

Introduction – Hildegard of Bingen

Watch the film about this music, listen to the performance, and answer the questions by ticking the most appropriate answer.

1. Who was Hildegard of Bingen, and when did she live?

- a) A famous scientist who lived 500 years ago
- b) A composer and nun who lived nearly 1000 years ago
- c) A queen who ruled Germany 200 years ago

2. What inspired Hildegard to create her music?

- a) The natural beauty of the countryside
- b) Stories from other nuns in her convent
- c) Visions she believed came from God

3. What is plainsong, and how is it different from other types of music?

- a) It has many instruments and fast rhythms
- b) It is a type of religious music with a single melody sung in unison
- c) It uses only drums and chanting

4. What is melisma, and where else can it be found in music?

- a) A musical instrument used in medieval times
- b) A type of harmony used in folk songs
- c) When lots of notes are sung on one syllable (also found in pop songs today!)

5. How is Hildegard's music still relevant today?

- a) It is still performed, even after nearly 1000 years
- b) Her melodies are played at sporting events
- c) It is only studied by historians but never performed



Let's step into Hilda's world briefly:

Draw, or write down some words to describe what Hildegard's bedroom might have looked like 1000 years ago. What would be the main similarities and differences to your bedroom today?

A large empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a drawing or written response.

Plainsong – Making Melodies

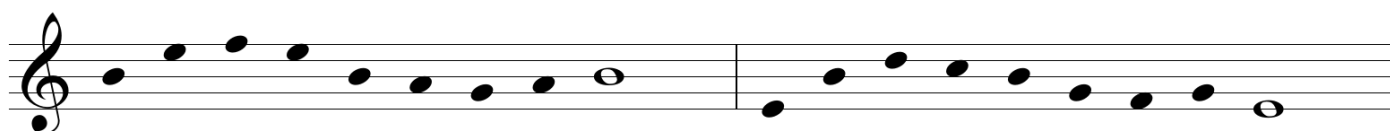
As you have discovered, plainsong is a type of religious music with a single melody sung in unison, sometimes with a drone accompaniment. Each song would use a collection of notes known as a scale, or mode. This music by Hildegard features a collection of notes called the **Phrygian mode**. Here they are in modern notation:



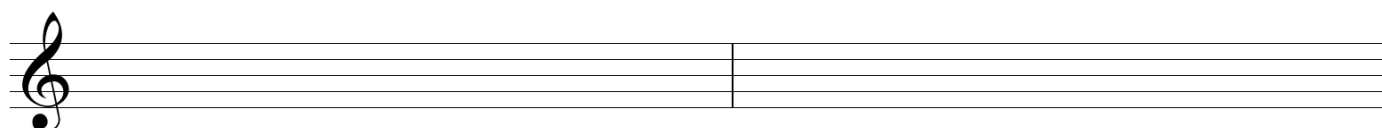
- There are two notes labelled 'E', a lower and a higher pitch. E is the most important note of this mode. It would be described as the **tonic**. The melody will keep returning to the note E.
- If you were to perform a **drone** throughout the melody, it would use the note E, or possibly the notes E and B.
- When drawing these musical notes, notice that the lower four notes (E, F, G, A) have **stems** that point upwards and are on the right-hand side of the note head – a bit like the letter 'd'. The higher four notes (B, C, D, E) have stems that point downward and are on the left-hand side of the note head – a bit like the letter 'p'.

Activity:

1. Add stems to the closed note heads (the coloured-in circles) of this melody (lines pointing up or down from each note head). Don't add stems to the open note heads (empty circles). The open note heads represent notes that would be held for longer, at the ends of phrases.
2. Label each note with its note name (E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E)
3. Every time the melody returns to E, draw a circle around the note E. This is the tonic.



4. Compose your own plainsong melody:



Plainsong – Adding Words

The effect of plainsong was haunting and ethereal. The choice and placement of words added to this effect, by creating very smooth melodic lines that focused on the vowel sounds in the words. In the introductory film, you discovered the word **melisma**, which is the word to describe one syllable spread out across lots of notes.

Each **phrase** has been given the words “Lux Aeterna”, which in Latin means ‘everlasting light’. Each **phrase** uses melisma in different ways. You can see how many notes are used for each syllable by following the curved lines (**slurs**) next to the note heads.

1.
Lux_ ae - ter - na

2.
Lux_____ ae - ter - na

3.
Lux_____ ae - ter - na

4.
Lux_ ae - ter - na

Which phrase has which melisma pattern?

- 4 notes, 2 notes, 2 notes, 1 note: _____
- 2 notes, 2 notes, 4 notes, 1 note: _____
- 2 notes, 4 notes, 2 notes, 1 note: _____
- 3 notes, 1 note, 4 notes, 1 note: _____

Your turn! Use the words “let there be light” to explore writing melismas. The first one has been done for you:

1.
let_ there_____ be light

2.
let there be light

3.
let there be light

4.
let there be light

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. 2 notes, 5 notes, 1 note, 1 note | 2. 3 notes, 3 notes, 2 notes, 1 note |
| 3. 2 notes, 4 notes, 2 notes, 1 note | 4. 4 notes, 2 notes, 2 notes, 1 note |

HINTS – look at how long lines are used after the words to make them sound for longer. See if you can add all the words and the slurs (curved lines) in appropriate places.

O Eucharisti in Latin – Creative Responses

COMPOSING CHALLENGE – develop your skills further:

On music manuscript paper or using music notation software, compose a plainsong with words. You could write a poem to set to music, or use some of the English or Latin words you have already experimented with. Try to combine the skills you have been working on – choose notes of the **phrygian mode** to use, return to the **tonic** frequently, and write **note heads** and **stems** confidently. Then set words to the music using **melismas**, shown by **slurs** next to the note heads and lines after the extended syllables.

RESEARCH / PRESENTATION – be inspired by history

Find out more about what life was like in a medieval convent. Present your findings as a poster, as a spoken presentation, or written down in the form of an interview with a medieval nun.

ART

Be inspired by the art of medieval Christianity, and design and colour in a stained-glass window. If you do not feel confident in creating your own design, here is one that you can colour in. Choose bright colours that would fill a room with light!

