests an interpretive frame. Whether explicitly or implicitly, the literary institution... dictates the form that the *outside* of the literary text will take, directing the text toward a particular readership and a particular interpretation.⁵

Watts' formulation easily maps onto musical products. CD's, like books, are titled, have cover art and other illustrations, and are "prefaced" by liner notes. They are marketed in stores and in print ads.

The packaging of Hildegard's music encompasses its physical, aural, and philosophical presentation. The container that a recording is sold in usually is decorated with images meant to entice the consumer browsing in a music store. Furthermore, the inner CD booklet may have more artwork and will certainly have liner notes to educate

⁵ Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), 2.

the listener about his purchase. The images and words on the container are chosen to promote a certain interpretation of the work which will appeal to a target audience. Even the way the music is performed can be used to promote an image of the composer, performer, work, or a social movement associated with it.

The “paratext” of the music, therefore, is not only the physical packaging and advertisements for an album; the paratext can be the performance preserved on the album (or, in the case of *Ordo Virtutum*, DVD). Because music must be performed to be recorded and marketed, there is an intermediate level of announcing, situating, and framing between the “unadorned” musical text (the score) and the final packaged product. When performing a piece of music, musicians make a series of choices about the piece. These choices comprise the musicians’ interpretation of the work and add a creative presence to the performance that was not present in the score. In other words, whereas an individual receives the text of a novel through self performance --reading it him/herself, the text of a musical work must be performed by an intermediary --the musician. In a piece like *Ordo Virtutum* this is especially true because of the small amount of information present in the manuscript and because the work must also be staged (for video recordings). I propose that this intermediate level of interpretation (i.e., the performers’ interpretation) participates in the packaging of a musical text to the same extent as the physical presentation of the recorded album.

Because of its compositional history and content, *Ordo Virtutum* is a prime example of how the branding of Hildegard changed over time. Early in her life, Hildegard began having visions which she believed came directly from God. She joined the

convent at Disibodenberg as a young woman where she eventually became prioress. Around 1150 Hildegard founded a new abbey at Rupertsberg and *Ordo Virtutum* was likely performed for its dedication in 1152. *Ordo Virtutum (The Order of the Virtues)* tells the story of a Soul who is tempted to stray from the Virtues by the Devil. The Soul eventually turns from the Devil, and the Virtues escort her away in a glorious procession. This dramatic action serves an instructional purpose in the context of the Church: the allegorical Virtues represent qualities of the ideal Christian life such as Knowledge of God, Humility, Charity, Fear of God, Obedience, Faith, Hope, Chastity, Innocence, Contempt of the World, Heavenly Love, Discipline, Charity, Mercy, Victory, Discretion, and Patience. Audrey Davidson divides the action of the play into six parts which translate roughly into an introduction, four acts, and a prologue. She describes the prologue (“In principio”) as “a strange and mystical passage” because the Virtues and Soul sing together in the voice of Christ. Significantly, Hildegard explored the themes of the Virtues, the Soul’s struggle, and the final imprisoning of the Devil in her drawings and writings, particularly in her record of her visions, *Scivias*, which was completed in 1151. Some of her drawings and verbal descriptions were used to inform productions of the play and to adorn CD booklets. *Ordo Virtutum* is remarkable not only because it was composed almost a century earlier than the next earliest morality play but also because Hildegard claimed never to have received musical training. Like Hildegard’s other music, the play was supposedly composed through divine inspiration.⁷

⁶ Audrey Eckdahl Davidson, “Music and Performance: Hildegard of Bingen’s *Ordo Virtutum*” in *The Ordo Virtutum of Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Audrey Eckdahl Davidson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), 8-9.

Because this work is both a play and a musical composition, there is a performative component that is open for interpretation, specifically costuming, staging, and gesture. The unique position of the play as the earliest such work, its composer's gender, and Hildegard's divinely inspired compositional method give potential audiences ways to become interested in it and in Hildegard. Each of the four presentations of *Ordo Virtutum* that I examine below puts forth a different interpretation through its distinct packaging. These interpretations correspond to musico-social movements during the revival, particularly the authenticity movement, new age movement, and third-wave feminist movement. By packaging their presentations in a certain way, each ensemble promotes a particular interpretation of *Ordo Virtutum* and of the Hildegard product. The demonstrated trend towards packaging in these recordings shows how the trajectory of the Hildegard revival changed as outside forces acted upon it.

Incorporating Ideologies: Authenticity, New Age Religion, and Feminism

In the 1982-1998 Hildegard revival, the "core revivalists" (to use Livingston's phrase) were initially music ensembles such as Sequentia, Gothic Voices, and Vox Animae and scholars such as Peter Dronke and Barbara Newman. Eventually this core group became supplanted as more people engaged with Hildegard. The Hildegurls are a prime example of this, as are enthusiasts such as Norma Gentile, who will be discussed in greater detail later. Not surprisingly, revivalists initially relied on Hildegard's musical and written manuscripts as source material. Groups such as Sequentia were highly trained in early music and possessed the skills needed to decipher Hildegard's source

documents. The core revivalists produced translations and editions of the manuscripts which made Hildegard's writings available to a wider audience. As the revival progressed and spread, revivalists no longer needed to rely on primary documents. One result of the shift away from primary documents was a change in the type of publications about Hildegard. Scholars were able to produce "readings" of her life and works informed by recent theorizing of gender, sexuality, power, and spirituality.

At least one contemporary author was conscious of the move away from translations and biographical studies. In the introduction to *Hildegard of Bingen: a Book of Essays*, Sabina Flanagan writes

The publication of this important collection of essays in 1998...is significant in several respects....The fact that many new volumes will greet the anniversary of her birth this year...is some measure of the extent to which Hildegard has now been incorporated into mainstream historical and academic studies....Also remarkable is the fact that this significant shift [represents] both a secularization and an internationalization of Hildegard studies....Overall, the collection represents what could be termed the second wave or second generation of Hildegard scholarship in English.⁷

Like the written, academic portion of the revival, which grew from document-based scholarship to reflect more recent trends in scholarship (i.e., the theorizing of gender, sexuality, power, and spirituality), the musical portion retained some of its original overarching ideologies (like historical authenticity) while expanding to include previously unrelated social movements.

Livingston's third trait of music revivals, a revivalist discourse/ideology, was one of the most controversial aspects of the late-20th century resurgence of interest in

⁷ Flanagan, xiiv-xiv.

Hildegard's music. Livingston's description of the function of authenticity within revivals offers a useful definition:

In all music revivals, the most important components for the formation of the aesthetic and ethical code are the ideas of historical continuity and organic purity of the revived practice. The term "authentic" is most commonly employed to distinguish the revived practice from other musics and to draw attention to its supposed "time depths." This is the centerpiece of music revivals, around which all else is secondary. It is this characteristic that distinguishes revivals from other musical movements or trends, and as suggested previously, the departure from "authentic" aesthetic standards may cause the eventual breakdown of the revival. In revivalist discourse, historical continuity is often used to imply authenticity and vice versa. "Authentic" music is believed to have been passed on through the generations outside of (or in spite of) mainstream markets. The ideology of authenticity, which combines historical research with reactionary ideas against the cultural mainstream, must be carefully constructed and maintained; this often gives rise to the prominent educational component of many revivals.⁸

Conceptions of authenticity, in some form, affected most musical performances of Hildegard's works and spawned sharp, ongoing debates among musicologists.⁹ Fabian notes that during the early music movement some record companies were guilty of "indiscriminate use of the term in interviews, record, reviews, sleeve notes and other popular publications of the time."¹⁰ In this paper, we will disregard much of the controversy over authenticity.

For the purposes of engaging (briefly) with the concept of authenticity in its many forms, James O. Young provides several useful if overly schematic definitions of the

⁸ Livingston, 74.

⁹ For a more complete discussion of authenticity in the early music movement, see John Butt's *Playing with History: the Historical Approach to Musical Performance* (Cambridge, 2002) and Richard Taruskin's *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford, 1995).

¹⁰ Dorottya Fabian, "Authenticity and Early Music" in *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 32:2 (December 2001), 154.

various ways that performers attempt to be “authentic.” Young identifies three ways that a performance may aim for historical authenticity:

According to the first proposal, an authentic performance is one faithful to the sound of performances at the time of composition. Alternatively, an authentic performance of a work is one faithful to the intentions of the work’s composer. The third proposal suggests that the authentic performance of a work involves fidelity to a score and the performance practices employed at the time of the work’s composition.¹¹

Young, like Fabian and continental musicologists, concludes that authenticity is an aesthetic goal for performers and recognizes that absolute historical authenticity is impossible because of our incomplete knowledge of the past.¹² This type of historical authenticity is the ideology/discourse which surrounded the earlier musical portion of the Hildegard revival and thus authenticity within the Hildegard music revival could encompass any recreation of Hildegard’s music that tries to sound premodern. This is an important distinction because of the large number of recordings which stray far from even this broad definition of historical authenticity. The Hildegard’s *Electric Ordo Virtutum* is an example of such a departure, although it was by no means the first.

There are a significant number of performances of Hildegard’s music which clearly are not aiming for historical authenticity. For these works, a different definition of authenticity must be used. Young calls authenticity separate from any historical constraints and “faithful to a performer’s individual genius” “personal authenticity.”¹³ (This is a type of authenticity more familiar from the personae of rock stars.) Because of

¹¹ James O. Young “Authenticity in Performance” in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2001), 385.

¹² Young, 384

¹³ Young, 384.

the connection many enthusiasts felt with Hildegard's music and the number of recordings produced with this (assumed) goal, personal authenticity must also enter into the discussion of the revival's discourse/ideology.

Personally authentic products also helped the revival expand its "group of revivalist followers which form[ed] the basis of [the] revivalist community."¹⁴ This community included not only medieval enthusiasts but also those who connected to Hildegard through her multifaceted identity as a female, "mystical" religious figure, writer, artist, composer, etc. In particular, "feminists and New Age spirituality seekers set her up as an icon."¹⁵ Feminists connected to Hildegard because of her non-traditional position as a woman in the Church. In 1998, Longaker speculated on the appeal of Hildegard to feminists:

Feminists identify not only with her individuality but with her efforts to strengthen the female image in worship. In one of her most famous songs, the sequence *O Ecclesia*, Hildegard symbolically represents the universal church with the martyred virgin St. Ursula, powerfully expanding women's claim to a central religious position.¹⁶

Elizabeth Dreyer says,

In the feminist movement and feminist theology, there is enormous energy put at the service of recovering women's history. And Hildegard was feisty. I think that appeals to the whole women's thing today. She figured out how to do what she needed to do and was successful at it. She approached things in her own way and was extremely creative.¹⁷

¹⁴ Livingston, 69.

¹⁵ Amy Slingerland, "Avant Hildegard" *Entertainment Design* 33:1 (January 1999), 9.

¹⁶ Mark Longaker, "900 Years Young: Hildegard von Bingen" *Early Music America* 3:4 (Winter 1997-1998), 45.

¹⁷ Quoted in Longaker, 45.

This interest in Hildegard as a feminist figure is reflected in her newfound prominence in music history texts and the increased publication of scholarly titles specifically addressing her gender. Witts recounts this phenomenon as it applies to Hildegard's popularity in mass media:

The general press, too, has presented Hildegard in terms of modern relevance. 'She has never been hipper,' the Reverend Donald Reeves of St James's Church in London's Piccadilly told *The Observer* in 1995. 'It's not just the interest in mysticism at present,' he added. 'It's also her crypto-feminism. She did everything from running an abbey to writing operas.' Hildegard was presented in *The Face* magazine as 'the feistiest woman since Boadicea, the smartest since Athena'....Hildegard's promotion as a feminist figurehead was assisted by the consideration that she had led an institution devoted exclusively to celibate women and that, despite her fame as a visionary, she had been denied canonization by male leaders of the Catholic hierarchy.¹⁸

The mysticism that Witts refers to also appealed to New Age followers. In the same article, Witts describes how this following affected album sales and the musical portion of the revival:

The prosperity of Gothic Voices' record (it won the 1983 Gramophone Early Music award) is attested by a sales figure to date exceeding 250,000 units, and its success was bolstered by the growth at this time of the 'New Age' movement--a consumerist shift which came about in order to articulate inclusive spiritual values beyond the established practices of the Christian church. Hildegard became a revered cult figure at this level because the intricate and arcane character of her celestial visions mingled shreds of biblical and pagan imagery, numerology and Neoplatonism. She was seen less as an abbess than a medieval shaman.....At the same time this distinctiveness permitted the recordings of Hildegard's songs to be played in order to inspire private meditation, and even as ambient 'mood' music. The Independent newspaper could claim by 1997 that she "provided the backing track for many an English middle-class dinner party." This shift of spiritual engagement into secular routines was consummated in the night clubs of Ibiza.¹⁹

¹⁸ Witts, 480.

¹⁹ Witts, 479-480.

Witts identifies several key traits of the Hildegard revival that beg for further discussion. First, the connection between the New Age movement and the Hildegard revival can be expanded beyond Witts' description. In a 1992 publication, J.G. Melton described the popularization of the New Age movement: "It arose, not so much as a new religion, but as a new revivalist religious impulse directed toward the esoteric/metaphysical/Eastern groups and to the mystical strain in all religions."²⁰ Furthermore, Mears and Ellison write that "this 'impulse' has emphasized transformation of the self through various activities, including channeling...crystals, natural diets, astrology, body work, healing, and so forth." They go on to summarize the work of other sociologists in formulating several major characteristics of the New Age movement including "the eclectic embrace of a wide array of healing therapies as well as spiritual beliefs and practices...[including] yoga [and] various forms of meditation" and "the desire to reconcile religious and scientific worldviews in a higher synthesis that enhances the human condition both spiritually and materially."²¹ It is easy to see how Hildegard's writings about the cosmos, healing, the body, and nature (*Physica* and *Causae et Curae*) fit into this set of principals.²²

One particularly revealing example of how New Age ideology affected the Hildegard revival lies in vocalist/auric healer Norma Gentile's work. About her, Mark Longaker writes,

²⁰ J.G. Melton "New thought and the New Age" In *Perspectives on the New Age*, edited by J. R. Lewis and J. G. Melton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 18.

²¹ Daniel Mears and Christopher Ellison, "Who Buys New Age Materials? Exploring Sociodemographic, Religious, Network, and Contextual Correlates of New Age Consumption" *Sociology of Religion* 61:3 (Autumn 2000), 291.

²² Concern for the environment and nature has also been identified as a trademark of the New Age movement in the late 20th Century. Katherine Albanese, "Fisher Kings and Public Places: the Old New Age in the 1990's" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 527 (May 1993) 137.

Someone who finds Hildegard's music adaptive to a variety of settings is Norma Gentile. With two recordings of Hildegard's music to her credit--a live recording called *Meditation Chants of Hildegard von Bingen* (1995) and the atmospheric *Unfurling Love's Creation* (1997), including Tibetan Singing Bowl accompaniment--she wants to revive the original spirituality of this chant. "What I'm feeling in her music," says Gentile, "...are the essences that were present in her time and that replay themselves again now at deeper levels than then. The current behind the music is spirit...." Besides holding a master's degree in vocal performance from the University of Michigan, Gentile is also a trained auric healer who counsels the sick and unhappy. "Hildegard's music really brings out from the inside of people the most wonderful experiences," Gentile says. "It's a healing process to sing her music as well as to listen to it."²³

Gentile's approach to Hildegard is typical of many New Age enthusiasts. In many consumer goods produced during the revival there can be found some reference to Hildegard's transcendental qualities and the idea that revivalists somehow connected personally to the nun. This, too, is described by Livingston as a common trait of revivals: "Bohlman (1988) has noted the tendency of revivalist discourse to collapse time and space in service to a 'new authenticity' defined by the belief in the practice's timelessness, unbroken historical continuity, and purity of expression."²⁴ New Age ideology had a powerful economic component and a widespread impact on the popular reception of Hildegard.

Many of the practitioners of New Age philosophies were responsible for organizing revivalist activities (Livingston's fifth characteristic of music revivals), often in the form of meditational retreats or seminars. In addition to New Age gatherings, the revival also boasted concerts, conferences, and symposia. Table 1 lists some of the events held in 1998, the high water mark of fin de siècle Hildegard reception.

²³ Mark Longaker, "900 Years Young," 24.

²⁴ Livingston, 69.

Table 1:

A partial listing of conferences and activities planned during Hildegard's 900th year, in chronological order.

January 16-17: Sacred Circles Leading from the Spirit (conference); Washington National Cathedral, Washington, DC; lecturers, performers (Folger Consort).

January through May: *Hildegard von Bingen Seminar* (college course); New England Conservatory of Music, Boston, MA; lecturers (Pozzi Escot).

March 4 and March 11: *Medieval Women: Weird or Wonderful--Hildegard and Her Sisters* (lecture); Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT; lecturer (Elizabeth Dreyer).

March 7-8: *Nancy Fierro's Hildegard von Bingen Retreat*; The Weber Center, Adrian, MI; lecturer/performer (Norma Gentile).

March 16-20: *Hildegard von Bingen 1098-1998* (symposium); Bildungszentrum Erbacher Hof, Mainz, Germany; lecturers (Rainer Berndt), performers.

March 18-23: *The Medicine of Hildegard von Bingen* (congress); Hildegard von Bingen Klinik, Constance, Germany; lecturers (medical), performers.

April 17 through August 16: *Hildegard von Bingen: Life & Work* (exhibition); Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, Mainz, Germany; lecturer (Hans-Jürgen Kotzur);

May 8-12: *International Congress of Medieval Studies* (congress); Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI; lecturers (Robert Cogan, Pozzi Escot), performers (Patrice Pastore).

June 15-23: *Visions, Creations & Wholeness* (conference); Ursuline College, Cleveland, OH; lecturers (Barbara Thornton, Ellen Oak), performers (Sequentia).

July 10-12: *Sacred Sound/Sacred Healing* (retreat); Song of the Morning Yoga Retreat Center, Gaylord, MI; lecturer/performer (Norma Gentile).

September 13-20: *Hildegard von Bingen in her Historical Perspective* (congress); Kulturbüro der Stadt Bingen, Bingen, Germany; lecturers (Peter Dronke, Pozzi Escot, Alfred Haverkamp).

September 20: *Hildegard von Bingen Festival Year Finale* (ecclesiastical conference); Kathedrale Bezirksamt, Rheingau, Germany; lecturer (Franz Kamphaus).

October 23-24: *A Feather on God's Breath* (conference); California State University, San Bernadino, CA; lecturer (Michael Fox--tentative), performer (Anonymous 4--tentative).

November 5-8: *The Greenest Branch* (conference); St. Michael's College, Burlington, VT; lecturers (Barbara Newman, Elizabeth Grossman), performers (Anonymous 4).²⁵

²⁵ Mark Longaker "1998: The Hildegard Year" *Early Music America* 3:4 (Winter 1997-1998) p. 22

As Table 1 demonstrates, revivalist activities involving Hildegard addressed a broad range of topics and catered not only to the “original” revivalists (early music/medieval enthusiasts) but also to the feminist and new age revivalists.

As stated earlier, the commercial aspect of the Hildegard revival played a significant role in its development and the portrayal of Hildegard by revivalists. In the next section of this essay, I explore these commercial factors by analyzing four albums of Hildegard’s morality play *Ordo Virtutum*. The first recording, Sequentia’s 1982 *Ordo Virtutum*, acts as our starting point because of its vanguard role in the revival. It shows that even in the earliest days of the revival there was a concern for consumer appeal and marketability. The next recording, Sequentia’s 1998 version of the morality play, demonstrates how the members of the ensemble, who acted as “core revivalists” approached the project differently after sixteen years, five other albums of Hildegard’s music, and the global popularity of Hildegard’s music. Vox Animae’s 1995 release provides an example of how the need to market to a new audience--in this case, an audience who engaged with early music because of its conflation with the New Age movement--influenced the production value of the project. The final album I consider, the Hildegurls’ 1998 *Electric Ordo Virtutum*, shows how by the time of its release the Hildegard revival had outgrown its initial expressions of Livingston’s six traits and become a widespread popular phenomenon: the original core revivalists, primary sources, and ideology of the revival were being displaced by the second (or even third) wave of enthusiasm for Hildegard. I attribute this metamorphosis to the broader commercial appeal present in the revival from its inception. To a greater degree than before,

performers combined artistic and commercial considerations in their albums and productions.

The need to market and sell Hildegard sprang from new economic forces affecting the early music movement in the 1970s. In a 1976 article in *Early Music*, Nicholas Kenyon identified the pressing need for economic self-sufficiency in the early music movement. He saw recordings as an important way for early music groups to supplement grants they may receive but was wary of the influence record companies might have on the ensembles.²⁶ Cusic observes that the classical genre has “generally failed to regenerate itself” with new and exciting personalities or compositions.²⁷ By repackaging Hildegard as a feminist or new age icon the early music movement addressed the failure to “regenerate” itself. New audiences/consumers are created through repackaging, especially if it directly connects to a market that already has a strong commercial element (like the new age movement). The commercial need to sell albums and make early music more commercially viable affected the four recordings I survey below.

Sequentia: Hearing the “Real” Hildegard

Sequentia, the performer of the first two albums, is one of the most well-known early music performance ensembles. Their efforts to record all of Hildegard’s music have

²⁶ Nicholas Kenyon, “The Economics of Early Music” *Early Music* 4:4 (October 1976) 446-447.

²⁷ Don Cusic, *Music in the Market*, (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996), 123.

made it widely available in the North America and Europe. The ensemble was originally founded by the late Barbara Thornton and Benjamin Bagby, who now leads the group. Both Thornton and Bagby studied at the Scholorum Cantorum in Basel, Switzerland. At the school, Bagby and Thornton recall that Hildegard's music was looked upon as "something less sophisticated than Gregorian chant or less transcendental."²⁸ Sequentia helped changed this attitude toward Hildegard's music in 1982 when Thornton, Bagby and the other members of Sequentia recorded Hildegard's *Ordo Virtutum* on a double LP set (it was rereleased as a CD in 1987). According to Sequentia's official website, this recording was the result of earlier work on the piece:

This first recording of the series, Hildegard's music drama "The Play of the Virtues," was made following a long gestation and rehearsal period, a scholarly conference in Cologne hosted by the WDR, a series of fully staged performances in Germany and the Netherlands (including at the first Utrecht Early Music Festival in 1982), and a television film. This version features the German actress Renate Köper in the role of Hildegard and actor William Mockridge in the role of the Diabolus (speaking roles). The role of the Soul was sung by Barbara Thornton, whose conception of the work is the basis for this recording.²⁹

This recording, along with the album "A Feather on the Breath of God" by Gothic Voices, "got the current revival off the ground."³⁰ Other journalists point to Thornton's advocacy of Hildegard as the impetus for the latest revival. In her *New York Times* obituary, Allan Kozinn credits Thornton's work:

It was largely because of Ms. Thornton's performances and recordings with Sequentia that Hildegard and her works have lately become the focus of scholarly and popular interest. In 1982, when Sequentia toured with a production of

²⁸ Longaker, "900 Years Young," 24.

²⁹ <http://www.sequentia.org/recordings/recording02.html> Accessed 11/17/2009

³⁰ Longaker, "900 Years Young," 24.

Hildegard's "Ordo Virtutum,"... Hildegard was virtually unknown outside a small circle of musicologists and students of medieval sacred works.... When Sequentia offered its production again last summer, at the Lincoln Center Festival, it was a popular draw, and one of at least three versions of the work presented in New York City this year.³¹

As a part of this celebration, Sequentia not only staged the above-referenced production but also rerecorded *Ordo Virtutum* in 1998. Both recordings rely heavily on research done by Thornton.

This advocacy was the guiding principle behind the presentation of the 1982 recording of *Ordo Virtutum*. Because there was not an established interest in Hildegard at the time, Thornton and Sequentia had to educate their audiences and create enthusiasm in order for their record to be successful. They did this by presenting an album that would attract listeners unfamiliar with Hildegard's story. Sequentia made additions to what was contained in the manuscript. A reviewer for the *American Record Guide* summarizes the alterations heard on the 1982 recording as follows:

The 1982 performing edition, prepared by Thornton and Bagby, attempted to flesh out the bare play and its bare vocal lines. The piece was framed by text passages taken from Hildegard's *Scivias*, spoken by an actress impersonating the author. An antiphon ('O Splendissima Gemma') from her liturgical collection called *Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum* was interpolated as well. Above all, Bagby and three other players rotating on a total of some eight instruments (fiddles, psaltery, flutes, organetto, harp, hurdy-gurdy), were kept busy with episode introductions and conclusions, dance interludes, and relatively continuous accompaniments.³²

The addition of text from *Scivias* allows Sequentia to present parts of the "total Hildegard package." Including some of her writings lets the audience see that there are other

³¹ Allan Kozinn, "Barbara Thornton, 48, Singer Who Championed Medieval Music," *New York Times* (November 15, 1998).

³² [First name not given] Barker, "Guide to Records," *American Record Guide* 61:4 (July-August 1998), 140.

aspects to Hildegard's persona that may interest them. The use of an actress speaking the texts as Hildegard also draws the audience in to Hildegard's world. No longer is she a long-dead nun in a German abbey, but a living entity presenting her personal thoughts and creations. The audience can connect to the concrete presence of Hildegard more easily than to the abstract, allegorical Virtues, Soul, and Devil in the play. The use of instrumental accompaniment also serves to make it more appealing to audiences. The instrumental timbres add interest to what Barker calls "bare vocal lines" and reflect a tendency to elaborate Hildegard's plainchant with instruments he notes in some of Sequentia's later albums.³³

The costuming of the 1982 production is drawn from Hildegard's descriptions and serves to attract audiences to another element of the "Hildegard product." In *Scivias* Hildegard describes her vision of the Virtues. Musicologist Audrey Eckdahl Davidson provides a useful summary of the descriptions and illustrations:

[E]ach of the Virtues is depicted with her own special garment and/or attribute—e.g., Fear of God has a Garment made all of eyes, Discipline has a purple garment which protects her from sinful lusts, Victory is armed, and Humility wears a golden crown. Humility also wears a mirror on her breast in which Christ's image is reflected.³⁴

Based on production photos contained in the liner notes for the CD, it appears that Sequentia used Hildegard's writings to design elaborate, fantastic costumes for their early productions of *Ordo Virtutum*. This choice serves two purposes: first, Sequentia is enticing audiences to a work that could initially be perceived as unexciting through

³³ Barker, 140.

³⁴ Audrey Eckdahl Davidson, "Music and Performance: Hildegard of Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum*," in *Aspects of Early Music and Performance* (Brooklyn, NY: AMS Press, 2008), 28.

elaborate, colorful costumes. Second, they are educating audiences about Hildegard's visions and the visually artistic portion of her output.

The 1982 album's physical packaging supports the conclusion that a desire to attract new listeners was the guiding influence in its presentation. The liner notes of the 1982 recording begin with a biography and then describe the sound and structure of the music. They also discuss some of the difficulties of preparing a performance of Medieval music. These notes can broadly be described as an introduction not only to Hildegard but also to monophonic chant. The booklet also has reproductions of two of Hildegard's illustrations, a page of a manuscript, and several photos from a staging of the play by *Sequentia*. Because Hildegard was not yet popular (even with fans of early music) *Sequentia* needed to educate buyers by providing them with basic information about Hildegard. The text of the booklet gives consumers an introduction to Hildegard's life and oeuvre. The reproductions of her artwork show the breadth of her talents and, like the addition of *Scivias* to the performance of *Ordo Virtutum*, provide a potential inroad for new fans who may be intrigued by her artwork. The reproduced manuscript page (page 60 of the CD booklet) shows the sparseness of a 12-century manuscript. The performance photos show instrumentalists, singers, and the actress who portrays Hildegard. All of these photos (found on pages 28-29) interest listeners in the action of the play and help them imagine what a performance of *Ordo Virtutum* would look like. In the photos and cast listing at the front of the booklet, the actress portraying Hildegard is given a prominent position; her picture is in the top left corner of page 29 and her name is credited first in the cast listing. On the back cover there is another production photo in

which Hildegard is standing in front of the action of the play; she is not speaking in the picture but still is positioned in a way that draws attention to her. Hildegard's prominence in all of these instances further demonstrates how the album tries to give audiences a vibrant personality with whom they can connect.³⁵ Both the performative and physical packaging of this presentation of *Ordo Virtutum* support the conclusion that Sequentia sought to create a new audience for Hildegard's music by educating them about her life and by making their performance of *Ordo Virtutum* more accessible to those who were unfamiliar with plainchant.

In their attempts to package *Ordo Virtutum* for unfamiliar listeners, Sequentia made additions to the text, music, and action of the play. All of their additions and production choices seem to have been guided by the discourse of historical authenticity that was integral to the early years of the Hildegard revival. They used period instruments, dressed in costumes inspired by Hildegard's writings and artwork, and made clear attempts to present the play in a historically accurate manner. By combining this with inserted accompaniment and texts, Sequentia packaged *Ordo Virtutum* in a way that fit into the ideology of authenticity while at the same time appealed to new audiences; the commercial need to educate new audiences outweighed any possible ideological concerns about conforming to strict standards of authenticity.

After recording and releasing almost all of Hildegard's music during the 1990's Sequentia rerecorded *Ordo Virtutum* in 1998. By this time Hildegard was popular with a

³⁵ I base my assumption that there is a need for audiences to connect to a personality on the prominence of the "great man" model that is even now still prominent in the way music history is taught. Furthermore, in popular music PR firms often promote single personalities in ways that will make the performer and his/her music seem accessible to large audiences.

much wider audience than she had been in 1982. Not surprisingly, Sequentia's wish to rerecord *Ordo Virtutum* stemmed from a desire to refine their presentation of the piece:

The first recording, made 15 years earlier, no longer seemed viable to [Thornton], and in the intervening years Barbara had not only gathered a new and virtuoso ensemble of soloists from Europe and North America, but had also developed and perfected her personal approach to the performance of Hildegard's works. Here, the play is recorded with large female and male vocal ensembles, four instrumentalists, and German actor Franz-Josef Heumannskämper in the role of the Diabolus.³⁶

The resulting performance is noticeably different from the 1982 recording. The original recording features two fiddle players, a pan flute, organetto, harp, psaltery, and hurdy-gurdy; the 1998 recording reduces this to three fiddles, flute, and organistrum. The quality of the voices in the later recording seems more fluid, presumably because the performers were more accustomed to singing the lines. Sequentia, besides having recorded several other albums of Hildegard's music in the intervening period, had developed a distinct vision of vocal unity under Thornton's guidance. She viewed the "absorption" of the eight modes used in Hildegard's music to be of primary importance if the singers were to feel comfortable singing the music. She told a reporter that

The most important medieval techniques we now use for learning to think, listen, and sing modally were evolved during Sequentia's summer courses for Early Music Vancouver beginning in 1990. Using the medieval treatises on modes, we interiorize a series of formulae, sung to the syllables 'nonenoeane' and 'noeagis.' Other formulae can be sung to religious mnemonic texts. These serve to give each singer a repertoire of modal gestures for orientation before singing a piece in the same mode, and they help to educate the throat in developing spontaneous modal reactions based on the idiosyncratic language of each mode.³⁷

³⁶ <http://www.sequentia.org/recordings/recording22.html> accessed 11/17/2009

³⁷ Longaker, 25.

Furthermore, Thornton felt that the ensemble needed to achieve a unified sound that came from the natural voice of each singer:

One of the most important aspects of forming a vocal ensemble sound...is to establish not only a vocal relation, but an emotional relatedness that the voice can express. Each singer must sound as if she were destined to sing the way she does, reflecting the fact that the individual singers (in this case, a specific historical community of Benedictine nuns) had always sung only with one another.³⁸

The techniques Thornton used with *Sequentia* leading up to the 1998 recording of *Ordo Virtutum* resulted in a different presentation of the music than the 1982 album. The idea that the performers had “always sung only with one another” in the 1998 recording emphasizes a connection between the cloistered original performers and Thornton’s ensemble of highly-trained 20th-century performers. This approach allows *Sequentia* to engage with the continuing authenticity ideology through an idealized approach to vocal unity while creating a performance that is also personally authentic for Thornton, who created the pedagogical approach used to train the ensemble.

Besides the different training the women’s ensemble had received, this recording includes different added material. Instead of an added antiphon and instrumental accompaniment, the 1998 recording contains two instrumental dances and several processions composed by *Sequentia*. An interlude between acts two and three is made up of three selections from Hildegard’s *Symphoniae*; *O quam magnum miraculum*, *O felix anima*, and *O quam mirabilis*. While the presentation of *Ordo Virtutum* in the 1998 version has less instrumental accompaniment added to Hildegard’s vocal lines, it has more material added around it (like the dances, processions, and interlude). Barker

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

characterized the instrumental parts in the 1998 recording as “unobtrusive” drones.³⁹

From his review it can be concluded that Sequentia’s 1998 album was perceived as having less of the ensemble’s creative presence than the 1982 album. Although there is more new music, because of the numerous dances and interludes in the 1998 recording, these instrumental passages occur outside of Hildegard’s plainchant. They are external accessories meant to embellish the action of the play rather than accompany the music. Because the 1982 recording of *Ordo Virtutum* and their subsequent albums had created interest in Hildegard’s music, Sequentia did not need to “dress up” the 1998 recording to make it accessible to potential customers.

³⁹ Baker, 140.

Table 2: Summary of Sequentia’s two *Ordo Virtutum* albums/performances

	1982 album	1998 album
Instruments	two fiddles, pan flute, organetto, harp, psaltery, hurdy-gurdy	three fiddles, flute, organistrum
Added text	from <i>Scivias</i>	none
Added music	Hildegard’s antiphon “O Splendissima Gemma”	two instrumental dances and processions composed by Sequentia. 3 selections from Hildegard’s <i>Symphoniae</i> sung between acts two and three: “O quam magnum miraculum,” “O felix anima,” “O quam mirabilis”
Costumes	elaborate, inspired by Hildegard’s descriptions	white kimono-inspired robes with large hats
Staging	female actress portraying Hildegard, reading added text from <i>Scivias</i>	
Accompaniment	heavier, instrumental	“unobtrusive” drone

For their 1998 live staging of *Ordo Virtutum*, Sequentia changed the production values of the performance, especially with regards to their costuming. For their production in New York, Sequentia’s stage director, Heumannskämper, hired an haute-couture designer, Thomas Venable, to design the costumes. He approached the task by researching Hildegard’s visions and studying Medieval clothing, but he chose a different approach for the costumes:

Ultimately he combined medieval silhouettes with Japanese kimono ideas and other modern touches. “I like the idea of mixing things together and coming up with a look,” he says. The Virtues wear voluminous white robes with apron-style

underdresses that have a center panel of Trevira polyester in a color corresponding to which character they portray. (These colors are taken from Hildegard's descriptions.) The over-ropes are made of four layers of cotton voile, totaling about 25 yards per dress. Their hats, shaped like bishop's miters or pointed gothic arches, are made of royal blue Trevira over an industrial felt form, fastened in the back with a Velcro band.⁴⁰

Because Sequentia's production of *Ordo Virtutum* was well known by 1998, there was little need to educate new audiences to their performance. Information on Hildegard was widely available by 1998 and Sequentia did not need to fear that audiences would confuse their interpretative choices with Hildegard's. In clothing the virtues in white robes, Venable removes Hildegard's presence as a visual artist. The designer could exercise more creative freedom without the need to present Hildegard's visions through costumes based on her descriptions. At the same time, he does not toss-off the ideology of authenticity altogether but uses period clothing as inspiration for his interpretation. He, like Thornton, was able to express a degree of personal authenticity in the 1998 production which drew attention away from the broad "Hildegard product." Instead of attempting to present as much information as possible about Hildegard's entire persona through a commercially appealing, historically accurate *Ordo Virtutum*, Sequentia was able to reflect an ideological shift towards personal authenticity and creative liberties.

The CD booklet accompanying the 1998 album de-emphasizes many of the elements that the 1982 used to package and sell Hildegard. It contains none of Hildegard's illustrations except the cover art, no reprinted manuscript pages, and no photos of staged productions. The only photos within the booklet are of Sequentia's

⁴⁰ Amy Slingerland, "Avant Hildegard," *Entertainment Design* 33:1 (January 1999), 9.

other Hildegard albums. The first liner notes in this booklet are about the play's historical context. This is followed by a description of the characters and action. Hildegard's biography does not appear until page ten of the booklet. Because the biography is positioned later in the booklet, readers are not introduced to Hildegard right away. Instead the play is contextualized and discussed. This may reflect consumers' greater familiarity with Hildegard. Because the Hildegard revival had gained so much attention, many potential buyers of the 1998 recording no longer needed a lengthy biographical introduction, nor would they need to see an actress portraying Hildegard to grasp that she was once a living, breathing person. They also likely would have already encountered some of her artwork. There was less need to present the entirety of Hildegard's persona to sell records, thus the liner notes of the 1998 album provide less basic information about her and more information about interpreting her play.

Many of the differences between the 1982 and 1998 albums can be attributed to the greater need to didactically package Hildegard in 1982. The liner notes, heavier use of instruments, elaborate (but Hildegard-inspired) costumes, and use of an actress as Hildegard all point to a packaging method that seeks to reach a broader audience and sell records. Despite any textual or musical additions, the 1982 album clearly seeks to fall within the ideology of authenticity that was so prominent early in the revival. Although the term was considered problematic, it likely would have evoked a meaningful association when used as an advertising label. By educating their audience about the total Hildegard product and associating their performances with the authenticity ideology

of the early music movement, Sequentia could count on a sellable album and an audience to whom their product could be marketed.

By 1998 Sequentia had a well established reputation as a leading early music ensemble. The Hildegard revival had become globally popular and they had successfully marketed an entire series of Hildegard albums. The 1998 album did not need an overtly “historically authentic” label to sell records because Sequentia’s record label, BMG, had strongly associated them with an authentic sound earlier in the 1990’s. For their album *Canticles of Ecstasy* BMG launched an ad campaign that touted Sequentia as the “real” way to hear Hildegard.⁴¹ Instead of establishing their historical authenticity, the ensemble could explore a more personally authentic interpretation of *Ordo Virtutum*; this also reflects the shift towards more inclusive revival ideologies.

As the fascination with Hildegard continued to grow, there was room for other ensembles to record *Ordo Virtutum* for the audience Sequentia had created. Because Sequentia presented a historically authentic version of *Ordo Virtutum*, other groups needed to cater to a different audience in order for their recordings to be more commercially viable. At the same time social movements such as the New Age movement were becoming associated with early music. This created a new audience to whom performers (or record companies) could market their recordings.

⁴¹ Jennifer Bain, “Hildegard on 34th Street: Chant in the Marketplace,” <http://www.echo.ucla.edu/volume6-issue1/bain/bain4.html> Accessed 4-28-2010.

Vox Anima: New Age Kids on the Block

During the 1990's, Vox Anima, another early music ensemble, staged *Ordo Virtutum* and issued it as both a CD and DVD of the performance. The group formed in 1994 and released their *Ordo Virtutum* project one year later in 1995. In general, their album was not as well received as Sequentia's recordings. In the *New York Times*, Cori Ellison complained that the recording did not feel "organic" despite being "admirably learned and attractively performed."⁴² Ellison described the musical presentation in her review: "Much of the work is chanted in even tones, the rest more freely. Several choral sections are cast in marchy measured rhythms. Instruments are used meagerly and none too creatively, and drones and parallel motion are added sparingly, only after the Virtues' victory."⁴³ The adaptation of Hildegard's music drama would appear to imply that Vox Anima, like Sequentia, sought to present the piece as historically authentic and without adding too much of their own presence. Vox Anima's video production, however, tells a different story. In the same NYT review, Ellison critiques the production:

Taped at the Priory of St. Bartholomew the Great in London and at Bayham Abbey in Sussex, it shares all the musical assets and liabilities of its audio cousin. Ferenc van Damme, the director, pulls out many cinematic stops, busily dissolving and superimposing (never cutting) shots of the evocative Romanesque architecture, fluffy clouds, candles and Hildegard's illuminations, all bathed in a golden light.

The players amble about with earnest, glazed looks, often breaking into stiff, hieratic semaphore. In a burst of reductive symbolism, the Soul is tantalized by a masher of a Devil clad in a tuxedo (complete with red tie and cummerbund), who nuzzles her and offers her pearls, and she sheds her snow-white cassock to reveal

⁴² Cori Ellison, "Classical Music: Hildegard Defies Time and the Devil," *New York Times*, July 5th 1998.

⁴³ Ibid.

a skimpy black slip dress. When the prodigal Soul finally comes crawling home to the Virtues, one of her spaghetti straps is meaningfully askew.⁴⁴

In short, Vox Animae takes numerous “inauthentic” liberties with the drama’s visual production. Despite the seeming similarity of musical style between the two groups, Vox Animae succeeds in packaging *Ordo Virtutum* differently because of their staging. The visual production alone suggests that the music and drama are meant to convey a supernatural, timeless feeling to viewers. By clothing the devil in a tuxedo with a red bow tie and portraying the Soul as a defiled woman, Vox Animae modernizes the look of the play and thus allows the music to transcend any temporal associations. In chant produced during the 1990’s and later, “timelessness” and “mysticism” were customarily employed to identify an album as being fit for New Age consumption. Musicologist Jennifer Bain comments on this trend across all packaged recordings of Hildegard’s music: [I]n the language used in marketing materials, record distributors frequently employ the New Age rhetoric of timelessness and spiritual renewal which is currently [in 2004] synonymous with medieval chant.⁴⁵ In statements found on their official website, Vox Animae also confirms that they seek to lend a mystical air to their production of *Ordo Virtutum*:

Acted, costumed and staged, and sung throughout to Hildegard’s music, *Ordo Virtutum* is a 12th Century plainsong opera which combines the meditational qualities of Gregorian chant with the Abbess’ personal, lyrical and emotional expression. An ensemble of *a cappella* singers plus harpist bring the Abbess’ *mystical* vision to life, to recount the *timeless* story of the Soul’s struggle with the

⁴⁴ Ellison, 7-5-98.

⁴⁵ Bain, “Hildegard on 34th Street.”

temptations of the world and how the Virtues assist in her fight against the Devil [emphasis added].⁴⁶

In the same way that the video recording and website promote a notion of Hildegard's mysticism, Vox Anima's booklet for their 1995 CD release of *Ordo Virtutum* is decorated with the nun's illustrations of her visions relating to the play.⁴⁷ The liner notes further emphasize the mystical element of Hildegard's persona. Hildegard is called a "visionary mystic" who expressed "the passionate intensity of her mystical experiences" through music like *Ordo Virtutum*.⁴⁸ Michael Fields, a member of the ensemble who wrote the notes, goes on to explain that Hildegard had a profound knowledge which "seemed to come directly from a source of wisdom deeper than learning and tradition."⁴⁹ This type of elaboration about Hildegard's visions, compositional process, and intent takes up most of the notes for the booklet. A description of the play's action is confined to approximately one page. The group's notes on their own performance take up another page, but conclude with paragraphs about the same type of spiritual interpretation of historical performance issues.

As though to make sure that their potential audience "gets" the mystical elements of the piece even if they skip the liner notes, Vox Anima subtitles their album "The Soul's Journey." This title appears above "Ordo Virtutum" and is printed in white against black, drawing the eye's attention immediately, whereas "Ordo Virtutum" is printed in a

⁴⁶ <http://www.vox-animae.org.uk/> Accessed November 17th, 2009.

⁴⁷ The CD booklet contains the following illustrations: *Woman in Song*, *Five Virtues Building a Heavenly City*, *The Soul besieged [sic] by Devils*, and *Queen Humility*.

⁴⁸ Vox Anima 1995 recording, liner notes 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

medium blue against black. While Vox Animaes packaging of *Ordo Virtutum* portrays it as an otherworldly composition which has survived hundreds of years through its timeless transcendence, their musical approach does not convey this idea. Vox Animaes performance, as critics have noted, is sparer than Sequentia's first album, which, as discussed above, contained elements that would have made it more appealing to a broad audience. It is difficult to discern if the packaging of Vox Animaes performance was an afterthought meant to dress-up a performance which was "asphyxiated by its reverential air" or if the ensemble thought that a "less-is-more" approach to the piece would best convey the mysticism of the piece. Either way, Vox Animaes intended audience is targeted most obviously through the album's physical presentation and their visual performance of *Ordo Virtutum*.

Vox Animaes was not the only group to promote Hildegard as a mystical visionary. Numerous books published in the 1990's portray her in this way, including a translation of her writings titled *Hildegard of Bingen: Mystical Writings*.⁵⁰ By emphasizing the mystical element of her music and personality, Vox Animaes was connecting their performance with the New Age movement. This movement, which had an affluent, educated, and urban consumer base provided Vox Animaes with a potential audience.⁵¹ This consumer base overlapped demographically with typical revivalist communities, who Livingston identifies as middle-class.⁵² By making their performance of *Ordo Virtutum* appealing to New Age consumers, Vox Animaes was potentially cornering a

⁵⁰ Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies, *Hildegard of Bingen: Mystical Writings* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990).

⁵¹ Mears and Ellison, 292-296.

⁵² Livingston, 66.

share of the early music market that was not interested in the strictly authentic presentations of Sequentia and Gothic Voices. This is not to say that Vox Animae's album is as completely aimed at the New Age movements as albums such as *Vision: The Music of Hildegard von Bingen*, performed by Emily van Evera and Sister Germaine Fritz (released in 1994). Vox Animae's album still remains solidly within the early music movement's original ideology, historical authenticity. It is an example of the gradual integration of new ideologies (new age philosophy in this case) into the revival's existing ideology of authenticity for the purpose of attracting new audiences. As we shall see, this trend continued as the 900th anniversary year drew nearer.

Medieval Gurl/Grrrl Power: The Hildegurls and *Electric Ordo Virtutum*

The groups discussed above have all remained, for the most part, faithful to manuscript sources and scholarly work on Hildegard and *Ordo Virtutum*. Despite any goals their presentations might have, their approach to the music strives for some degree of authenticity: they use period instruments, sing in a way that is not reflective of modern vocal training, and perform in churches. Other performers who have approached *Ordo Virtutum* have made no such efforts toward historical authenticity and have instead used the work as a jumping-off point for new, avant-garde composition. Perhaps the best known example of this extreme adaptation is by a group of New York women composers who called themselves the Hildegurls. The Hildegurls are unique not only because they use *Ordo Virtutum* but also because their work is an artistic endeavor intended for concert performance. Furthermore, members of the Hildegurls have backgrounds in early music.

The Hildegurls and their *Electric Ordo Virtutum* are unique among performers of Hildegard's music. While they separate themselves from the authenticity ideology, they still base their performance on Hildegard's plainchant and seek to create an artistic product. Other "inauthentic" performances are intended for meditation or as dance music. As the following pages will demonstrate, this performance shows the influences of the previous sixteen years and is a culmination of the movements that had affected earlier recordings of the piece.

As a part of the 1998 festival celebrating Hildegard's 900th birthday the Hildegurls performed *Ordo Virtutum* at Lincoln Center's Clark Theater (Sequentia performed as part of the same festival but in a nearby cathedral). The Hildegurls include Kitty Brazelton, Lisa Bielawa, Eve Beglarian, and Elaine Kaplinsky. All four women are composers who work with both acoustic and electronic music. Brazelton, who is currently on the faculty of Bennington College, studied early music and taught music history.⁵³ This is significant because it implies that the Hildegurls approached *Ordo Virtutum* with knowledge of its composer and historical context; their *Electric Ordo Virtutum* is not a side-project of uneducated amateurs, but a thoughtfully considered professional composition.

The Hildegurls divide their *Electric Ordo Virtutum* along the same structural lines that Audrey Davidson suggests in her chapter on performance (a prologue, four "acts" and a recessional) and each of the acts features one of the four composers as the Soul (except when the Soul is not present). Each performer composed new music around

⁵³ <http://www.kitbraz.com/bio.html> Accessed November 15th, 2009.

Hildegard's original plainchant, often creating harmonies by syncing their singing with taped voices or electronic instruments. In each act Hildegard's chant remains unaltered but the music surrounding it reflects the style of the Hildegurl responsible for that act. Their musical approach did not discard Hildegard's original plainchant so much as it embellished it with new (often very dissonant) harmonies played by electronic instruments. Because there were only four performers in the Hildegurls, sections of *Ordo Virtutum* requiring more than four voices used taped voices, often with special or synthesized effects. As in the more traditional performances of this piece, the devil is given the most unpleasant sounds and effects but never appears on stage. The Hildegurls dressed in white tunics and pants and stood on a stage made of several raised platforms and painted with one of Hildegard's illustrations. The names of the Virtues were also painted on the stage in fonts reminiscent of graffiti.⁵⁴

Electric Ordo Virtutum shows how the new age, feminist, and authenticity influences on the Hildegard revival had coalesced by the late 1990's. The Hildegurls kept Hildegard the primary focus (musically and philosophically) of their composition by using her plainchant as the basis for their production. Despite the liberties of this adaptation's production values, a critic of the performance, Paul Griffiths, saw the ensemble's faithfulness to Hildegard's original as a liability. For him, they had

limited their opportunities.... It soon became odd to see these vivid contemporary people sweetly singing ancient chant, albeit into microphones. And the discrepancy did not communicate anything very interesting. Occasionally, [the

⁵⁴ Image found at www.kitbraz.com

places] where Elaine Kaplinsky was in charge, had a quasi-rock sound. But there was altogether too much respect.⁵⁵

By retaining Hildegard's strong musical presence in their composition, the Hildegurls implied that she was still musically relevant in the late 20th Century. In a 1998 interview, Beglarian states that the group is "trying to make [Hildegard's] points as powerfully as [they] can" by immersing themselves in the "soul" of the piece, a concept that Kitty Brazelton believed Hildegard would "connect with" despite their unorthodox approach.⁵⁶ By approaching the performance in this way they associate Hildegard with a modern style and allow her to transcend almost a millennium. This is similar to the approach Vox Animae used in their 1995 recording of *Ordo Virtutum*. The idea that one could transcend time, distance, and theology in order to "connect" with or "channel" something ethereal is a hallmark of the New Age movement.⁵⁷

Members of the Hildegurls also felt that the piece could have a personal effect on audiences. Beglarian stated her belief that Hildegard's play was applicable to even modern audiences in a 1998 interview: "We keep talking about how this piece is so deeply personal that nine centuries later there's no trouble identifying with the Soul and her travails. One doesn't even have to be Christian. Instead of just abstract theology, there's a strong sense of personal impact on a human being."⁵⁸ By using a smaller ensemble and having each band member assume the role of the Soul (or Humility), the

⁵⁵ Paul Griffiths, "Festival Review: The Downtown Touch for a 12th-Century Tale," *New York Times*, July 24, 1998.

⁵⁶ Interview with the Hildegurls by Joe Hannan, found on www.kitbraz.com, 1998. Interview, Figure 2.

⁵⁷ Daniel Mears and Christopher Ellison, "Who Buys New Age Materials? Exploring Sociodemographic, Religious, Network, and Contextual Correlates of New Age Consumption," *Sociology of Religion* 61:3 (Autumn 2000), 291.

⁵⁸ Interview with the Hildegurls by Joe Hannan, found on www.kitbraz.com, 1998.

Hildegurls create a sense of personal connectedness with the plot, the music, and the original composer. Each performer is personally transformed during her act (literally, as she assumes the role of the Soul/Humility, and figuratively as she becomes a co-composer of the music with Hildegard), further demonstrating the influence of New Age beliefs on the performance.⁵⁹ By the end of the performance there is only the ever-present electronic drone. For the Hildegurls, “the idea is also that the intense individuality that each of us has exhibited in her section gets subsumed into a big mass. It's not just our story, it's everybody's story.”⁶⁰ Much as Vox Animae tried to emphasize the timeless mysticism of Hildegard's play through their staging, the Hildegurls attempted to show the universality of the “soul” of the piece through their musical adaptation.

In addition to the New Age movement, third-wave feminism influenced the Hildegurls and their *Electric Ordo Virtutum*. Members of the group compare Hildegard to modern women who they view as particularly artistic, rebellious, or successful. Lisa Bielawa compares Hildegard to Gertrude Stein because “both she and Stein were dichotomous--each was a bit of a social elitist and at the same time a visionary artist who could see into the universality of the human condition.” Elaine Kaplinsky finds similarities between Hildegard and Millicent Fenwick, a female politician from New Jersey who fought against the political majority for what she felt was right.⁶¹ Despite these comparisons, some members of the group are more hesitant to call Hildegard a feminist. In a recent interview with the author, Brazelton expressed uncertainty regarding

⁵⁹ “This [New Age] ‘impulse’ has emphasized transformation of the self through various activities.” See Mears and Ellison, 291.

⁶⁰ Hannan interview with the Hildegurls.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the validity of her band-mates' comparisons, stating "I hope it wasn't me who said that."⁶² She goes on to say that she cannot be sure what feminism really meant for someone in the 12th Century but does acknowledge Hildegard's (and her own) gender as a complicating factor. Although their intent to create a "feminist" work through *Electric Ordo Virtutum* is questionable, they are aware of Hildegard's identity as a woman and their own identities as innovative female composers. The Hildegurls draw attention to this element through the use of "gurls" in their name: "'Gurls' is a word with a certain amount of attitude. There's a whole concept of taking names that are put-downs and re-owning them---like activists calling themselves 'queer' or John Leguizamo calling his one-man show Spic-O-Rama. 'Girl' is a word we think is worth re-owning."⁶³ They acknowledge Hildegard's identity as a woman while connecting themselves to it through the reclaimed pejorative. The 'girl power' movement of the 1990's often used alternate spellings of "girl" (grrrl, grrl) as a way to express an aggressive femininity.⁶⁴ Around this same time the Spice Girls were making "girl power" an increasingly mainstream (and arguably devalued) expression of empowered femininity. It is no stretch to imagine a connection between the Hildegurls' name and this pervasive cultural influence. The connection between *Electric Ordo Virtutum* and the girl power movement extends to the Hildegurls' history as composers and performers. Several of them, including Brazelton, were involved with the punk rock scene during their careers. The girl power movement of the 1990's was, as Marisa Meltzer, a rock historian, explains, a mainstreaming and

⁶² Appendix A, Email correspondence with Kitty Brazelton

⁶³ Hanna interview.

⁶⁴ Marisa Meltzer, *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2010), 16.

commodification of earlier counterculture revolutions in music, beginning with punk.⁶⁵

Another part of the third-wave ideology found in the girl power movement is that femininity can be defined and expressed in an individual, personal way.⁶⁶ In their adaptation, the Hildegurls each applied their own aesthetic to an act of the play. By doing this and omitting the Devil (typically the only male role), they express their own unique interpretation of the female Soul or Humility. Rather than creating a unified style which would express the corporate musical identities of the four women, the structure of the piece emphasizes the individuality of each Hildegurl and Hildegard. The Hildegurls were aware of some conflicts between their own beliefs and Hildegard's but still respected her as an artist. Bielawa commented:

The question of whether you could stand having Hildegard as a friend---a lot of the time people assume that since we're working with Hildegard's *Ordo* that she is some kind of model of artistic and personal achievement for us. In fact, we've got problems with her. She's gritty and her ideas are weird. Yeah, it's a beautiful piece and she's an artist, but we're not necessarily into her as a role model. We're dealing with differences that transcend the aesthetic. She is as idiosyncratic as we are---we haven't approached her uncritically.⁶⁷

They also recognized Hildegard as having a compositional process that was rooted in the individual females with whom Hildegard lived.⁶⁸ Both of these expressions of personal, differing femininity and female voice follow Meltzer's definition of third-wave feminism as expressed through late 20th-century music.

⁶⁵ Meltzer, viii-ix.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁷ Hannan interview with the Hildegurls.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

By 1998, when the Hildegurls performed at Lincoln Center with Sequentia, the Hildegard revival had reached its peak. Influences like the New Age and feminist movements had combined to reshape the presentation of Hildegard's works. As the programming of Sequentia and the Hildegurls on the same festival shows, "authenticity" also had lost some of its dominance over how Hildegard's music was performed.

Brazelton states that performing with Sequentia was "fun":

They were the "legit" version. Which I found very funny. And they seemed to be very accepting of our work. Because what's legit? None of us—neither Sequentia nor us—really know what *Ordo* would have sounded like during Hildegard's lifetime, or even how she intended it. And we all knew that I think.⁶⁹

The musical portion of the Hildegard revival had become inclusive and was no longer constrained by debates about historical authenticity. Instead, a group like the Hildegurls could interpret her music with greater freedom and create a product that, to them, was "aesthetically authentic." Regarding Hildegard's music, the question of historical authenticity had become less important. Creating a personal connection with Hildegard's music that could transcend aesthetic or philosophical boundaries was more important to groups like the Hildegurls than historical authenticity. The influences of New Age philosophy and feminism on the Hildegurls allowed them to express their own personal authenticity through Hildegard's music.

Electric Ordo Virtutum shows the influences of all three movements discussed previously in this project. The piece reflects New Age philosophies about finding personal transformation through a universally acceptable theological message. At the same time, third-wave feminist influences appear in the individualized compositional

⁶⁹ Appendix 1, E-mail correspondence with Kitty Brazelton.

styles of the piece. The piece acknowledges but rejects historical authenticity in favor of aesthetic authenticity, a growing trend in the Hildegard revival; it shows how performances of Hildegard's music during the revival had developed far beyond the initial, historically authentic recordings by groups like Sequentia and Gothic Voices. By the peak of the revival Hildegard's music had outgrown its historical associations to become a viable, and marketable, vehicle for self-expression.

Conclusions: The Hildegard Brand

The significance of these four recordings of *Ordo Virtutum* is not merely that they were influenced by musico-social movements and catered to the need to sell records. Rather, they are significant because they represent how the Hildegard revival of 1982-1998 was fundamentally different from earlier Hildegard revivals. Whereas earlier revivals were contained within academic or religious circles, the latest Hildegard revival spread to popular culture in an unprecedented way. Through the commercial element of this revival her persona grew far beyond the bounds of scholarly interest and permeated the imaginations of creators like the Hildegurls. This widespread commercial dissemination was due in large part to the media, or more specifically the publishing, advertising, music, and journalism industries.

While the commercial element was certainly a trait of other revivals, its influence on the latest Hildegard revival caused such a radical change in the nature of the revival that it ceased to exhibit some of Livingston's traits. The core group of revivalists were no

longer necessary to sustain the revival and in fact catered to only a select group of fellow revivalists. Hildegard's original documents had been studied to the extent that a second wave of scholarship (some of it self-consciously postmodern) was no longer addressing issues directly relating to them. Furthermore, a corpus of "fan fiction" had emerged that embellished Hildegard's biography to an extent that new enthusiasts could be enticed by these fictional works. The original revivalist ideology/discourse around historical authenticity had been surpassed in popularity by personal authenticity, New Age philosophies, and feminism. Reflecting this shift, the revivalist community had become large and diverse enough to lead to revivalist activities that would segregate the different elements of the community rather than unite it. Revivalists like Witts felt that the popular element of the revival was not based on fact and therefore was not legitimately connected to scholarly study of Hildegard. It could be said that because of these changes, by 1998 the Hildegard revival had lost its "time depth" (recalling Livingston's phrase). Witts' comparison of Hildegard to Coco Chanel, who had merely lent her name to a mass produced commodity, becomes more meaningful.⁷⁰ While Chanel was complicit in her self-branding, Hildegard has had no such luxury. "Hildegard of Bingen," by 1998, no longer represented a historical figure but a brand of commercially viable products meant for mass consumption.

⁷⁰ Witts, "How to Make a Saint," 479.

Appendix A: Email correspondence between Kitty Brazelton and the author- March 19th, 2010

What led you to take-on this project?

I had a date to fill on a women composers' festival in '96 that was underpaid. The four of us had done a small 15-minute gig together three years earlier at a concert series I was producing, where we sang and improvised on a few of Hildegard's antiphons. We enjoyed that and had promised each other to do it again some time. When the second date came up, I thought, well, just singing would be easy and low overhead. When we got together to talk about it, we got excited and immediately made it much more ambitious, taking on the Ordo, adding technology, and instruments. Later we added staging and movement. So it grew as we went along.

How many times was it performed?

6? 7 times? But that's hard to reduce that way because we recorded it in the studio twice, and that was a sort of performance as well.

Do you consider Electric Ordo to be a feminist reading of the work?

I have never been clear what feminism really is, so I'm not sure how to answer that. I have friends who are feminists who seem to know what that means and I respect their work. But for me, it's just that I happen to be a woman. And Hildegard happened to be a woman. And most of her characters happened to be women.

The "edge" that we brought to our cross-millennium "collaborations" with Hildegard, was just what each of us brought to the table stylistically. There was no intention beyond making an authentic aesthetic statement which allowed both Hildegard and ourselves to be heard.

There are certainly times in my life as a composer, performer and teacher, when I experience reactions which I believe have to do with my gender. With some people, I feel I might have more credibility, were I male. People might listen to me more openly. Especially other women. But I ultimately think all that is just an excuse. People find whatever reasons they can to push new art away and minimize it. They prefer the familiar and they seek shreds of reasons not to make the effort. My gender is just a handy grab-bar. And as I said, I've noticed women are the worst this way---including myself—I judge women colleagues more severely than I do male.

So feminism, I don't know. I can't dress it up that fancy. I think feminism is, or should be, something more elegant than what I'm describing.

In an interview from 1998 members of your ensemble compared Hildegard to feminists of the 20th century. Do you agree with this labeling of her?

I hope it wasn't me who said that. I see Hildegard as remarkable because she lived in a

time when women's roles were clearly defined, and usually did not include the areas of leadership in which she lived and worked. She was able to have herself acknowledged as a prophet in a time when few living humans were accorded that sort of authority. She was acknowledged as a composer of liturgical music when no human was, man or woman.

But I am cautious here, because I believe her rank as an abbess, therefore as an officer of the Church, may have conferred upon her a standing that I cannot comprehend coming from my world. It is easy to make sweeping statements about a time and culture that is so distant. And I do it all the time, but I'm not sure that I want to have such unbased conjecture on my part, set in stone. What's a feminist in the 12th century? Could there even have been such a thing? What's a feminist now? I have no idea. I've been trying to figure it out for a long time.

Was there a particular audience you were trying to reach with the work?

Whoever would listen.

Did you have a larger, philosophical goal in mind when arranging the performances?

Nothing more than we found Hildegard's work and person beautiful and we wanted to communicate with her across time, and bring her to people in our own time.

What significance did performing in the same festival as Sequentia have for you?

Fun. They were the "legit" version. Which I found very funny. And they seemed to be very accepting of our work. Because what's legit? None of us—neither Sequentia nor us—really know what Ordo would have sounded like during Hildegard's lifetime, or even how she intended it. And we all knew that I think.

How was this work influenced by other musical movements/styles you were involved with?

I enjoy medieval music because it makes me question musical assumptions I've grown up with. Ways I saw the world as being "forever". Through early music I am able to make contact with roots of our musical thinking which are threatening and alien all the while terribly familiar. I like the way it makes me feel.

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