

voice

“Medieval women in song”

Voice vocal trio - Victoria Couper, Clemmie Franks, and Emily Burn - perform songs to celebrate women in medieval music as composers, icons, and narrators.

Running order

O clarissima mater Hildegard of Bingen (12th C)

O Vos Liz Dilnott Johnson (2000)

Laude novella sia cantata Anon., from the Cortona Laudario (13th C Italy)

Dilectoza Cortesia Anon., Bologna Q15, ed. Prof. Laurie Stras (15th C Italy), arr V. Couper for Voice Trio (2025)

Ave Maris Stella / Hail, Star of the Sea, Hail, Great Builder, the Song Among Us Moira Smiley (2024)

Tres Hermanicas Traditional Sephardic, arr. V. Couper for Voice Trio (2011)

Trois Sereurs Anon., from the Montpellier Codex (13th C France)

S'on me regarde/Prennés i garde/HÉ MI ENFANT Anon., from the Montpellier Codex (13th C France)

Bien m'ont Amours entrepris Anon., France (13th C) arr. E. Burn for Voice Trio (2014)

Azeruz Stevie Wishart (2001)

Nunc Gaudeant Hildegard of Bingen (12thC) arr. Voice Trio

Programme Notes

Voice Trio's programme features the beautiful music of the German Benedictine abbess, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). As well as being a great spiritual thinker and leader, a herbalist, and visionary, she was a prolific composer. She wrote 77 chants, which are collected in her anthology *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum* ('Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations') and a musical morality play *Ordo virtutem*, ('Order of the virtues'). Many of Hildegard's musical works were inspired by intense visions that she referred to as 'lux vivens' (living light).

Hildegard's musical style is distinguished by her use of melisma (a single syllable sung to many notes) and soaring vocal lines. Voice Trio was introduced to her music at a young age when they joined the early music group, Sinfonye, directed by Stevie Wishart. They perform Hildegard's works from transcriptions by Stevie Wishart. The programme opens with a responsory for the Virgin **o clarissima mater**. We follow these with a modern day interpretation of one of Hildegard's original chant, **O Vos** by Liz Dilnot Johnson, which uses the same musical tropes of melisma and soaring, fluid lines in this canon for three high voices.

While *laude* (vernacular sacred song from medieval Italy), such as **Laude novella sia cantata**, are religious in nature, they do not form part of the liturgy and are written in vernacular Italian, not Latin. *Laude* were performed by *Laudesi* - lay fraternities which sprang up throughout northern Italy from about 1260. These groups gathered together to perform various charitable works, and to sing and pray. The piece we perform today is in praise of the Virgin Mary, while the piece that follows it, **Dilectoza Cortesia** from Bologna Italy, would have been sung in a convent and describes the nuns' devotion and love for Jesus.

This is followed by a modern day interpretation of a piece of medieval chant extolling the Virgin Mary by American composer, Moira Smiley, with whom Voice Trio have performed and collaborated, **Ave Maris Stella / Hail, Star of the Sea, Hail, Great Builder, the Song Among Us**, which begins with a popular medieval Marian hymn, Ave Maris Stella. Smiley wrote this piece for a secular liturgy in which she wanted a praise song for the feminine and masculine principles that she finds divine.

Tres Hermanicas and **Trois Sereurs** tell stories about three sisters and their experience of love. **Tres Hermanicas** is an arrangement of a traditional Sephardic ballad. Although some texts in this tradition point back to life in medieval Spain, following the trend of folk song collecting, most of these songs were notated at the beginning of the 20th century, and this one in particular indicates that it comes from Greece/Turkey when we learn that the errant daughter is banished to Rhodes, one of the Greek islands. **Trois Sereurs** is a secular, polyphonic motet found in a collection of 13th century French polyphony known as the Montpellier Codex (France, 13th century). Voice was introduced to this piece by Stevie Wishart, who performed and recorded it with her group, Sinfonye.

S'on me regarde/Prennes i garde/HE MI ENFANT, is a polyphonic motet from a collection of 13th century French polyphony known as the Montpellier Codex and it deals with the theme of unattainable desire. This witty song with the lovers speaking in the first person, hiding from one another is a perfect example of an unrequited love-triangle. Also from the same century is the trouvère song **Bien m'ont Amours entrepris**. Trouvères were the poet-composers of the courts of 12th and 13th century northern France. Like their contemporaries, the Occitan troubadours, and indeed those that followed on in the centuries to come, the subject of most of their poetry and song was “fin amour” or courtly love – chivalrous, noble, and forever out of reach.

We return to Hildegard’s music as we draw to the end of the programme with **Azeruz**, composed by Stevie Wishart in 2001, originally for voices and hurdy-gurdy. In this piece Wishart sets words from the abbess’ ‘lingua ignota’ (made-up language) which lists the herbs and plants that Hildegard used in her herbal remedies. The programme closes with Voice own interpretation of Hildegard’s **Nunc gaudeant**, a votive antiphon for the dedication of a church, in which we play with the use of organum (medieval harmony), deviating from authentic harmonies to create a fuller, richer, and more ‘modern’ sound. It has been suggested that this joyful piece was written in response to the lifting of an interdict that restricted music-making, at the point of welcoming back this essential part of daily worship.

Biography

Voice, vocal trio

(Victoria Couper, Clemmie Franks, Emily Burn)

“Brilliant trio...sensational singers” The Choir, BBC Radio 3 – Sara Mohr-Pietsch

Voice is an exciting, female vocal trio. In their 18 years together, they have built a dedicated fan-base across the world; a rich, varied repertoire of their own arrangements, new commissions, and rarely performed Early Music; and they have honed a truly unique sound. Victoria, Clemmie, and Emily first began singing together in Oxford as members of the Oxford Girls’ Choir, before going on to form the trio in 2006 as well as forging their own successful, diverse careers. They draw on their individual musical interests and experiences to create thrilling timbres and a blend that has been described as ‘one voice’.

Their interest in Early Music can be traced back to their performances and recordings of the medieval chant of St Hildegard of Bingen, which they learned as members of Stevie Wishart’s group, Sinfonye. The singers still perform with Sinfonye today and as a trio, Voice continues to perform Hildegard’s music and have commissioned new works inspired by her words and chant.

The trio has toured throughout the UK, USA and Europe with their two self-released albums: Musical Harmony (2013), “a stunning body of work destined to prick up the hairs on the back of one’s neck” (Oxford Times & Mail), and Patterns of Love (2015). Collaborative releases include: I Have Set My Hert So Hy

(Avie, 2015) with Dufay Collective, whom they also toured two new programmes of Spanish medieval pilgrim music in Galicia in September 2019; and Leoš Janáček's *The Diary of One Who Disappeared*; Moravian Folksongs; *Říkadla* with Julius Drake and Nicky Spence (Hyperion, 2019). "The arrival of the siren-like trio... is heart-stopping and haunting in equal measure" (Gramophone Recording of the Month).

Voice released their latest album, *Hildegard Portraits* on SOMM Recordings in June 2022. 4.5* "beauty and precision.. Highly recommended" - James Manheim, AllMusic. They continue to tour their multimedia show *Hildegard Transfigured*, with visual artist Innerstrings, described as "transfixing" Opera Today & received 4* review The Guardian.

www.voicetrio.co.uk

Sung texts

O clarissima mater Hildegard of Bingen (12th C)

Translation credit © Stevie Wishart

O clarissima mater sanctae medicinae, Tu unguenta per Sanctum Filium tuum infudisti In plangentia vulnera mortis, Quae Eva edificavit in tormenta animarum.	O most radiant mother of sacred healing, Thou pourest ointment through thy Holy Son Upon the mournful wounds of death, That Eve made as torments for our souls.
Tu destruxisti mortem, aedificando vitam. Ora pro nobis, ad tuum natum, Stella maris, Maria.	Thou hast destroyed death by building life. Pray for us, unto Him that was born of thee, Mary, star of the sea.
O vivificum instrumentum Et laetum ornamentum Et dulcedo omnium deliciarum, Quae in te nom deficient. Ora pro nobis...	O life-making instrument And ornament of joy, The sweetness of all delights That are not lacking in thee. Pray for us...
Gloria Patri et Filio, Et Spiritui Sancto. Ora pro nobis...	Glory to the Father, and to the Son, And to the Holy Spirit. Pray for us...

O Vos Liz Dilnott Johnson (2000)

Text taken from Hildegard of Bingen's, o vos felices radices (responsory for patriarchs and prophets)

Gaudete Gaudete in illo, Gaudete capito vestro O vos felices Gaudete	Rejoice Rejoice in him Rejoice in your Captain O merry roots Rejoice
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Laude Novella Anon., Italy (13thC)

Praise song from the Cortona Laudario

<i>Laude novella sia cantata al'alta donna encoronata</i>	<i>Sing new praises to the crowned queen of heaven!</i>
Fresca virgine donçella, primo fior, rosa novella, tutto'l mondo a te s'appella;	O fair virgin maid, matchless early rose, All the world magnifies you;

<p>nella bonor fostinata.</p> <p>Fonte se' d'acqua surgente, Madre de Dio vivente; tu se' luce de la gente, sopra li angeli exaltata</p> <p>Tu se' rosa, tu se' gillio, tu portasti el dolçe fillio: però, donna, sì m'èpillio de laudar te, honorata.</p> <p>Nulla lingua pò contare, come tu se' da laudare: lo tuo nome fa tremare Sathanas a mille fiata.</p>	<p>you were born in perfect goodness.</p> <p>Fount of rising water, mother of the living God; You are a light to the people, exalted above the angels.</p> <p>You are the rose, you are the lily, you have borne the sweet child: So my queen I vow to praise and honour thee.</p> <p>No tongue can sing the measure of your praises: Your name makes Satan tremble a thousand times.</p>
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Dilectoza Cortesia Anon., Bologna Q15, ed. Prof. Laurie Stras (15th C Italy) arr V. Couper for Voice Trio (2025).

Text and translation Prof. Laurie Stras

<p>Dilectoza, cortesia, piaciate non più tardare far che l'anima mia si te deggia seguitare correndo per quella via per la qual volesti andare Sancto Yhesu Christo Yhesu [per] amore</p> <p>se la tua bonta iocunda my vora poter menare lanima mia feconda per lo tuo rimemorare diventando sitibonda non vora se non amare</p> <p>Sitibonda coreria a te fonte dilectosa l'alta bonda si steria con l' affecto suo focoso solo se delecteria del voler tuo saporoso</p> <p>Che adunche deve dire ny cercar da ti datore la lingua my fa murire risguardando el mio errore si ch'io non posso stare de gustar el tuo dolzore [dolpzore]</p>	<p>Delightful, courtesy, Please don't delay any longer, Make my soul Have to follow you Running on that path By which you wished to go, Holy Jesus Christ, Jesus, for love.</p> <p>If your joyful goodness Wants me to be able to lead My fecund soul For your remembrance Becoming thirsty I want nothing except to love.</p> <p>Thirsty, I will run To you, delightful fountain The exalted goodness will pour out With its fiery passion Only if I might delight in Your delicious will.</p> <p>What then should I say If not to seek from you, Giver, My tongue makes me die, Looking at my sin If I cannot stay And taste your sweetness.</p>
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Ave Maris Stella / Hail, Star of the Sea, Hail, Great Builder, the Song Among Us Moira Smiley (2024)

<p>Ave maris stella, Dei Mater alma, Atque semper Virgo, Felix caeli porta</p>	<p>Hail, star of the sea, Blessed mother of God And ever Virgin, Happy gate of heaven</p>
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<p>Hail, star of the sea nurturing mother of all you with barnacles, and folds of flesh like waves of bioluminescence you blemished, dimpled and wisened holding birth and death as babes upon your knees. We are yours eternally.</p> <p>Hail, great builder fallible father or hope you with scaffolds to investigate the skies Defender of the defenceless. Articulator of light and dark. Protector of the wise. You are our eyes.</p>	
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Tres Hermanicas Traditional Sephardic, arr. V. Couper for Voice (2011)

<p>Tres hermanicas eran, tres hermanicas son, Las dos estan casadas, la chica en perdición.</p> <p>El padre con vergüença a la Rhodes la mandó En el medio del camino, castillo la fraguó</p> <p>De piedra minudica al laja al deredor Sin puerta y sin ventanas, que non suba varón.</p> <p>El amor que lo supo a nadar se echó Sus braços hizo remos, su cuerpo galeón.</p> <p>Nadando y navegando al castillo arribó Echó sus entreçados, arriba lo subió.</p>	<p>There were three sisters, three sisters they are, Two are married, the youngest in sin.</p> <p>The father in his vengeance sent her to Rhodes. In the middle of the path, he forged a castle,</p> <p>It was built of stone and surrounded by a lake, With neither door nor windows, so none could climb.</p> <p>The lover, knowing how, began to swim, His arms became oars, his body a boat.</p> <p>Swimming and navigating he arrived at the castle, She threw down her plaits, and soon he climbed up.</p>
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Trois Sereurs Anon., France (13thC)

Motet from the Montpellier Codex

Translation credit - Stevie Wishart/Sinfonye

<p><i>Trois sereurs seur rive mer chantent cler.</i> La mainnee a apele Robin son ami: "Prise m'avez el bois rame: Reportez m'ii!"</p>	<p><i>Three sisters on the seashore singing clearly.</i> The middle one called Robin her lover. "You took me away to the woods, take me there again!"</p>
<p><i>Trois sereurs seur rive mer chantent cler.</i> L'ainnee dit a: "On doit bien jone dame amer, et s'amor garder, cil qui l'a."</p>	<p><i>Three sisters on the seashore singing clearly.</i> The eldest said: "You must love a young woman well, and look after her love, if you should have it."</p>
<p><i>Trois sereurs seur rive mer chantent cler.</i> La jonete fu brunete, de brun ani s'aati: "Je sui brune s'avrai brun ami aussi."</p>	<p><i>Three sisters on the seashore singing clearly.</i> The youngest one with dark-brown hair, boasted about her dark lover: "I have dark hair; I'll have a dark lover too."</p>

S'on me regarde/Prennés i garde/HÉ MI ENFANT Anon., France (13th C)

Motet from the Montpellier Codex

<p>Triplum: S'on me regarde, s'on me regarde, dites le moi; trop sui gaillarde, bien l'aperchoi. Ne puis laisser que mon regarde ne s'esparde car tes m'esgarde, dont mout me tarde, qu'il m'ait ou soi, qu'il a en foi de m'amour plan otroi. Mais tel ci voi, qui est, je croi, (feu d'enfer l'arde!) jalous de moi. Mais pour li d'amer ne recroi, car par ma foi pour nient m'esgarde, bien per sa garde; J'arai rechoi!</p>	<p>Triplum: If someone sees me, if someone sees me, tell me; I am too bold I see it well. I cannot but let my eyes wonder for a certain one looks at me for which I am very impatient that I am where he is so that he has in faith the full gift of my love. But I see that one who is, I believe, (hellfire burn him!) jealous of me. But not for him Will I renounce loving, for by my faith he watches me for nothing, he wastes his time: I will have an escape!</p>
<p>Motetus: Prennés i garde, s'on me regard: trop sui galliarde, dites le moi, pour Dieu vous proi, Car tes m'esgarde, dont mout me tarde, qu'il m'ait ou soi, bien l'aperchoi; et tel chi voi, qui est, je croi (feu d'enfer l'arde!) jalous de moi. Mais pour li d'amer ne recroi pour nient n'esgarde, bien pert sa garde: j'arai rechoi et de mon ami le dosnoi. Faire le doi! Ne serai plus couarde.</p>	<p>Motetus: Take care if someone sees me; I am too bold, tell me, for God's sake I beg you. For a certain one looks at me, for which I am very impatient, that I am where he is I see it well; and I see that one who is, I believe, (hellfire burn him!) jealous of me. But not for him will I renounce loving, he watches me for nothing, he wastes his time: I will have an escape, and the wooing of my lover. I must do it! I will no longer be cowardly.</p>
<p>Tenor: Hé, mi enfant</p>	<p>Tenor: Ah, my child</p>

Bien m'ont Amours entrepris Anon., France (13th C) arr. Emily Burn for Voice (2014)

Motet melody, text, and translation taken from Songs of the Troubadours and Trouveres: an anthology of poems and melodies, eds. Rosenberg, Switten, Le Vot (1998) Garland Publishers London

Bien m'ont Amours entrepris. Je croi n'i porai durer, Car la nuit, quant doi dormir Et je me cuit reposer, Lors me covient tres torner Et fremir et tressaillir Si sui pris De desir et de panser	Love has taken hold of me, I think I cannot last, For at night, when I should sleep And I expect to rest I find myself tossing and turning, Shivering and trembling, So gripped and I By desire and brooding.
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Azeruz Stevie Wishart (2001)

Text from *Lingua ignota* by St Hildegard of Bingen, translation after Pitra 1882

<i>Lingua ignota</i>	<i>English</i>
Anziz	Cowbane
Marizma	Common centaury
Zizria	Cinnamon
Sparinichibus	Almond
Aseruz	Hemp
Magizima	Black hellebore
Zizanz	Briar
Gusca	Lesser celandine
Dizia	Burning bush
Mazma	Vetch
Pazia	Henbane
Cririschia	Laurel
Mikoziz	Garden radish
Laufrica	Coltsfoot
Fulzia	Marigold
Florisca	Seed of the balsam
Gimeldia	Pine

Nunc Gaudeant Hildegard of Bingen (12th C)

Translation credit © Stevie Wishart

Nunc gaudeant materna viscera Ecclesie
Quia in superna symphonia
Filia eius in sinum suum collocatisunt.

Unde, o turpissime serpens
Confusus es,
Quoniam quos tua estimatio in visceribus tuis
habuit.

Nunc fulgent sanguine Filii Dei,
Et ideo laus tibi sit,
Rex altissime,
Alleluia

Now let the motherly womb of the Church rejoice,
Because in heavenly harmony
Her sons are gathered into her bosom.

Go hence, O shameful serpent,
You are confounded,
For those you thought you had in your maw

Now shine in the blood of the Son of God.
And therefore praise be to you,
O King Most High,
Alleluia.