

Sonata a Quattro WoO 4

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) remains one of the most well-known Italian composers and violinists from the middle Baroque era. He is especially remembered for his contributions to the development of the sonata and concerto genres, particularly the four-movement sonata da chiesa (“church” sonata) structure. Corelli studied in Bologna and Rome and spent most of his career in Rome working for wealthy patrons. His entire musical output consists of six published collections: five collections of solo and trio sonatas and one collection of concerti grossi. Corelli was also considered to be one of the best violinists of his generation and helped the violin to become more respected as a virtuosic solo instrument. Since Corelli hardly wrote any music for trumpet, this sonata holds a unique place in the repertoire. It largely follows the four-movement sonata da chiesa structure of slow-fast-slow-fast but with one additional fast movement. The short opening Adagio is a stately fanfare, acting as an introduction for the following imitative Allegro movement. This is contrasted by the following Grave for strings, which features typical rich “Corelli” harmonies. Next comes a stately yet playful Allegretto featuring the solo trumpet and finally a lovely Allegro in 6/4 that has a pastoral, serene quality.

Ordo Virtutum

Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) is the first recognized woman composer in Western music history. She left a remarkable collection of writings and compositions, which were carefully preserved by subsequent generations of nuns in her cloistered community.

The origins of the Ordo Virtutum (Play of the Virtues) spring from her first visionary text *Scivias*, in which she recounts multiple divine visions. Among these were visions of figures embodying various Virtues and Vices; her musical compositions also include a drama involving a soul corrupted by a Devil and then redeemed with the aid of these beings. The score contains both character names and stage directions, indicating a staged performance. We even have a contemporary description of a performance by her community; witnessed by a visitor who was taken aback by the ostentatious finery of the dress and presentation of the performing nuns!

At its heart, Ordo Virtutum is a psychological allegory. The Virtues are embodiments of spiritual strengths; they present themselves in colorful and metaphorical language and are arranged in a sequence that seems highly significant: Humility is the first virtue along with Charity, Hope and Faith, while Mercy and Patience are at the end of the list. Hildegard singles out Chastity and Victory for special functions, particularly in confronting a devil

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figure; while the Virtues sing elaborately composed chant, the devil is instructed to shout his words.

All of this is centered on the journey of a human embodied soul. In the first scene the soul longs for God but is soon derailed by the challenges of living in the world and loses her way. The opportunistic Devil steps in to snatch her away, while the Virtues mourn the tragic loss. Later the soul returns, penitent and seeking redemption; with the assistance of the Virtues she is able to achieve grace, and the combined Virtues bind and mock the Devil in a final triumph.

Today's performance preserves the major outlines of this plot while offering a highly abridged version of the score. Some of the most original and rapturous ensemble pieces have been omitted due to length and complexity.

There is no historical evidence for the use of instruments in the performance of Hildegard's compositions, but various medieval instruments could plausibly be used: hurdy-gurdy, vielle (medieval fiddle), and harp. We will incorporate all of these into our performance, adding an additional texture to the purity of the vocal sound and meditative nature of the solo chant singing.

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