

## Hildegard von Bingen - O Jerusalem (2009)



**Symphoniae to Saint Rupert Dendermonde St. Peters & Paulusabdij, ms. Codex 9 & Hessische Landesbibliothek, HS. 2 (aka Rupertsberger "Riesenkodex"):** 1. *Sequence to St. Rupert: O Ierusalem* 2. *Antiphon to St. Rupert: Quia felix pueritia - Magnificat - Quia felix pueritia* 3. *Antiphon to St. Rupert: O felix apparitio* 4. *O beatissime Ruperte*  
[play](#)

### Consecratio Virginum: the mystical marriage

5. *Instrumental piece* 6. *Antiphon and Versicle to Maria: O tu illustrata* 7. *Antiphon to Maria: Cum erubuerint*  
[play](#)

### The Sacred Wedding

8. *O frondens virga - Gloria patri* Hymn: *Ave generosa* 9. *Antiphon to Maria: O quam preciosa*

### Hildegard's relationship to men of the spirit

10. *Hymn to Holy Spirit: O ignee spiritus* 11. *Instrumental piece* 12. *Antiphon to Maria: O quam, magnam miraculam est*

Performers: Sequentia - Barbara Thornton & Benjamin Bagby, directors: 1) Vox feminae [Barbara Thornton, Gundula Anders, Pamela Dellal, Elizabeth Glen, Heather Knuthson, Nancy Mayer, Lucia Pahn, Consuelo Sañudo, Carol Schlaikjer, Janet Youngdahl] - Barbara Thornton, dir. 2) Sons of Thunder [Benjamin Bagby, Stephen Grant, Peter Halpern, Eric Mentzel, Peter Schmitz, Bernhard Schneider] - Benjamin Bagby, dir. 3) Instrumental ensemble [Elizabeth Gaver (medieval fiddles), Benjamin Bagby (medieval harp, portative organ, organistrum), Na'ama Lion (medieval flute)] - Elizabeth Gaver, dir.

Abbess Hildegard of Bingen composed only seven pieces of music in the prolix medieval genre of the sequence, yet each splendidly adorns her oeuvre like the rough-hewn gems encrusting a Gothic Bible. One of Hildegard's most glitteringly expansive sequences is the piece for St. Rupert, *O Jerusalem aurea civitatis*. Ninth century Viking invaders had pulled down the walls of St. Rupert's church on the Rhine; Hildegard took her nuns and rebuilt the monastery in the year 1150. Not only, then, did she have a personal interest in the reputation of the saint, her sequence itself may thus be tied to the specific occasion of the new monastery's dedication. Its text climaxes in references to the "living stones" of which the new Jerusalem is built, an image alluding to the Catholic hymn for the dedication of a church, *Urbs beata Jerusalem*. In addition, as Christopher Page has noted, the poetess may have been drawing the comparison between her monastery and the Holy City of Jerusalem itself, destroyed by the Romans yet awaiting its rebuilding in heaven.

Both music and text of *O Jerusalem* build, step by step and stone upon stone, to a soaring architectural climax. Both open at daybreak, as it were, with the textual image of dawn breaking on the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, which is set to three repetitions of an understated chant melody, low in its plagal range. In the next stanzas, the poetess superimposes the dawn of Rupert's earthly boyhood with an image of him, sanctified, shining in the gems of the Holy city; he cannot be "hidden by the fools" who sacked his first church. At this time, the melody dramatically opens into the aspirant upper reaches of its unusual mode. The allusive collage continues in the next group of stanzas, as the poetic imagery blossoms into a series of references to Rupert's "true showing" (showing his relics), to the nubile flowers of the Song of Songs, and to pagan dances transformed to angelic dance; the melody now ranges widely through its compass. The climax arrives as Hildegard describes the living stones, the Christians upon which the new Jerusalem is founded despite their sinful and earthly nature. As dawn breaks upon this city, Hildegard's melody breaks its bounds and expands upwards into the "authentic" mode; as the lowly humans are transformed, the music itself mutates. May God and St. Rupert allow those who trust in them so to ascend to blessedness. ---Timothy Dickey, Rovi

Another flawless *Sequentia* contribution to the complete works of Hildegard, this set uses the 10 minute title piece, written for the dedication of a church, to lay the cornerstone for a series of liturgical songs which might have been appropriate to such an occasion. As the church bells ring to set the stage for the recorded fantasia, the lovely choir begins and carries straight through a roller coaster of gems, occasionally colored by a spare but powerful addition of period instruments throughout, fiddle, harp, organ, flute. Characteristic Hildegard themes of the miraculous, holy virginity and its fruits amplify and adorn songs regarding the new church's patron Saint Rupert and his virtues, a duke's son and ascetic who died at 20. *Sequentia*'s combination of vibrant performance and informed but creative reconstruction perfectly matches

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the spirit of the bold medieval composer and abbess Hildegard, as she in turn linked her own charisms to Rupert. The total effect is like a rare telescope look into a distant spiritual terrain, and quite absorbing. --- Billyjack D'Urberville, amazon.com

This recording received a 1998 "Critic's Choice" award from Gramophone magazine.

"Sequentia's ten high voices come into their own, interpreting Hildegard's soaring melodies with imagination and verve. . . . [W]hat an enjoyable programme they have produced, sung with flow and conviction! The bells of Bamberg Cathedral introduce it all on a festive note, which matches their own to perfection, and if we do not actually find ourselves transported on to the Rupertsberg itself, we have at least got as far as St Panteleon of Cologne." -- Mary Berry, Gramophone

O JERUSALEM follows Hildegard's continued devotion to the Benedictine order, and principally to St. Rupert and the Virgin Mary. 'O Jerusalem' is not your standard liturgical music, however. It is a dedication ceremony, celebrating the establishment of Rupertsberg, a church to serve von Bingen's sisters in the Benedictine order. The composer's hard work for the church, along with her music and writings, are the only surviving testament to St. Rupert's life and works. The solemn majesty of the music is hard to miss: Slowly chiming church bells over a hauntingly beautiful chorus at the beginning of 'O Jerusalem' set the tone. Yet despite its seriousness, there is a joyful energy within. This sense pervades the piece, giving the music a buoyant quality within its medieval mode. --- arkivmusic.com

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