

Aureole etc.



Golden Age singers



Faure songs  
Charlotte de Rothschild (soprano)

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Some items to consider

## REVIEW



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Gerard Hoffnung CDs



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Hildegard of Bingen's last work, *Liber divinorum operum*, is subdivided into ten visions, starting with a prologue and ending with an epilogue. Parts of this were divided into three letters for the service *Notturmo del Mattutino del Commune delle Vergine*. On this disc the service has been recreated by soprano Barbara Zanichelli, Ensemble San Felice and Federico Bardazzi. Hildegard's music on disc has tended to be presented in recital form, rather divorced from its liturgical context. But she wrote her pieces in the context of the church's liturgy.

On this disc we get a whole set of Hildegard's music assembled into a coherent service, three psalms with their antiphons, followed by the three readings from *Liber divinorum operum* each followed by a responsorium with a final prayer.

Though the performers include a small choir of female voices, a gothic harp, vielle and portative organ, the performance style is in fact quite austere. It is thought that Hildegard may have used instruments in services even though frowned upon by the authorities. Here the instruments are used quite discreetly with the voices generally unaccompanied. The results are resolutely austere in texture, but seductive in their shapeliness and melodic outline.

Soprano Barbara Zanichelli has the majority of the work, with the chorus providing unassertive drones as well as singing the Psalm chants. She has an attractive, tightly focused voice with good flexibility. I am not quite sure that she makes enough of the words. After all, Hildegard's pieces are about the words and the music: the words relate to her visions and are profoundly important. There is a tendency to appreciate this music for its austere, haunting beauty and forget the startling nature of her vision.

The booklet talks about seeing the two sides of Hildegard. I don't think that any of the recordings issued, not even Gothic Voices' *A feather on the breath of God*, quite evokes Hildegard's indomitable personality and quite terrifying visions.

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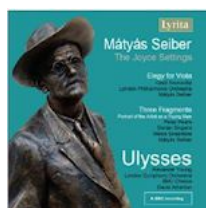
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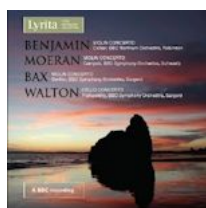
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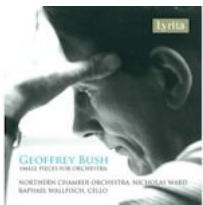
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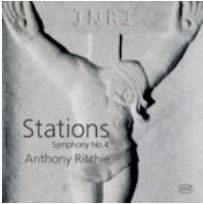
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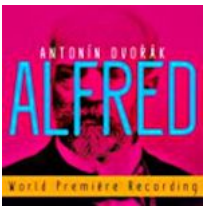
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The CD booklet includes an extensive article, written in rather flowery language. There is also a CD-ROM which includes a PDF of the CD booklet plus a PDF of texts and translations. Unfortunately the translations are only into Italian, which seems short-sighted.

This disc makes a good introduction to Hildegard's music if you are interested in her as a writer of liturgical pieces. The performances are firmly anchored into the sound of early plainchant. It is let down only by the fact that you need Italian to follow the translations of the texts.

*Robert Hugill*



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