

# Research for the Performing Arts

Teleri the Well-Prepared

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**Research** is a method by which you answer questions, investigate unknowns, and educate yourself. It can be done at any depth.

## Teleri's Four-Step Research Process

**Goal-Setting:** What question are you asking? Why do you want to know? What do you hope to get out of this? What constraints (time, money, interest) are in effect? What requirements do you have for the end result?

**Information Search:** Finding resources to give you the information to help you answer the questions. Sometimes the information search answers all your questions without further interpretation needed (e.g., you found a 'how to' guide and decided that was all you wanted). Sometimes the information is ambiguous and requires you to interpret or synthesize it.

**Process:** You interpret/synthesize your information and apply it to your artistic problem. You do your art and make your thing.

**Self-Evaluation:** How well did you meet your goals? What have you learned? What would you do differently? What achievement are you proud of?

## **Goal-Setting for Performance**

Frequently involves questions of accessibility (to audience) vs. authenticity. There is no magic right answer, and what we can authenticate is limited. But it isn't zero, either - we can see a sort of plausible envelope into which performance can be fit. Have an idea of how many guidelines you're willing to break.

## **Information Search for Performance**

### Storytelling

I don't know much about resources for storytelling, so I started this section of notes with the two things I am aware of:

Performing Medieval Narrative Today

<http://mednar.org/>

Evelyn Birge Vitz , Nancy Freeman Regalado , Marilyn Lawrence (Eds). Performing Medieval Narrative. D.S. Brewer 2005. ISBN 978-1843840398.

Then I thought, let me include some information on the book:

This book provides the first comprehensive study of the performance of medieval narrative, using examples from England and the Continent and a variety of genres to examine the crucial question of whether - and how - medieval narratives were indeed intended for performance. Moving beyond the familiar dichotomy between oral and written literature, the various contributions emphasize the range and power of medieval performance traditions, and demonstrate that knowledge of the modes and means of performance is crucial for appreciating medieval narratives. The book is divided into four main parts, with each essay engaging with a specific issue or work, relating it to larger questions about performance. It first focuses on representations of the art of medieval performers of narrative. It then examines relationships between narrative performances and the material books that inspired, recorded, or represented them. The next section studies performance features inscribed in texts and the significance of considering performability. The volume concludes with contributions by present-day professional performers who bring medieval narratives to life for contemporary audiences. Topics covered include orality, performance, storytelling, music, drama, the material book, public reading, and court life.

And its table of contents:

Part I: Medieval Performers of Narrative and their Art

Sioned Davies: "'He was the best teller of tales in the world': Performing Medieval Welsh Narrative"

Joyce Coleman: "The Complaint of the Makers: Wynnere and Wastoure and the 'Misperformance Topos' in Medieval England"

John Ahern: "Dioneo's Repertory: Performance and Writing in Boccaccio's Decameron"

Part II: Medieval Performance and the Book

Keith Busby: "Mise en texte as Indicator of Oral Performance in Old French Verse Narrative"

Evelyn Birge Vitz: "Erotic Reading in the Middle Ages: Performance and Re-performance of Romance"

Marilyn Lawrence: "Oral Performance of Written Narrative in the Medieval French Romance *Ysaÿe le Triste*"

Nancy Freeman Regalado: "Performing Romance: Arthurian Interludes in Sarrasin's *Le roman du Hem* (1278)"

Part III: Performability and Medieval Narrative Genres

Brian J. Levy: "Performing Fabliaux"

Adrian P. Tudor: "Preaching, Storytelling, and the Performance of Short Pious Narratives"

Kenneth Varty: "Reading, Reciting, and Performing the Renart"

Karl Reichl: "Turkic Bard and Medieval Entertainer: What a Living Epic Tradition Can Tell Us about Oral Performance of Narrative in the Middle Ages"

Part IV: Perspectives from Contemporary Performers

Benjamin Bagby: "Beowulf, the Edda, and the Performance of Medieval Epic: Notes from the Workshop of a Reconstructed 'Singer of Tales'"

(Available online:

[http://bagbybeowulf.com/background/PerformingMedNarr\\_13.pdf](http://bagbybeowulf.com/background/PerformingMedNarr_13.pdf))

He also has a great Beowulf performance on DVD.

Linda Marie Zaerr: "The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell: Performance and Intertextuality in Middle English Popular Romance"

Anne Azéma: "'Une aventure vous dirai': Performing Medieval Narrative"

Then I thought, what else could I find? I started with something basic:

Google "Medieval Storytelling."

- Sioned Davies. "Storytelling in Medieval Wales." *Oral Tradition*, 7(2), 1992, 231-57. [http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/7ii/4\\_davies.pdf](http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/7ii/4_davies.pdf)
- Cariadoc's Miscellany: Period Sources for Storytelling. [http://www.pbm.com/~lindah/cariadoc/period\\_sources\\_for\\_story\\_telling.html](http://www.pbm.com/~lindah/cariadoc/period_sources_for_story_telling.html) (Mostly story resources but also a few notes on presentation/staging.)
- 2 different college syllabi for classes about medieval storytelling (although the class seems more focused on the stories rather than the performance)
- YouTube video of someone performing medieval narrative: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8U4DkjbEUWA>

Those weren't bad, but most of the results were about medieval story composition/writing, not performance. So I added that word:

Google "Medieval Storytelling Performance"

- "Scholarly articles for 'medieval storytelling performance' right at top of page!
  - Head over to scholar.google.com
  - WOW a whole bunch of articles!
- Back to regular Google
- Patrick Ball and others: historically informed production of Tristan and Iseult with audio clips [http://www.patrickball.com/pages/shows/show\\_flamelove.php](http://www.patrickball.com/pages/shows/show_flamelove.php)
- Sioned Davis (hey we saw her before!) "From Storytelling to Sermons: The Oral Narrative Tradition in Wales." *Oral Tradition*, 18(2), 2003. "As someone whose main interest is storytelling in medieval Wales, orality, aurality, and performance are key issues in any analysis of the Middle Welsh prose corpus, especially in matters relating to style

and structure.”

- Two Googles in, and we're starting to see 'names' in the field. And she's one of the contributors to the first book. Looking up authors who have published something that's useful is a good way to find more things that are useful.
- Thor Ewing's website - he is a professional storyteller working with medieval narrative. Might be interesting to see what his recreations look like.  
<http://www.historicalarts.co.uk/thor/stories.html>
- Evelyn Birge Vitz. (Hey we saw her name before too!) "Tales with Guts: A "Raesic" Aesthetic in Medieval French Storytelling." *The Drama Review*, 52(4), Winter 2008, 145-173.
  - "Scholars of medieval Europe tend to see aural performances of narrative works as just medieval "books on tape" with a disembodied reader. But the auditory element was often only a small part of the live performance. Narrative works in medieval Europe were performed, and storytellers engaged audiences' bodies and emotions as well as their minds. Richard Schechner's "Rasaesthetics" helps us recognize the strong emotional flavors and dynamism inherent in the performance tradition of many medieval stories."

Ideas for More Googling, based on the summaries and blurbs. We look for keywords that sound like technical jargon used by academics that will distinguish the articles we want from random Internet content:

oral narrative, oral poetry, oral tradition; any of those with "performace" added; Sioned Davis, Evelyn Birge Vitz; Rasaesthetics; medieval performance tradition; et cetera...

### Music

Timothy McGee. *Medieval and Renaissance Music: A Performer's Guide*. University of Toronto Press. 1985.

A general handbook addressing most of the basic musical matters needed to put together a performance. Out of print, available used from \$15 on Amazon.

Timothy McGee. *The Sound of Medieval Song: Ornamentation and Vocal Style according to the Treatises*. Oxford University Press, 1998.

I don't have this one, but I covet it badly. At \$99, it is an investment.

Timothy McGee, ed.. *Singing Early Music. Singing Early Music: The Pronunciation of European Languages in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Indiana University Press, 2004.

Detailed information on how to pronounce medieval languages. Comes with a CD to help you hear it. \$40 list price.

Timothy McGee, ed. *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Early Drama, Art and Music Monograph series, vol. 30. Western Michigan University Medieval, 2003.

Very interesting articles on very hard to authenticate practices. Only \$15. Volume 30? Makes me wonder what the others are about..

Timothy McGee. *Instruments and their Music in the Middle Ages*. Ashgate, 2008.

A collection of some of the most influential articles on medieval musical performance, with a price tag to match (almost \$350). Probably want to get this one from the library. (I have not read it myself.)

Ross Duffin, ed. *A Performer's Guide to Medieval Music*. Indiana University Press, 2002.

\$36. Collection of essays by various authors on types of medieval music, instruments and voices, and essential musical theory. Similar to the 1985 McGee but I'd rather have both.

Christopher Page. *Voices and Instruments of the Middle Ages, The Christian West and Its Singers*. Yet more information on and ideas about how songs were sung and how instruments were played.

Richard Hoppin. *Medieval Music*. Kinds of music (religious and secular), musical theory; standard graduate text. Also has an accompanying anthology of tunes.)

Cambridge Companion to Medieval Music - I don't have it

And so many others!

### Narrative Poetry

This overlaps some with the storytelling - folks in the Middle Ages were as likely to have their narratives in verse as in prose.

Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales*.

So a bunch of academics were arguing over whether or not Homer was an oral poet. And a guy thought, "Hey, let's go and study a living oral tradition and see if it has any unique features! And then see if those features are in Homer!" And then his student wrote up the results in this seminal work. Oral-formulaic theory is no longer the be-all and end-all of oral performance, but it is still a force to be reckoned with.

John Miles Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*

This is meant to be an introductory text, and the tone is sometimes a little "GOSH GEE WHIZ". You'd think the author had never seen a live performance - a play, a concert, anything. But he contrasts and compares some very different kinds of oral performance (a Nuyorican poetry slam, Himalayan oral poetry, ancient epics) and points out the sorts of things you can learn thereby.

Foley has published a huge number of more sober articles and also maintains a very interesting/useful website "Center for Studies of Oral Tradition,"

<http://www.oraltradition.org/>

### Other Poetry (and also some music)

Probably your best bet is to search by historical performer type: Anglo-Saxon scop, Icelandic skald, Occitan troubador, northern French trouvère, Welsh bardd, German minnesanger, etc. The context and culture which would have influenced their performances will be best highlighted in books specifically about them.

So on my bookshelf I have: Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry, The Mead-Hall, The Anglo-Saxon Scop (a reprint of a 1903 Master's thesis now free online from Google Books!), Ben Bagby's *Beowulf* DVD, Christopher Page's PhD dissertation on the playing of the Germanic lyre (also free online) and a reprint of a translation of three music theory treatises from early period.

### An Expensive Hint:

Amazon.com's "Customers who bought this item also bought" feature. If I go and stumble across "The World of the Troubadors," it recommends a host of other books, at least four of which look possibly relevant to someone who wanted to research the performance practice of the troubadours.

## **Repertoire**

### YouTube

Great for ideas. Many performances of actual medieval music, poetry, stories. Just Google what you find because there's also lots of performances of "medieval" stuff that's not.

### ChoralWiki

[http://www0.cpd.org/wiki/index.php/Category:Musical\\_eras](http://www0.cpd.org/wiki/index.php/Category:Musical_eras)

Bam, medieval and Renaissance sheet music. Free.

### Google

Ask Google. Type in what you want, as general or as specific as you know. "medieval short stories for kids;" "Renaissance war poems;" "12th century love songs" You may not get what you want, but you'll start seeing what's there. *There is a lot there.*

And of course, the library. But you can get really far these days with just an Internet connection. It's the Information Superhighway, right?

## **Secondary Sources**

### [scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com)

A good tool for searching for secondary sources (academic journal articles). Write down the reference and bring it to a library. A university may have the journal; your local county library can get it via Interlibrary Loan.

### Your Nearby University Library

They have amazing journal databases you can search just like the Internet. A research librarian will be happy to show you how to use the system.

### **Primary Sources: Everywhere and Nowhere**

Aside from musical treatises, information on performance can be found scattershot throughout medieval artifacts. Maybe this history contains an account of a performance in it! Maybe this manuscript has a picture of David on his harp! Maybe these palace or town records say when performers were hired, how many of what types, and what they were paid! Maybe this work of fiction shows the characters performing!

Or maybe they don't. It can be long and exhausting work combing through primary sources, looking for glimpses of performance. The good books and secondary sources contain many references to primary sources, and they are a good place to get references of where to look if you want to examine the evidence for yourself, to draw your own conclusions.

Or dive in and let us know what you find!