

Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction 3/e

Sample Essay for Chapter 1

Compare and contrast the use of musical elements in the Kyrie settings of Mary Lou Williams, Sara Parkman, and Hildegard von Bingen.

STOP and write your essay before scrolling down.

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Note: This essay assumes that the course is covering music general education concepts and thus a basic understanding of musical elements is needed. When “elements of music” are referenced, you should attempt to address aspects of melody, harmony, form, timbre, or rhythm to the best of your ability.

Mary Lou Williams, Sara Parkman and Hildegard von Bingen all wrote musical works that reference the Medieval “Kyrie” from the Christian liturgy. **Bingen**, a Medieval nun, wrote what is considered a traditional setting of the Kyrie. The **form** is ABA. When the text shifts to “Christe eleison,” the melody changes. The **melody** itself is very melismatic, featuring many notes per syllable. There is no **harmony** even when multiple voices are involved.

Mary Lou **Williams' setting** of the Kyrie from her Mass is quite different. While she does use repeated text (in English, not Latin) she does so using a call and response **form**. She repeats the first section three times, men versus women, before shifting to the "Christ Have Mercy" "B" section, also using call and response. The final Kyrie still features call and response, but is more improvisatory. Unlike Hildegard's Kyrie, there is a **rhythmic** drive in Williams' work, propelled in part by a drum set. Also unlike Hildegard, Williams uses **harmony**, provided by an instrumental ensemble.

Sara Parkman is a living composer who leaned on ancient spiritual traditions to create a modern folk Kyrie setting featuring electronic **timbres** as a backdrop. Parkman's work begins against a static synthesized opening where "Kyrie" is sung slowly, almost chant-like. Like Hildegard, Parkman repeats the text, and it becomes increasingly melismatic. Parkman then departs from the more traditional style as she moves into a three-part **form** (ABA) where she shifts to Swedish text and the **rhythm** picks up energy. A chorus is added to create more **harmony**.

Although these three works are quite different sounding on the surface, it is interesting to see that all are connected in some manner to an ancient Medieval tradition that continues to impact musical composition today.