

MUSC 115 Response 3

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Q: Choose one Medieval female composer and discuss her style, importance and contributions.



A: Hildegard of Bingen, of course!

Hildegard of Bingen was a visionary composer who lived in the 12th century. She was ahead of her time, as her music was considered highly innovative and reflective of her spiritual beliefs and connection to the divine. She composed extensively for religious ceremonies and is best known for her liturgical songs, or *plainchant*. We discussed quite a few compositions by her during lecture. Here, I'd like to discuss more about the unorthodox techniques she used:

- Haunting and ethereal melodies: for example, her piece *O ignis spiritus* featured a simple yet repetitive melody that creates a sense of otherworldly beauty.
- Rich harmonies: despite having a simple melody (like most other pieces in her era did), Hildegard's compositions were rich in harmony with multiple intertwining vocal lines. One such example is *Veni, sancte Spiritus*.
- Creative usage of instruments: her compositions featured various instruments such as bells and organs that added to the overall sound of her music, creating interesting color and texture. One example is *O virtus Sapientie* where the organ accompanying the choir created a atmospheric soundscape.
- Unusual intervals and harmonies: in *O fronden virga*, she used dissonant harmonies to create tension before resolving them!

As mentioned in the slides, one of her most important legacy is the *Riesencodex*, a collection of musical and liturgical texts containing 77 of her compositions, as well as some of her letters, poems, and visions. She was one of the first composers to systematically preserve compositions in this way.

In addition to being a revolutionary composer, Hildegard was also a prolific writer, and her literature on natural history, medicine, and spirituality were influential in her time. She was even one of the first women to write in Latin. The Codex itself also served as an important source for studying Hildegard's life, as it contained extensive documents of her musical style, religious beliefs, and her expedience with being a visionary and a spiritual leader. To sum things up, Hildegard was a pioneer in the medieval world, in music as well as other areas. Her contributions to these fields continue to be recognized, celebrated, and studied by modern musicians and scholars.