



# Performance and the Middle English Romance (Studies in Medieval Romance)

*Linda Marie Zaerr*

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Although English medieval minstrels performed gestes, a genre closely related to romance, often playing the harp or the fiddle, the question of if, and how, Middle English romance was performed has been hotly debated. Here, the performance tradition is explored by combining textual, historical and musicological scholarship with practical experience from a noted musician. Using previously unrecognised evidence, the author reconstructs a realistic model of minstrel performance, showing how a simple melody can interact with the text, and vice versa. She argues that elements in Middle English romance which may seem simplistic or repetitive may in fact be incomplete, as missing an integral musical dimension; metrical irregularities, for example, may be relics of sophisticated rhythmic variation that make sense only with music. Overall, the study offers both a more accurate comprehension of minstrel performance, and a deeper appreciation of the romances themselves.

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