



# the other voice

a portrait  
of hilda of whitby  
in words and music

text by  
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*The Other Voice: A Portrait of Hilda of Whitby* was first performed at Holy Cross Church, Kingston, N.Y., on October 24 and 25, 1998. Musical direction was by Barbara Pickhardt and stage direction was by Stephen Kitsakos. Set was designed by Leslie Bender and constructed by Ed Peters, costumes were created by Diana Haines, and graphic design was by Lynn Bondar, CRSR Designs.

HILDA	Barbara Hardgrave
ELFLEDA	Andrea Buegers
ROLF	Tom Miller
CAEDMON	Jeffrey Brown

Johana Hall and Ed Peters assisted in the staging. Members of the chorus were Virginia Barthel, Leeta Damron, Bill Damron, Judy Damron, Sheila France, Bill Goleeke, Diana Haines, and Renee Samuels.

# Notes

## *Scene I*

It is the late 660's, and spring is finally on its way to the cold coast of Northeast England. Hilda, beloved abbess of Whitby, esteemed far and wide as the most influential woman in Anglo-Saxon Christendom, is where she most likes to be: alone with God, taking refreshment and courage from her prayers. She is in her mid-fifties. Her early adult life remains undisclosed, but we know that at age thirty-three she took vows as a nun, ruled over the monastery of Hartlepool as abbess, and went on to transform a desolate Whitby cliff overlooking the North Sea into a thriving monastery for men and women, a center of learning, and a place visited by kings, princes, bishops and other seekers of her wisdom and advice. The famous Synod of Whitby where Celtic and Roman-trained Bishops argued their differences before King Oswy to settle the date of Easter, took place at Hilda's monastery in 664.

Hilda has also raised the Princess Elflada, whose father, King Oswy, gave the baby princess to the Christian God as a thank offering for letting him defeat the heathen king Penda in battle. Elflada, who will soon be taking her first vows as a nun, interrupts Hilda's prayers. The teenage princess has just come back from an ecstatic evening walk along the cliff, where she heard the ice cracking, saw Caedmon the herdsman delivering a new lamb, and stopped to chat with Rolf the Reeve, who oversees the workings of the monastery estate. The Princess admires Rolf because he "says interesting things," but Hilda is angered when she hears that the oversociable pagan reeve has raised doubts in the princess about her forthcoming marriage to Christ. Hilda reassures Elflada, and they sing a Sixth Century Latin hymn, "To Thee Before the Close of Day."

## *Scene II*

Alone again, Hilda warms herself into a fine, focused anger at Rolf the Reeve. She asks God why he sent her this troublesome man who, though he's a good manager, insinuates himself into people's personal business and forgets his station. Rolf is far too smart for his own good, "though not smart enough to see the good of you, Lord." Then she puts on her cloak and goes out into the night to confront the reeve, asking God to focus her wrath and sharpen her tongue to meet its target. Rolf apologizes for getting too personal with Elflada, but explains that it's not easy for a communicative fellow like himself to live with his brother Caedmon, who prefers

talking to animals. Hilda warns Rolf not to repeat the offense and is preparing to leave when she hears another voice, which is Caedmon making up a song to welcome a new lamb into the fold. She tells Rolf that a gift like his brother's is meant for more than lambs. If Caedmon were to sing the stories of the scriptures, she says, he would make more lambs for God. After she leaves, warning Rolf again to mend his ways or be fired, Rolf confronts Caedmon: If she asks you up there to sing, you'd better open your mouth and sing.

### *Scene III*

Hilda and Elfleda are rehearsing for Elfleda's clothing ceremony on the morrow, when she will take her first vows as a nun. Elfleda confesses that she is uncertain and that she isn't ready to leave Hilda. The abbess shores up the girl's doubts and, during their duet, Hilda's stronger purpose slowly turns the girl's nostalgic lament at leaving the carefree world of a young girl wandering the cliffs into a joyful acceptance of her destiny as the future abbess. After Elfleda exits, Hilda droops as she realizes that tomorrow she will be losing the child who was her closest and dearest earthly companion.

### *Scene IV*

Some months have gone by. Hilda has sorely missed her lost daughter who is now enclosed as a novice. One morning Rolf arrives unexpectedly at the monastery, dragging Caedmon. His brother has just had a heavenly visitor, he announces to the abbess. He prods the unwilling Caedmon to repeat to the abbess what the otherworldly voice instructed him to do. Hilda, that wisest of women, understands that she is being given a divine gift through her canny reeve. She has known God long enough to know He accomplishes His purposes through many voices, not all of them issuing from the mouths of the deserving or even the truthful. And she is seasoned enough in the ways of the world to know exactly how to put these "other voices" to work for God's glory. She laughs for the first time in months.

### *Scene V*

It is the year 680. The Abbess Hilda is now 66 and close to death. The abbess has been ill for six years. As Bede, her only known biographer<sup>1</sup> writing within 50 years of her death, when memories of her were still fresh, tells us: "It pleased the Author of our salvation to try her holy soul by a long sickness, in order that...her strength

might be perfected in weakness.” Knowing her time on earth is short, Hilda has sent for Rolf the Reeve, who has outlived Caedmon. We learn that Hilda taught Rolf to read so that he could “feed” the scriptures to his brother,<sup>2</sup> who was then inspired, as Hilda had foreseen, to make songs that reached the hearts of the unconverted. Through giving Rolf another voice, that of literacy, the wise abbess has given his irrepressible communicative energies a purposeful focus.

The concluding Requiem for Hilda, sung by the Abbess Elfleda, was inspired by text found in 2 Esdras 2:15–33 and by the final prayer of the Burial Service in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Mother, embrace thy children  
And bring them up with gladness;  
Make their feet as fast as a pillar;  
For I have chosen thee, saith the Lord.  
Those that be dead will I raise up again  
And bring them out of their graves.  
Fear not, thou mother of the children,  
For I have chosen thee, saith the Lord.

Be joyful, O thou mother, with thy children  
For I will deliver thee, saith the Lord.  
Remember thy children that sleep,  
For I shall bring them out of the sides  
Of the earth and shew mercy unto them.

Rest eternal grant to her, O Lord  
And let light perpetual shine upon her.

–Gail Godwin, October 12, 1998

<sup>1</sup> The Venerable Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, was completed in 731 at the monastery of Jarrow, 50 miles up the coast from Whitby. In Bede’s life of St. Cuthbert, he often quotes Cuthbert’s special friend, the Abbess Elfleda of Whitby, who most likely was also a source for what we know about her spiritual mother, Hilda.

<sup>2</sup> Bede tells us that Caedmon’s superior, the reeve, took him before the abbess to report Caedmon’s dream of a man ordering him to sing in his native tongue about the creation of all things. We have made the reeve and the cowherd brothers, which is not at all impossible. Bede tells us Caedmon later became a brother in the monastery, but he apparently never learned to read. According to Bede, Caedmon stored up in his memory all that was read to him, “and like an animal chewing the cud, turned it into such melodious verse that his delightful renderings turned his instructors into his audience.”

*The Other Voice* is Robert Starer's and Gail Godwin's eighth collaboration. The first was *The Last Lover*, premiered at the Caramoor Festival in 1975. Then came *Anna Margarita's Will*, recorded by CRI under a grant from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1976. *Journals of a Songmaker* was commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts for William Steinberg's farewell concert as music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony in 1976. Their fourth collaboration was *Apollonia*, a full-length opera written for the Minnesota Opera Company. Next came *Remembering Felix*, recorded by Robert J. Lurtsema for Albany Records in 1987, and *Letter to a Composer* (1996) recorded by Parnassus Records. In 1996 came *Gregory the Great*, a Vespers pageant with music and chant, performed at St. Gregory's Church, Woodstock, N.Y.

*The Other Voice: A Portrait of Hilda of Whitby in Words and Music* was written and composed during the spring of 1998.

## Cast

HILDA, Abbess of Whitby	Mezzo-Soprano
ELFLEDA, Princess and Nun	Soprano
ROLF the Reeve	Baritone
CAEDMON, Cowherd and Poet	Tenor

The accompaniment may be played on an organ, on the piano, or on a synthesizer with judiciously selected sound-images. The chorus used in the last scene is optional.





Scene I

*During the late 660's, at the abbey of Whitby, on the coast of Northumbria. Hilda, Abbess of Whitby, is alone at night in her chambers: in shadowed profile. No features should be seen. Just a veiled figure kneeling. Maybe a candle.*

*Gently flowing* (♩=ca. 69)

pp

3/4

Musical notation for the piano introduction, featuring a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is marked *pp* and begins with a half note G4, followed by eighth notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, and a quarter rest. The bass line is mostly silent, with a few chords in the final measure.

HILDA *pp*

Ah

Musical notation for the first vocal entry and piano accompaniment. The vocal line (treble clef) has a whole rest for the first four measures, then a half note G4 with the text "HILDA" above and "Ah" below. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) continues the melody from the introduction, with a *pp* dynamic. A large watermark "FOR REVIEW ONLY" is visible across the page.

ah

Ah ah

Musical notation for the second vocal entry and piano accompaniment. The vocal line (treble clef) has a half note G4 with "ah" below, followed by a whole rest, then a half note G4 with "Ah" below, and another half note G4 with "ah" below. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) continues the melody. A large watermark "FOR REVIEW ONLY" is visible across the page.

Musical notation for the final piano accompaniment. The piano continues the melody from the previous section, ending with a quarter rest in the final measure.

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(Lights, Hilda becomes visible)

Ah ah ah Ah

The first system of the musical score. The vocal line (treble clef) begins with a rest, followed by the syllables "Ah ah ah Ah" on a melodic line. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) consists of sustained chords in the right hand and bass notes in the left hand.

O God, here I am.

*p*

*8va*

The second system of the musical score. The vocal line has a rest followed by "O God, here I am." The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and chords in the left hand. Dynamics include *p* and *8va*.

Here I am. The roof leaks,

*pp*

*8va*

*pp*

The third system of the musical score. The vocal line continues with "Here I am. The roof leaks,". The piano accompaniment includes a melodic line in the right hand and chords in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp* and *8va*.

our sheep stray; Rolf the Reeve mends our

The fourth system of the musical score. The vocal line continues with "our sheep stray; Rolf the Reeve mends our". The piano accompaniment includes a melodic line in the right hand and chords in the left hand.

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*mf*

fen - ces. But pokes his nose in - to

*sva*

*p*

pla - ces that are not his busi - ness. *f*

*mf*

God, here I am. As if you did not know.

*p*

*p*

The wind steals our shin - gles.

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The musical score consists of three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system features a vocal line starting with a half rest followed by a quarter note, and a piano accompaniment with a half note chord. The second system continues the vocal line with a quarter note and a half note, and the piano accompaniment with a half note chord. The third system concludes the vocal line with a quarter note and a half note, and the piano accompaniment with a half note chord. Dynamics include *mf*, *p*, and *f*. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' in the first system.

*mf*  
My monks and nuns have spir - i - tual cris - es.

Rolf the Reeve lurks and snoops. *f* O

God I want-ed on - ly you in the beau-ti - ful si - lence.

HILDA: I wanted only you in the beautiful silence.

Not all these others: leaking roofs...falling  
shingles...straying sheep and straying souls. So many duties to  
so many personalities.

But here I am  
As you well know.

While Hilda speaks, beginning with “You put me here” and ending with “and I will miss her sorely,” the following music should be played softly without any attempt at synchronization with the words

The musical score is written for piano in 3/4 time and consists of five systems of staves. The first system begins with a dynamic marking of *pp* and features a melodic line in the right hand with a *Sva* (sustained) marking. The second system continues the melodic line with a *Sva* marking. The third system shows the bass line becoming more active. The fourth system features a complex texture with chords and moving lines in both hands. The fifth system concludes the piece with a final melodic phrase in the right hand and sustained chords in the left hand, also marked with *Sva*.

You put me here  
in this wild sea-swept place  
even the Romans abandoned.  
You said build,  
I built.  
You said teach,  
I taught.  
You said mediate  
between men bickering over the date of Easter  
I opened my doors to them  
and let them fight it out.  
You said be mother to a baby princess  
and raise her and teach her my ways.  
I have been her mother  
though it hasn't always been easy  
and soon she will leave  
and I will miss her sorely.

But here I am, as always,

As if you didn't know  
you who knit me together in my own mother's womb

What assignment do you have next for me written in  
your book?

*(Elfreda bursts in, wearing cloak, out of breath; stops short when she sees Hilda kneeling)*

ELFLEDA: Sorry, Mother. You were praying.

HILDA *(rising from her knees and turning to face the audience full-front for the first time; we see a wise, open, and humorous face.):*  
Half-praying, half-fretting, my daughter.

*(She opens her arms to the girl, who rushes to embrace her.)*

HILDA: But you're cold, Elf.

*Hilda rubs the girl's cheeks and hands briskly.*

ELFLEDA (Knocks back the hood of her cloak; she's spilling over with radiant youth and energy.):

The musical score is set in 2/4 time and consists of three systems. The first system begins with the tempo marking *Andante* and the character name ELFLEDA. The vocal line starts with a rest, followed by the lyrics "I had a fine walk un-der the". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the bass clef. The second system continues the vocal line with "ear - ly moon. Lit - tle teas - ings of". The piano accompaniment includes a melodic line in the treble clef and continues the eighth-note pattern in the bass. The third system concludes with the lyrics "spring ev - ery - where. I heard the". The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the treble clef and continues the eighth-note pattern in the bass. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). A watermark "FOR REVISION" is visible across the score.

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ice crack - ing be - low the cliffs and dark

This system contains the first two measures of the piece. The vocal line begins with a half note 'ice', followed by a quarter note 'crack - ing', a quarter rest, and then a half note 'be - low the cliffs and dark'. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and a melody in the right hand that mirrors the vocal line.

waves lick - ing at the bro - ken ice piec - es.

This system contains the next two measures. The vocal line starts with a half note 'waves', followed by a quarter note 'lick - ing at the bro - ken ice piec - es.', and a quarter rest. The piano accompaniment continues with a similar eighth-note bass line and a right-hand melody that includes some chromatic movement.

Ev - en the mud smelled sweet; ev - en the

This system contains the next two measures. The vocal line begins with a half note 'Ev - en the mud', followed by a quarter note 'smelled sweet;', and a quarter rest. The piano accompaniment features a more active bass line with triplets and a right-hand melody that includes a triplet of eighth notes. Dynamics include *mf* and *p*.

mud smelled sweet.

This system contains the final two measures. The vocal line starts with a half note 'mud smelled sweet.', followed by a quarter rest. The piano accompaniment features a more active bass line with triplets and a right-hand melody that includes a triplet of eighth notes. Dynamics include *p*.



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*Freely*

What were you fret - ting a - bout, Moth - er?

(spoken)

Not me, I hope. *(humorously, but with a great deal of history implied)* Well, then what?

HILDA

Not you- this time.

HILDA: Just the usual care-wanderings of an abbess. Leaking roofs, problems of certain monks and nuns... menus for important visitors... lost sheep...

ELFLEDA

*a tempo*

*p* *mf*

Lost sheep... We've got a new lamb.

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I heard it bleat - ing: I heard it bleat - ing.

Caed-mon, the herds-man, must have just pulled it out of its

moth-er. He was croon - ing to it; he was

croon - - - ing to it in that half-wit way—

(Hugs herself)

— of his.

*p*

*f* *mf* *p*

What a night! What a night! What a night! Oh, and

*f* *mf* *p*

*f* *mf*

Rolf the Reeve, Rolf the Reeve was

*f* *mf*

The musical score consists of three systems. Each system has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment is written in two staves (treble and bass clef). The vocal line is in a single staff. The lyrics are: "— of his.", "What a night! What a night! What a night! Oh, and", and "Rolf the Reeve, Rolf the Reeve was". Dynamic markings include *f* (forte), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *p* (piano). A large diagonal watermark "FOR REVIEW ONLY" is present across the middle of the page.

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*p*  
mend-ing our fenc - es un - der the moon - light  
HILDA (*under her breath*)  
Or wait - ing for

The first system of the musical score consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a treble clef and a dynamic marking of *p*. The lyrics are "mend-ing our fenc - es un - der the moon - light". The piano accompaniment starts with a treble clef and a dynamic marking of *p*. A watermark "FOOTREVIEW.COM" is visible across the score.

you to pass.

The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a treble clef and lyrics "you to pass.". The piano accompaniment has a treble and bass clef. A watermark "FOOTREVIEW.COM" is visible across the score.

(She addresses the girl directly):

*mf*  
Caed - mon is - n't a half - wit; he sim - ply does not feel at

The third system features a change in tempo and meter. The vocal line starts with a treble clef, a dynamic marking of *mf*, and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are "Caed - mon is - n't a half - wit; he sim - ply does not feel at". The piano accompaniment has a treble and bass clef, a dynamic marking of *mf*, and a 3/4 time signature. A watermark "FOOTREVIEW.COM" is visible across the score.

*f*  
home with hu - man be - ings;

*p*  
he simp - ly does not feel at home with hu - man

be - ings.

*pp*

ELFLEDA: I stopped to chat with Rolf. He's so perceptive. He says things that make me go away thinking.

HILDA (*warily*): And what have you come home thinking tonight?

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*pp*

*pp*

He said if-

This system contains two systems of music. The first system is a piano accompaniment in 2/4 time, starting with a *pp* dynamic. It features a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The second system shows a vocal line with a rest followed by the lyrics "He said if-" and a piano accompaniment with a *pp* dynamic.

ELFLEDA: (*plunges ahead*)—if the gods had given *him* a daughter like me, he wouldn't have given her away to the Christian God just so he could win a bloody old battle.

*Piú mosso*

*f*

HILDA

*f*

Rolf should stick to his own af - fairs.

This system contains two systems of music. The first system is a piano accompaniment in 2/4 time, marked *Piú mosso* and *f*. The second system shows a vocal line for Hilda, marked *f*, with the lyrics "Rolf should stick to his own af - fairs." and a piano accompaniment in 2/4 time.

*f*  
A reeve's busi- ness is dif- ferent from a king's.

HILDA (*visibly reining in her anger*): And the God your father promised you to is evolutions away from Rolf's tree and thunder spirits.

*a tempo*  
*p*  
*p*  
I know, Moth- er. For- give me.

*p*  
I just wish I knew God more in- ti- mate- ly.

ELFLEDA: Since I *have* been promised to him. Sometimes it seems like... well, just an arranged marriage I'm going toward: The Princess Elfleda promised to a king she's never met. (*Anguished pause.*) Will I ever meet him, Mother? Can even *you* promise me that?

HILDA: Come here, Elfleda. I love you as my own child. You slept in my chamber when you were scarcely older than that lamb born tonight.

ELFLEDA: I love you, too, Mother. More than anything. If only I could love God half as much as I love you. But I don't know God. I know you.

*a tempo*

*p*

HILDA: How many hours would you say you have talked to me, ever since you could talk?

ELFLEDA: How many...? (*Stymied.*) Oh, impossible to count.

HILDA: When you have talked to God as many hours as you've talked to me, my child, I promise you will love him better than you are able to imagine now.

ELFLEDA: Not better than you.

HILDA: Far better. It's a love you will grow into.

ELFLEDA: Why do I feel so sad?

HILDA: Because you're growing. Come, we've talked enough.



HILDA: Kneel here with me and let us talk to him together.

HILDA

To thee be - fore the close of day, Cre - a - tor of the world, we  
 pray. From all ill dreams de - fend our sight, from  
 fears and ter - rors of the night; with - hold from  
 us our ghost - ly foe, that spot of sin we may not know.

ELFLEDA *p*

To thee be - fore the

HILDA

To thee be - fore the close of day,

close of day, Cre - a - tor of the world, we  
 Cre - a - tor of the world, we pray. From

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*mf* pray, from all ill dreams de-fend our sight, from  
*f* all ill dreams, ill dreams de-fend our sight,

all ill dreams de-fend our sight. From fears and  
*mf* all ill dreams de-fend our sight,

ter-rors of the night; with-hold from  
*p* from fears and ter-rors of the night; *pp* with-hold from

us our ghost-ly foe, that spot of sin we may not  
 us our ghost-ly foe that

know.

spot of sin we may not know.

*pp*

This system contains the first vocal line and the beginning of the piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a whole note rest, followed by a half note, and then a quarter note. The piano accompaniment is mostly rests, with a few notes appearing in the final measure.

This system continues the piano accompaniment from the first system. It features a mix of eighth and quarter notes in both the treble and bass staves, with some chords and rests.

*mf* *p*

This system continues the piano accompaniment. It includes dynamic markings of *mf* and *p*. The music consists of various note values and rests in both staves.

(Hilda embraces the girl and sends her off to bed.)

*pp*

This system continues the piano accompaniment. It features a *pp* dynamic marking. The music is primarily composed of chords and rests in both staves.

*ppp* *ritard.*

This system concludes the piano accompaniment. It includes dynamic markings of *ppp* and *ritard.* The music features chords and moving lines in both staves, ending with a double bar line.