Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers
SECULAR & SACRED MUSIC TO 1900

EDITED BY Laurel Parsons & Brenda Ravenscroft
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Volume 1: Secular & Sacred Music to 1900
Volume 2: Concert Music, 1900–1960
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Le donne son venute in eccellenza
di ciascun’arte ove hanno posto cura;
e qualunque all’istorie abbia avvertenza,
ze sente ancor la fama non oscura.
Se’l mondo n’è gran tempo stato senza,
non pero sempre il mal influsso dura;
e forse ascosi han lor debiti onori
l’invidia o il non saper degli scrittori.

Ben mi par di veder ch’al secol nostro
tanta virtù fra belle donne emerga,
che può dare opra a carte et ad inchiostro,
perchè nei futuri anni si disperga,
e perchè, odiose lingue, il mal dir vostro
con vostra eterno infamia si sommerga. . .

Women have arrived at excellence
in every art in which they have striven;
in their chosen fields their renown is apparent
to anyone who studies the history books.
If the world has long remained unaware of their achievements
this sad state of affairs is only transitory;
perhaps envy concealed the honors due to them,
or perhaps the ignorance of historians.

In our own day I can clearly see
such virtues evident among fair ladies
that pen must be set to paper
to record it all for posterity
and to drown in perpetual shame
the calumnies of evil tongues.

—Ludovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, Canto XX¹

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*Edward D. Latham*

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Acknowledgments

This is the second volume we have published in this series, and like the first it could not have been completed without the contributions, logistical support, and patience of many people. Foremost among these are our authors, some of whom have waited for more years than we care to tell to see their essays finally emerge in print. Suzanne Ryan of Oxford University Press has continued to provide her expert guidance, inspiration, and friendship. We would also like to thank Andrew Maillet for his help setting some of the musical examples; OUP editorial assistant Jamie Kim; Caroline Brass of David Brass Rare Books for her swift and cheerful assistance in providing us with the high-resolution image of Feuillet’s dance notation in Chapter 5 and permission to reproduce it; and William Ross, Head of Special Collections at the University of New Hampshire, for his quick response to a last-minute query about the 1892 published score of Amy Beach’s “Phantoms.” The Society for Music Theory has supported our project in the form of a subvention grant, for which we are extremely grateful.

One of the challenges of putting this project together has been finding repertoire for which both scores and recordings can be found, so that readers can carry on their own explorations and performances of these compositions. In this regard we are extremely grateful to soprano Sharon Krebs, pianist Harald Krebs, and their recording assistant Mark Franklin, for the recordings they made of Josephine Lang’s multiple settings, exclusively for our companion website. Since some of these songs are not only unpublished but unfinished, these recordings provide readers with their first opportunity to hear how Lang experimented with different musical interpretations of the same poetry.
Finally, we would like to thank those anonymous readers who provided constructive feedback along the way (you know who you are), as well as colleagues whose reports of using our previously published volume in their teaching have fueled our motivation as we advance this project. We hope this volume will continue to expand the conversation, and look forward now to working with a new set of authors on the next one in the series.
About the Companion Website

www.oup.com/us/musicbywomencomposersto1900

Username: Music2
Password: Book4416

Oxford has created a password-protected website to accompany *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Secular & Sacred Music to 1900*. On this companion website, readers will find all musical examples and illustrations, including color versions of Figures 2.1 and 5.1; full scores of Clara Schumann’s “Liebst du um Schönheit” (Chapter 9) and Amy Beach’s “Phantoms” (Chapter 10); the video recording for Chapter 5, and audio recordings for Chapter 8. For those who wish to examine larger versions of the volume’s visual materials, Oxford University Press has made it possible for readers to zoom in on all examples and illustrations. The reader is encouraged to consult this resource in conjunction with the chapters. Examples available online are indicated in the text with Oxford’s symbol ☞, and audio or video recordings ☚.
Introduction: “Half of Humanity Has Something to Say, Also”
Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft

The main character of Bernard MacLaverty’s 1997 novel *Grace Notes* is composer Catherine McKenna. In Catherine’s study hangs a poster entitled “The Masters of Classical Music,” representing the history of music as a tree rooted in medieval Europe.

They were the Masters all right, there was no doubt about it. Three hundred men and one woman. Only the most important of the composers were illustrated. Their oval portraits grew like nuts on the branches of the tree, an array of beards and wigs and whiskers and nearer the top of the chart moustaches and spectacles. What a testosterone brigade. The only woman, at the very bottom of the tree trunk, did not have a picture.

That was how the poster had been printed, but when she was teaching Catherine had changed it. At the top right-hand corner she had, with a mapping pen, printed with extreme neatness her own name and a brief biography. It was in the tone of the other entries and she stuck it into a gap between Harrison Birtwistle and Karlheinz Stockhausen, just above Luigi Nono.

**Catherine Anne McKenna.** Irish composer. Much sought-after teacher of music during free periods. Main compositions *A Suite for Trumpetists and Tromboners; String Trios; A Canon for Ulster. Preludes and Fugues; A SET OF 9 SYMPHONIES.*

She hadn’t written any symphonies yet but it amused her to include such a fact in the letter box of her life.¹
In literally writing herself into history—even one that only she will likely see—Catherine claims a measure of value and visibility for her own creative work. Her inclusion of exactly nine imaginary symphonies allows her to align herself ironically with the “great” composers of the Western canon (chiefly Beethoven), at the same time leaving open the possibility that she will, someday, achieve something equally ambitious.

From a twenty-first-century perspective, the image of Catherine’s poster seems hopelessly passé—the “testosterone brigade” of mostly dead white European and American males, the organic model of history as a tree growing unbroken and ever upward. But in 2018 this poster, or one nearly identical to it, was still in print and available for purchase. There were now two female nuts on the tree—Hildegard of Bingen at the bottom and Sofia Gubaidulina on one of the upper branches—but nothing to suggest that any other woman had taken pen to staff paper at any time during the 800 years between them.

Thanks to the pioneering work of many musicologists and a smaller number of music theorists since the late twentieth century, the absence of female composers is not quite as dire in the world of music scholarship. Many fine articles and monographs on their lives and achievements are now available, compositions by women appear more regularly as examples in music theory textbooks, and an increasing number of online resources exist for those who would like to hear and learn more about their music. ² Judy Lochhead takes the integration of music by female composers one evolutionary step further in her book Reconceiving Structure in Contemporary Music: New Tools in Music Theory and Analysis (Routledge, 2016), in which she demonstrates her novel approach to analysis through studies of four compositions, all by women, but without special mention of the fact. ³

This is surely how it should be, and Kaija Saariaho echoes the view of so many composers when she observes to an NPR interviewer, “It’s kind of ridiculous . . . I feel that we should speak about my music and not of me being a woman.” Yet later in the interview, after reflecting on the obstacles female composers continue to face in the twenty-first century, she concedes, “Maybe we, then, should talk about it, even if it seems so unbelievable. You know, half of humanity has something to say, also.” ⁴ So, while we celebrate the increased attention to music by women that we have seen in the years since we began this project, there remains a need to study this music—to examine what these composers have to say, and how they are saying it. This need is particularly urgent in the field of music theory and analysis. In the introduction to our volume, Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Concert Music, 1960–2000, published in 2016, we presented data on the frequency with which analyses of compositions by women appear in major music theory journals and conference programs. Although there

² Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers
have been some notable new publications and presentations, two years later this rate remains more or less unchanged. Yet, as our project has developed, our motivation to pursue it has become fueled less by considerations of equitable representation than by our constantly growing enthusiasm for the exciting range and quality of music that women have created over the centuries. For this we owe a debt of appreciation to our authors—including those whose proposals we were unable to accept—and of course to the composers themselves.

In our inaugural volume, we presented the goals of this four-volume project: (1) to celebrate outstanding music composed by women in the so-called Western classical tradition by according it the same enthusiastic and detailed scholarly attention usually devoted to music by men; (2) to create a critical mass of scholarship that would stimulate new research into this repertoire and bring analysis of music by women out of the margins and into the mainstream of contemporary analytic discourse; and more generally, (3) to bring to readers’ attention a fresh body of music that is rewarding to the performer and listener as well as to the scholar. That first collection of essays focused on instrumental and vocal music by composers working in the late twentieth century, a time marked by unprecedented growth, opportunity, and achievement for female composers.

Now, in this new collection, we reach back in history to medieval Europe and work forward to the late nineteenth century, exploring music by Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Maddalena Casulana (ca. 1544–ca. 1590), Barbara Strozzi (1619–1677), Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de La Guerre (1665–1729), Marianna Martines (1744–1812), Clara Schumann (1819–1896), Fanny Hensel (1805–1847), Josephine Lang (1815–1880), and Amy Beach (1867–1944).

Each essay, preceded by a brief biographical sketch of the composer, presents a detailed analytical study of an individual work, or, in a few cases in which a comparative analytical argument is being made, a small selection of representative works by the same composer. Given that the vast time period covered in this volume spans numerous sociohistorical epochs and musical styles, the authors’ analytical strategies vary greatly. Approaches range from Jennifer Bain’s meticulous examination of text and pitch patterns in Hildegard’s sequences, to Susan McClary’s multisensory exploration of Jacquet de La Guerre’s harpsichord sarabandes, to Michael Baker and Edward D. Latham’s Schenkerian analyses of music by Schumann and Beach. But, without exception, our authors—Bain, Peter Schubert, Barbara Swanson and Richard Kolb, McClary, L. Poundie Burstein, Harald Krebs, Stephen Rodgers, Baker, and Latham—have chosen these particular compositions because they find them both musically and analytically intriguing.

We have ordered the essays in this collection chronologically, grouping them into three sections. Part I—Chapters 2 through 4—focuses on early vocal music by Hildegard, Casulana, and Strozzi (works composed up
to the mid-seventeenth century). Part II—Chapters 5 and 6—looks at three examples of keyboard music in the Baroque and Classical eras by Jacquet de La Guerre and Martines. Finally, Part III—Chapters 7 through 10—presents analyses of compositions representing two of the primary small forms of the nineteenth century: the German lied (Hensel, Lang, and Schumann) and the character piece for piano (Beach). More detailed descriptions of each chapter can be found in our introductions to these three sections.

Published scores and recordings of most compositions are readily available, with the exception of the multiple settings of Lang discussed by Krebs in Chapter 8. These settings have not been commercially recorded, but on our companion website readers will be able to hear recordings of performances by Sharon and Harald Krebs, prepared exclusively for this volume. The companion website also reproduces all of the book’s musical examples in a format that allows readers to zoom in and examine them in more detail, as well as complete scores for Casulana’s “Per lei pos’ in oblio,” Schumann’s “Liebst du um Schönheit,” and Beach’s “Phantoms,” and a video recording of a dance performance discussed by McClary in her chapter on Jacquet de La Guerre.

Although it may be tempting to view the nearly 750-year span from Hildegard to Beach as a long, upward trajectory of increasing opportunity and success for female composers, we urge readers to resist this interpretation and recognize the singularity of each composer’s achievement. Opportunities for women fluctuated from time to time and place to place, with advancement sometimes followed (or accompanied) by misogynistic backlash and relapse. Moreover, the composers represented in this volume worked in very different social and historical contexts, pursuing their own compositional activities through personal lives determined by unique constellations of privileges, obstacles, circumstances, and personalities. There is little to compare, for example, between Hildegard composing sequences in a medieval Germanic convent and Strozzi composing love songs for the men of her father’s Accademia degli Unisoni in Venice 500 years later.

Even between the overlapping careers of the three nineteenth-century German composers Hensel, Schumann, and Lang there were significant differences of opportunity, arising from the fact that they came from different social classes—and not always in the ways we might expect. Harald Krebs has pointed out that while Lang’s lower-class upbringing limited her opportunities for a high-quality musical education and other advantages, she had more liberty to earn money through publishing her music than did the upper-class Hensel, for whom such pursuits were considered unseemly. In fact, Hensel’s brother Felix Mendelssohn, who famously objected to his sister publishing her music and even passed off some of her songs as his
own, made extraordinary efforts to promote and find a publisher for Lang’s music. On the other hand, Hensel’s expansive home in Berlin allowed her a venue for the performance of orchestral or choral works, perhaps a luxury unavailable to Lang, who struggled to support her six children while geographically isolated in the relatively small and remote town of Tübingen. Nancy B. Reich has similarly compared the careers of Hensel and Schumann, noting that Schumann’s middle-class origins gave her the option of earning a living as a professional musician, a prospect again unavailable to Hensel.10

In short, the contexts in which female composers worked—usually in isolation from their counterparts—were simply too distinct (particularly in the early centuries) to construct an unbroken stream of progress, let alone a matrilineage formed by the kinds of networks and mentoring links that we see among male composers. In addition, the act of musical composition held different meanings and values in different sociohistorical contexts. For example, as Matthew Head has written with regard to women and composition in eighteenth-century France,

[b]ecause musical composition was, among other things, a trade, we do need to be cautious in assuming that women (particularly those of means) would necessarily have wished to compose had the education been available, any more than stitch their own clothes, which, like music, were more objects of fashion and consumption than labor for the leisured bourgeoisie. Among professional female musicians, composition may have proved less prestigious and lucrative than a career as a singer.11

In particular, post-Romantic views of composition as a vehicle for self-expression must be set aside, or at least bracketed, when reading these essays, especially those in Parts I and II.

Despite these distinctions, there are some broad similarities among the composers and works in this collection, most tellingly in the areas of genre and scale. Of the nine essays, six focus on vocal music and three on compositions for keyboard, but this selection does not necessarily reflect the range of genres explored by these composers over the course of their careers.12 Many of the women in this volume did compose for larger and more complex instrumentations. Jacquet de La Guerre’s compositions, for example, include chamber music, cantatas, and opera, encompassing a breadth of genres exceeding that of many of her male contemporaries. Martines composed a symphony, at least four keyboard concerti, and several fully orchestrated masses and oratorios. In the nineteenth century, Hensel, Schumann, and Beach all composed at least some chamber and orchestral music, Beach prolifically and with great public success up until the 1930s. So although women certainly have excelled in writing songs and
compositions for solo keyboard instruments—very likely because they can be performed without access to the financial and political networks necessary for mounting large-scale works such as opera—these forms by no means represent the spectrum of their achievements. (The prevalence of small-scale compositions in this volume is also to some degree symptomatic of the field of music analysis generally, not only because of the compression of rich detail in vocal and keyboard repertoire, but also pragmatic considerations about the size and expense of producing musical examples from orchestral and other large-scale works.)

The composition of small forms should not of course be viewed as somehow inadequate, a lesser stage of development toward a higher evolutionary state occupied by the massively orchestrated symphonic or operatic works traditionally taken as signs of compositional mastery. Nor should we dismiss gender as if it were irrelevant to a composer’s choice of genre. On the contrary, as musicologists, ethnomusicologists, and theorists have long observed, considerations of gender and genre are often inextricably interwoven in musical cultures, not least in the European classical tradition. The complex (and often vexed) implications of this intertwinement cannot be adequately summarized in these pages, and much analytical research remains to be done.

In the introductory chapter to Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Concert Music, 1960–2000, we explain that the goal of this project is not to establish the works explored in its pages as a new canon, but to ignite new research into the vast amount of outstanding repertoire that remains to be explored and enjoyed by scholars, performers, and listeners. As Lynne Rogers observes in her essay “The Joy of Analysis,”

To be sure, many of us are passionate about building historical generalizations or uncovering compositional practices. Nonetheless, much as we may be moved to consider a composition ‘a statistical sample of a musical population,’ it is the individual work that lies at the root of our most essential relationship to music.

Covering a span of 750 years, this volume cannot possibly provide readers with a full spectrum of music by women over that period. It can only hint at discoveries yet to be made, and we invite our readers to forge ahead.

NOTES

2. For example, see Julie C. Dunbar’s undergraduate textbook Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), and Kendra Preston


Statistics from the years 2015 through 2017 of annual conferences held by the Society for Music Theory (SMT) show little progress. At the 2015 SMT conference in St. Louis, MO, two out of 116 total papers mentioned the name of a female composer in their title, in comparison to forty-five citing the name of a male composer. At the joint conference for the SMT and the American Musicological Society (AMS) held in Vancouver, Canada, in November 2016, out of a total of 121 SMT paper presentations, the only one naming female composers in its title—Nancy Yunhwa Rao’s paper “Analysis, and the Dilemma of Music Genealogy: The Cases of Ruth Crawford and Johanna Beyer”—was given in a session sponsored by the Committee on the Status of Women; fifty-seven paper presentations included the names of male composers. (In comparison, AMS presentations were less focused on specific composers and displayed a better ratio between female and male composers: out of 236 papers, ten titles incorporated the names of women composers, predominantly in popular music genres, and fifty-six included male composers.) At the 2017 SMT conference in Arlington, VA, the Committee on the Status of Women hosted a special session featuring three papers on the music of Chen Yi, but in the 115 remaining paper titles, specific male composers were cited fifty-four times and female composers twice.


7. For example, Deborah Rohr (“Women and the Music Profession in Victorian England: the Royal Society of Female Musicians, 1839–1866,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 18, no. 4 [1999]: 307–46) contrasts the growing educational opportunities for female musicians in Victorian England with their deliberate exclusion from the male-only Royal Society of Musicians (which supported its members in need),


9. The importance of a composer having her music published, thereby making it available for dissemination and performance, and establishing her reputation, cannot be overstated. For example, Casulana’s success and fame—having her music performed publicly across Italy (including being conducted by Orlando di Lasso), being honored by male composers in their dedications—was largely due to her success in publishing her music.


12. See chap. 4 (especially pp. 130–32) of Marcia J. Citron’s *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), and chap. 6 of Jill Halstead’s *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1997). Halstead cites English psychologist Glenn Wilson, writing in 1958, “Many women have written successful songs . . . but they have seldom put together musical works on a grander scale such as operas, symphonies or even musical comedies. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that some factor such as intrinsic motivation or ‘scale of thinking’ is another contributor to artistic genius” (171).


For countless generations, if not the entirety of human existence, women have created through song. Their voices have not always been heard, however, as Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones have observed, “the literal, audible voice . . . has been a site of women’s silencing, as well as an instrument of empowerment.”

For women who compose, the shifting sands between silencing and empowerment are a perpetual feature of the landscape. The composers whose sacred and secular music is featured in this first group of essays—Hildegard of Bingen, Maddalena Casulana, and Barbara Strozzi—would have negotiated these challenges in different ways, according to the opportunities and limitations of their particular times, locations, and social strata. Their music has survived through the centuries in large part because of circumstances of class and education that provided them with the skills and materials necessary to preserve their compositions as written scores. But more importantly, it is a testament to the compositional gifts of these women and the lasting quality of the music they produced, as the essays in Part I so aptly demonstrate.

For centuries, the richest source of sacred song composed by women could be found in music created by nuns to meet the liturgical needs of their religious communities. No composer in this tradition is more renowned than Hildegard of Bingen. In Chapter 2, Jennifer Bain examines Hildegard’s extraordinary sequence O Ierusalem (ca. 1150–1170), demonstrating how she departed from conventional sequence form by weaving intricate patterns of varied repetition into the musical fabric, patterns that interact with structural and semantic aspects of the text to an uncommon degree for her time.

The secular songs discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 were composed much later, between 1570—just two years after Casulana’s Primo libro de madrigali a quattro voci became the first published music by a woman—and 1707. Some parallels can be drawn between Casulana and Strozzi, who both forged their musical careers in Venice, and were known as singers who performed their own music. But Strozzi was born long after Casulana’s death, and there are stark differences in musical style between Casulana’s mostly homophonic four-part madrigals and Strozzi’s solo cantatas.

In Chapter 3, Peter Schubert illuminates Casulana’s compositional ingenuity through analysis of her 1570 four-part madrigal “Per lei pos’ in oblio” in the context of the sixteenth-century madrigale arioso. With attention to the links between musical structure and performance practice of the time, Schubert explores her “tightly controlled and contrapuntally masterful” design of chordal phrases through her use of melodic arie, bass-line soggetti, and artful harmony. As Richard Kolb and Barbara Swanson argue in Chapter 4, Strozzi blends two forms of the seventeenth-century Italian lament tradition in her solo cantata Appresso ai molli argenti (1659), creating a vivid interpretation of the poetic text through striking use of dissonance, extended bass-line descents, and unexpected harmonic shifts.
Hildegard of Bingen, *O Ierusalem aurea civitas* (ca. 1150–1170)

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) composed one of the largest repertories of Western liturgical chant that can be ascribed to a single composer in the Middle Ages. She was born in Bermersheim (in what is now Germany) to the noble family of Hildebert of Bermersheim and Mechtilde of Merxheim. According to Hildegard’s recollections, at approximately eight years of age she was offered to God “for a spiritual way of life,” and for the next six years she either remained with her parents or was placed with the pious young woman, Jutta of Sponheim, for spiritual instruction in Jutta’s family home.

At the age of 14 on November 1, 1112, Hildegard was enclosed at Disibodenberg in an anchorage along with Jutta of Sponheim (now 20) and another young woman, also named Jutta. The senior Jutta’s piety attracted many other women and the community grew. On Jutta’s death in 1136, the nuns of Hildegard’s Benedictine sister community elected her *Magistra*. In the years after she assumed this position Hildegard, as her medieval biographers wrote, “was divinely warned through a voice which came to her, that she should not delay to write down whatever she saw or heard,” and she

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i. Anna Silvas, ed., *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*, translated and introduced by Anna Silvas (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 51 and 54. This volume provides English translations of numerous important twelfth-century documents, and an excellent commentary on the early religious life of Hildegard that deals with discrepancies among the original sources. Hildegard’s contemporary biographers understood this phrase “for a spiritual way of life” to mean that she was placed at Disibodenberg at the age of eight or in 1105–1106, but the records at Disibodenberg indicate that she entered in 1112, when she was fourteen.

ii. In medieval times deeply religious women often lived solitary lives in confined quarters called anchorages, cell-like structures that were usually attached (anchored) to the walls of a church.
began writing down her visions.iii In 1148, at the Synod of Trier, she sought and received papal approval from Pope Eugene III to document her visions as revelations from the Holy Spirit. Sometime around 1150—and with resistance from the Abbot of Disibodenberg—Hildegard moved her nuns to Rupertstberg, where she had a new monastery built for her growing community. In 1165 she established a daughter house across the Rhine in the village of Eibingen. Between 1158 and 1171 Hildegard undertook four preaching tours. She died in 1179.

In addition to her three large visionary texts (Scivias, Liber vitae meritorum, Liber divinorum operum), Hildegard also wrote hundreds of letters (compiled in a number of collections in the Middle Ages); medical texts (Liber simplicis medicinae or Physica and Liber compositae medicinae or Causae et curae); lives of saints (Vita sancti Rupperti confessoris and Vita sancti Dysibodi episcopi); sermons; liturgical chant for the Mass and Office, known collectively as the Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum; and the Ordo virtutum, often referred to as a liturgical drama.iv Her 77 chant items for Mass and Office include hymns, responsories, antiphons, sequences, one alleluia, and a Kyrie. Her music is transmitted in two main manuscripts, held at the Hochschul- und Landesbibliothek RheinMain in Wiesbaden, Germany, and at the Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven (until 2017 held at the Abbey of Saint Peter and Paul at Dendermonde, Belgium).

Interest in Hildegard’s life and music has grown since the last quarter of the twentieth century. While feminist scholars have examined Hildegard as an early role model for women, other scholars consider the linking of feminism with the study of her accomplishments to be anachronistic.v Her music has been recorded and performed by many fine artists, such as the early music ensemble Sequentia, and her life and works are examined in the 2003 DVD Hildegard von Bingen in Portrait.vi

iii. Translated by Silvas from the Vita Sanctae Hildegardis (The Life of Saint Hildegard), in Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources, 141.
iv. As Michael Norton has demonstrated, the term “liturgical drama” is problematic for a number of reasons. In this particular case it is even less appropriate, because Hildegard’s dramatized story is not biblical nor is it evoking the life of a saint. See Michael Norton, Liturgical Drama and the Reimaging of Medieval Theatre (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2017), 1–18, and Jennifer Bain, “Genre and Hildegard of Bingen’s Ordo virtutum,” A-R Online Music Anthology (2017), www.armusicanthology.com.
Varied Repetition in Hildegard’s Sequence for St. Rupert:  
*O Ierusalem aurea civitas*

*Jennifer Bain*

All chant genres from the medieval liturgy link music and text in fundamental ways. Some genres, such as the Ordinary Mass items (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei), have regular texts that are unchanging from day to day, while others, such as the sequence, hymn, antiphon, and responsory, use texts that are specific to the day (e.g., the feast day) in the liturgical year. No Christian church, for example, would sing “Joy to the World” on Good Friday, the darkest day in the Christian calendar; that hymn is reserved for the Christmas season. Many genres use texts that are free in poetic style, not using a standardized rhyme or syllable-count scheme. In contrast, the medieval sequence and hymn follow rather strict poetic forms that are reflected directly in their musical settings. The medieval hymn, like the modern, is a simple strophic form, in which the syllable count and structure remains the same from one stanza to the next, and every stanza uses the same melody. The medieval sequence, however, is much more complex.

The poem in a standard medieval sequence is written as a series of independent couplets, or verse pairs; the two verses of each couplet share an identical number of syllables, but the syllable count does not have to be maintained from one couplet or verse pair to the next.¹ The widely known and anthologized eleventh-century Easter sequence ascribed to Wipo of Burgundy, *Victimae paschali laudes* (“Praises to the paschal victim”), serves as a useful example.² The text in Table 2.1 starts with a single 15-syllable verse, followed by three pairs of verses: 2a and b each comprise 24 syllables, 3a and b have 31 syllables each, while 4a and b return to a 24-syllable construction. Sometimes the text endings of verse pairs in a sequence will rhyme or will use assonance instead, but there are many sequences like *Victimae paschali laudes* that use neither.

Musically the form follows the poetic structure. The two verses in each couplet share not only an identical number of syllables but also the same melody. Example 2.1 highlights this structure by following each verse with its syllable count as well as its melodic range.³ The couplets themselves, again, differ from each other in both syllable count and in melodic profile, creating in this case the formal pattern: \(a \; bb \; cc \; dd\). While the verse pairs 2, 3, and 4 all begin with the same a c d gesture, the octave displacement in the third verse pair marks it as rather different, because of the change in quality of the voice in a monophonic setting when it begins an octave lower.
Verse pairs 2 and 4 are much more clearly variations of each other, even keeping the same syllable count, but this melodic return is not a feature necessary to the form.

Hildegard of Bingen, who as a nun for almost seven decades from the age of 14 until she died at 81 spent hours every day performing the eight services in the Divine Office, certainly had a profound knowledge of the medieval liturgy and the various chant genres. When she composed her own liturgical music, she grounded her style in the musical repertory she knew, in one case beginning her own chant as a melodic variation of a widely known antiphon for Mary. Even while working within an established repertorial style, she also played with the structural forms that she received, most notably in her much freer approach to both the textual and musical structure of hymns and sequences. In these two genres, she abandons strict repetition of syllable count and melody. Particularly in her sequences, syllable counts between the two verses of her couplets almost never match and the melodies are adjusted to accommodate the differences in textual length. Instead of strict repetition she uses a varied repetition technique, in which repetition within a couplet is still audible—the form thus preserved—while many elements of the melodic surface expand or contract to relate directly to the new text structure.

In strophic song from any era, it can be difficult to consider the relationship between words and music after the first stanza; if elements of the melody relate directly to text structure or meaning in the first stanza, how can they

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Syllables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Victimae paschali laudes immolent Christiani</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a Agnus redemit oves: Christus innocens Patri reconciliavit peccatores.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b Mors et vita duello confluxere mirando, Dux vitae mortuus, regnat vivus.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a Dic nobis Maria, quid vidisti in via? Sepulcrum Christi viventis, et gloriam vidi resurgentis:</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b Angelicos testes, sudarium et vestes. Surrexit Christus spes mea: praecedet suos in Galilaeam.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a Credendum est magis soli Mariae veraci quam Iudaeorum turbae fallaci.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b Scimus Christum surrexisse a mortuis vere: Tu nobis, victor Rex, miserere.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 2.1
[Wipo of Burgundy,] *Victimae paschali laudes*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, m. lat. 15181, folios 296v–297r

In all of the musical examples, numbers at the end of a musical phrase and/or verse provide the syllable count for that unit, while the letters indicate the pitch range.
do the same in subsequent stanzas when the text changes? Hildegard’s creative approach to the sequence and hymn avoids this problem, and displays deep sensitivity to the relationship between text and music, including close attention to grammatical structure, word stress, word and syllable parsing, and the highlighting of important text in the poem. In this essay, I will demonstrate how in Hildegard’s sequence style, these concerns override the preservation of the standardized form with strict repetition. A close analysis of her sequence, *O Ierusalem aurea civitas* (“O Jerusalem, golden city”), the longest musical work in her output apart from her hour-long *Ordo virtutum* (“Order of the Virtues,” often referred to as a liturgical drama), provides an excellent example of her varied repetition technique, her attention to musical/textual relationships, and her large-scale control of musical structure.

**Manuscript evidence**

Perhaps the first question to ask is this: if Hildegard does not follow the strict form of the sequence, how do we know that she was composing sequences at all? This is where manuscript evidence is crucial. *O Ierusalem* appears in the two main manuscripts that preserve Hildegard’s music, commonly referred to as Dendermonde and the Riesencodex. Because of missing folios the sequence is incomplete in Dendermonde, cut off after the first few verses, but it is found in its entirety in the Riesencodex. Most medieval chant manuscripts contain “rubrics,” that is, text written in red ink providing information about the chant (in contrast to the brown or black ink used for chant texts and melodies). Often the rubrics indicate the genre, as well as the feast day. In this case, the Dendermonde manuscript provides a genre rubric, identifying *O Ierusalem* as a sequence, while the Riesencodex at the bottom of the first column of f.476v in Figure 2.1, indicates the feast day instead with “De s[an]c[t]o rup[e]r[t]o” (“for [the feast day] of St. Rupert”). In chant manuscripts, the first letter of every sequence verse (or every hymn stanza) is indicated in some way, often with a colored letter, usually red or blue, as evident in Figure 2.1 (a full-color version can be found on the companion website [link]). These colored letters made the large-scale structure easily identifiable for medieval singers (and modern scholars) consulting the manuscripts.

Following the verse designations provided by the manuscripts through these colored letters, and comparing their musical settings, I have tabulated the syllable counts and verse pairings in all seven designated sequences. Table 2.2, a summary of the couplet structure and syllable counts for these texts, shows that the syllable counts within each couplet almost never