

Volume VI contains one antiphon (#55), two responsories (#56, #59), and two symphonias (#57, 58), the latter a genre unique here and not normally used in chant. As a genre, Hildegard may have appropriated the term *symphonos* for a hymn-like piece to be sung in unison, as distinct from *antiphonos* which specified singing in octaves. According to French usage of the twelfth century, symphonia refers to a musical instrument, the organistrum (hurdy-gurdy).<sup>1</sup> The five chants honor different modes of purity; the purity of chaste virgins, of penitent widows, and of inculpable innocents. Because they personify holy purity, Virgins, widows, and Innocents - - the children slaughtered by King Herod - - rank within the medieval order of Saints, and provide models for a virtuous life on earth. In contrast with the Ursula songs that follow in the *Symphonia* (Vol. VII) where she praises a particular Saint, here Hildegard does not laud particular women, but rather the more universally meaningful states of monastic Virginité and Widowhood, as well as the condition of blessed Innocence.

The quest for a virtuous life is a dominant theme for Hildegard. She chose the monastic veil for herself, we might presume, in affirmation of a meritorious life. Such voluntary, perpetual choice for the 'Kingdom of Heaven,' professed in the vow of chastity, was believed to foreshadow the bliss of eternal life. Accordingly, virginity, although not the highest of the virtues, was considered more excellent than other sacraments. Thus, because it strives for a divine good, it was ranked above even marriage by the medieval church. Hildegard seems to be in full agreement with the teachings of the church on this point. Yet the songs also bespeak an understanding of the grief over physical barrenness and the fear of faltering that might haunt a woman who has chosen virginity, and acknowledge her need of support. In *O Pater omnium* both of these sentiments find expression: the confident utterances "O most exquisite Christ ... we have renounced for you the fertile lover of intimacy, and we take hold of you in sublime love ... in a different mode we are married to you" are followed by the sober plea "Assist us to preserve our faith." Similarly in *O dulcissime amator* she gives voice to those who ardently seek the union with Christ, their heavenly spouse, but who fear their own weakness, crying out, "O sweetest lover, help us guard our virginity," and "O how burdensome it is for us miserable ones to imitate you." Hildegard's songs offer both celebration and consolation. Her images of greenness and verdure of a garden translate into poetry St. Augustin's promise that virginity enjoys complete spiritual fecundity. And they confirm Saint Paul's view of virginity as a sign of the greatest possible love a human can offer, arising from a will determined to seek God alone and to belong to Him exclusively.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in the short psalm antiphon *O pulcre facies* (#55), virgins are held up as examples of virtue and love. They lift their beautiful faces, beholding God, and God sees Himself in these faces as in a mirror. They adorn the earth as a sweet garden which shines brightly in all its greening verdure. Embracing their divine ministries (Ms. R has 'mysteries'), they foreshadow in their serenity the celestial beauty of eternal harmony. These images echo patristic teaching on virginity which carries eschatological significance as a present experience of future life in the kingdom of heaven. Her poem holds up virginity as a symbolism of the life of angels, once again recalling St. Augustin who goes so far as to qualify virginity as "angelic."

The image of the greening garden recurs in *O nobilissima viriditas* (#56), one of the musically most elaborate responsories of the whole *Symphonia* cycle. It too echoes patristic thought. According to the Church Fathers, the integrity of the flesh, conserved in virginity, represents the state of the creature in the Garden, as it came intact from the Creator. Taken as a monastic vow, it represents a symbolic return to Paradise, to the state where this integrity is restored.

*O dulcissime amator* (#57) strikes the note of a passionate love song, in the tradition, perhaps, of the Song of Songs. It deals with the tribulations a nun faces in trying to preserve her virginity. The song reminds her that she has vowed to Christ an exclusive love that admits of no sharing and that because of this, she may celebrate Him as spouse. It encourages her to hold Him in her heart, "as if He were present." And it places purity of heart in the center of all her desire and intention, encouraging in her soul a readiness to open itself to the mysteries of God.

Widows who chose to end their days in a religious community were granted a special place in the church along with virgins. They were admitted into the church for important services, but usually lived outside the cloister in houses of their own (49). Like the holy virgin, the widow, who has turned away from marriage and fertility, and has wed herself spiritually to Christ, finds salvation by invoking His name as *sponsus* (150). *O Pater omnium* (#58), a *symphonia* of widows and a companion piece to *O dulcissime amator*, moves from images of the corruption and pain of Eve which they have shared in their worldly marriages, to the joys of penance as a final effort toward purity, toward a resurrection into new life by their spiritual marriage to Christ. Like the *symphonia* of virgins, this piece too is a plea for continued faithfulness and solicits help in refusing any temptation that would destroy the spiritual marriage.

All of these texts reveal that for Hildegard salvation is not acquired simply by passive participation in religious rites, but is earned by an effort of self-transformation. The songs invite introspection, and encourage an exploration of the conscience. Like the neo-Platonists, Hildegard seems to hold that sin resides not merely in committing a wrongful act, but instead dwells in the wrongful intention, whether the act is performed or not. Consequently, she delegates moral governance to the inner life.<sup>3</sup> These songs express in poetic form a new philosophical stance that views penitence as the beginning of a process of inner regeneration, requisite to cleansing away sin. For Abelard, such inner cleansing relied on reason; for St. Bernard, Hildegard's early supporter, it rested on love. In her songs, Hildegard focuses on love, both the love the virgin or widow brings to Christ, and the love she receives. This love given and received holds the promise of incredible joy.

Musically, there are a number of similarities among the songs, chief among them modality, for all but one piece (*O nobilissima viriditas*) share the final E. Considering that nearly half of all songs in the *Symphonia* are organized around E as focal pitch - - which stands in contrast to the Gregorian repertoire where *deuterus* is a less frequent choice - - these E-pieces offer a good opportunity for the study of Hildegard's preferred modality and of the most prevalent melody types within that modality. In the cycle as a whole, three main melody types are prevalent among E-pieces: a high type (authentic), a low type (plagal), and an expanded type (combined authentic/plagal). Each of these types is represented by the group of E-pieces offered here, two of which are clearly authentic, while one is expanded, and the last holds to a plagal orientation.

The types are determined not merely by ambitus, but more particularly by the way they move within this ambitus. The high type for the most part traverses the octave range from E to e, and on occasion moves beyond. Such is the case in *O pulcre facies* (#55) which sets up a gradual rise from its initial pitch E through the octave during its long first phrase (*O -edificantes*), and upon return to the final at the end of this opening phrase briefly touches a tone below E. This slight cadential expansion to low D during an approach back to E recurs in phrase 2 (*o beate virgines*) which begins and ends on the final, and again in phrases 5 (*cum - presignavit*), 6 (*ubi - estis*), and 7 (*in omnibus - redolentis*), all of which end on the final. In phrase 4 (*in quibus rex*), however, which is the only phrase to begin on the fifth and end on the octave and to tout any confirmation of the final, the range expands by two tones beyond the octave to g (*in quibus rex se consideravit*). Yet, this upward expansion of the tone space remains a singular event in the antiphon. By virtue of its contrast with the rest of the piece the advent of high g can be perceived as a climactic moment. Structurally, this moment comes near the mid point of the chant, and affectively, it draws attention to the image of God contemplating Himself in the beautiful raised faces of the virgins who are beholding Him in their gaze.

*Rex noster promptus* (#59), another piece of the high type, does not rise above the octave, but instead adds two steps below the final (ambitus C-e). Beginning again on E, this responsory is slower to rise to e than the previous antiphon. The first (*Rex noster*) phrase explores a space from E - a - C - E, the second (*promptus est*) from g - c - D - e, and only the third phrase (*suscipere - innocentum*) pushes up to e. Low C is not revisited until the doxology, and the melodic turns of phrase throughout the piece rise from E - e and descend from e - D - E with nearly equal frequency, creating a symmetrically balanced arch for its melodic phrases throughout the responsory.

*O dulcissime amator* (#57) falls into a different category. It similarly limits its upper reaches to e, but adds three steps below the final and extends to low B. This expansion in effect combines both authentic and plagal ranges. We see Hildegard pushing traditional boundaries adhered to by most other chant and establishing a hallmark of her own style.

In contrast to the first three E-pieces, the *symphonia* of widows, *O Pater omnium* (#58), adheres to a plagal melodic orientation, with a tone space that reaches from gamma ut (Γ -ut or low G) up to c.

As in *O pulcre facies* where the upward expansion to high g remained a singular event, here the downward extension to low Γ- ut occurs only once, at the beginning (*omnium*) as if to signal the plagal melodic disposition at the outset of the chant. For the most part, *O Pater omnium* evolves within a space linked to the central fifth, and moves largely between C and a. Upward expansions beyond a to c are rare. They occur only once in strophe 1 (*constituisti*), thrice in strophe 2 (*currimus, nobis, devotissime*), once in strophe 3 (*virga*), and once at the outset of strophe 4 (*adiuva*). In addition to an overall low range, the plagal orientation of the chant manifests itself in the direction that the majority of phrases take. Each strophe begins and ends on the final. Within each strophe, most phrases begin on a higher pitch (usually g), briefly rise (to a), only to embark on a more or less fully drawn-out descent which invariably leads back toward the final. As a result of the low range and the many descending phrases, *O Pater omnium* casts a more subdued tone than do authentic E-pieces, a tone induced perhaps by the many grim references in the text which summon ideas of a great fall into tribulation, of sin, exile from Paradise, of joining Eve in her suffering, and of penance.

The single c-piece, *O nobilissima viriditas* (#56) extends from a fifth below the final to a ninth above it (F-d'), and thus traverses a larger range than the other pieces included here. The responsory part commences in a plagal manner and gradually rises through the authentic range toward a melodic climax near the end of the repetenda, while the verse hovers within the plagal register. But more remarkable than the resulting combination of plagal and authentic tone spaces is the changing definition of this larger space which develops concurrently with the shifting registers.

As in the other ten pieces in the *Symphonia* which share the final c, here Hildegard sets up some interesting tonal conditions that arise in part from the availability of both b-durum (b $\natural$ ) and b-mollum (bb) in the medieval gamut, and in part from the duality of conflicting modal colors between intersecting plagal and authentic octaves. These conditions allow her to create intervallic relationships that do not normally occur in the four traditional tonalities of protus (D final), deuterus (E final), tritus (F final), and tetrardus (G final).

All but one of Hildegard's c-pieces (#38, vol. IV) can be considered tetrardus transpositions, as they hold to the central fourth-species fifth which characterizes tetrardus, i.e.. tone - - tone - - semitone - - tone, or c-d-e-f-g. That is, all c-pieces hold this central fifth stable. But the fourth space below this fifth can change, depending on the presence or the absence of bb. When bb is chosen, the resulting intervals define a first-species fourth by following the tone - - semitone - - tone - - progression proper to tetrardus. But when b $\natural$  is used instead, the intervals change and the fourth becomes a third-species fourth. Such a fourth, with its tone - - tone - - semitone progression, or g-a-b-c, is proper to tritus.

In *O nobilissima viriditas*, b $\natural$  seems to be the preferred choice, in contrast to most of the other c - pieces which favor bb. The responsory opens with a descending fourth, c-b $\natural$ - a-[b $\natural$ -a] - G. The emphasis on b $\natural$  through repetition leaves no doubt about the tritus flavor of this fourth. This flavor holds until the end of the melisma on [*nobilissi-]ma* where bb, and with it a contrasting tetrardus quality is briefly introduced (in Ms. D only)<sup>4</sup>. The remainder of phrase 1 reverts back to b $\natural$ . Phrase 2 turns to bb on [*ra-]di-[cas]*, only to shift back to b $\natural$  on so-[le]- (at least in Ms. D, while Ms. R indicates bb on [*so-]lle*). This tritus quality establishes itself over the course of the responsory, and it is not until the Verse that the tetrardus flavor returns. A similar tonal instability occurs in the other c-pieces. These shifts allow

Hildegard to change the modal flavor during the course of an individual chant, something which sets her c-pieces apart from most others in the *Symphonia*.

*O nobilissima viriditas* not only moves through a remarkably extended range and explores an enriched array of modal flavors, but also is hugely augmented in its linear dimension. This horizontal augmentation, manifested through frequent and long melismas, seems to parallel the vertical expansion in the other two domains. The melismas not only slow down text delivery, but also seem to fall on words marked by their affective significance. In the first phrase there are two long melismas, one extending the initial *O* exclamation over 28 notes, another stretching *nobilissima* over 23 notes. *Sole* in phrase 2 has 16 notes, while *candida* in phrase 3 has 38, and *excellencia* phrase 5 extends to 34 notes. Other only slightly less expansive melismas further stretch the horizontal domain of the piece. But the penultimate word in the repetenda, *divinorum*, is carried by a melisma of 72 notes, an unusual length even for Hildegard! For purposes of comparison, the antiphon *O pulcre facies* (#55) follows a similar but less extended plan. Here, words highlighted by melismas are the two *o*-exclamations (a 12-note and a 5-note melisma, respectively), the two references to God (*deum* with 8 notes, and the last word of the poem (*redolentes* with 35 notes).

In a full execution of the complete responsory structure of *O nobilissima viriditas*, which is not indicated in the sources but probably intended, the 72-note melisma would be heard three times, with the third instance coming near the end of the piece. In such performance, a sense of accumulation, of gathering intensity not contrary to the visionary force of the text will develop over the course of the unfolding chant. This gathering intensity occurs in other Hildegard pieces as well, but is particularly fitting here as initially the chant *O nobilissima viriditas* provided the climax to Scivias where it appears as the final lyrical passage in a grand vision of celestial harmony.

1. Howard Mayer Brown, s.v. "Symphonia," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Stanley Sadie, ed. Vol. 18. (Macmillan Publishers, 1980).

2. I Cor 7.34.

3. Georges Duby and Philippe Braunstein: "The Emergence of the Individual," in *A History of Private Life*, Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, gen. eds., (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988) 513.

4. The sources do not always agree on the placement of *bb*. Moreover, it is hard to know whether a flat alters only the *b* immediately following, or whether the alteration remains valid until, e.g., the end of the line or the next clef change.