



**John Haines.** *Music in Films on the Middle Ages: Authenticity vs. Fantasy.* Routledge Research in Music Series. New York: Routledge, 2013. xvii + 229 pp. \$148.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-82412-5.

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## Music: A Crucial Part of Building a Historical, Imaginative Distance

John Haines's work will be well known to those with an interest in early music and to those who trace the way in which medieval music has been represented in the intervening centuries between its original composition and the present day. In this important book, Haines turns his gaze to films featuring the Middle Ages and to the tropes—musical and visual—that have developed to conjure their sound world. The distant historical past has always provided a rich stimulus for film directors and their creative teams, perhaps attracted by the period's paradoxical blend of horror, decadence, religious zeal, pestilence, romance, mythology, and heroism. As Haines shows, much of the attraction of the Middle Ages lay in its potential for various forms of nostalgia, a welcome escape from the realities of present-day life. Music was a crucial part of building a historical, imaginative distance.

Bringing some order to the musical treatments of such diverse topics and genres is Haines's first challenge: his approach—and it is a structurally satisfying one—is to group his selection of musical signifiers of the past into broad thematic categories: the bell, the horn call and trumpet fanfare, court and dance music, the singing minstrel, chant, and the riding warrior. The engaging opening discussion introduces further frames (chivalry, pastoralism, Orientalism, satire, the supernatural, and primitivism). Each of the themes is then discussed in an extensive chapter of its own. The films under consideration stretch from the earliest movies to 2012, the year in which

*The Hobbit* was on general release. The apparent stability of musical clichés across such a staggering chronological and generic spread supports Haines's method.

Haines's study of the singing minstrel archetype exemplifies his approach within the wider text. The film composer is left with little choice other than to use his/her imagination to depict minstrelsy, since no evidence remains of actual minstrel song. This is quite different from the case of religious chant in film. There composers can either use authentic texted melodies of the past or choose to create entirely new ones. The minstrel is typically portrayed singing a basic lyric, self-accompanied on a lute. Some composers attempted to evoke authenticity through their use of instrumentation that was sufficiently suggestive of ancient instruments. Yet even Miklós Rózsa, who had trained in early music in Germany and held authenticity in high regard, avoided creating underscores dominated by relentless parallel fifths or other "musicological oddities" (p. 99). The stylistic simplicity of minstrel song in film is a response to expectations of primitivism in the songs of the past, and popular understandings of the relatively unsophisticated cultural literacy associated with lower-class musicians. Haines links this aspect of minstrel song to the late Victorian reception of twelfth-century secular song, when published editions often presented melodies in basic triple time over a light, non-harmonically complex piano accompaniment. The naive style of the songs

minstrels performed at court, or around a fire, is analyzed in a manner that will be meaningful to musicologists and wider audiences alike. Relevant music examples are found throughout the book, but they are typically very short; more extensive examples, perhaps avoided for copyright reasons, would have allowed the reader to see the structural components of minstrel songs more readily, supporting the argument of primitivism. Haines provides specific timings for the appearance of musical motifs in his description, pointing the reader toward the full melodies and orchestrations.

As Haines outlines in his discussion of campfire minstrel songs, the sound world of the Middle Ages is conjured not only by the traditional components of “music”, as discussed by this book—melody, harmony, timbre, rhythm, instrumentation—but also by sound and sound design more generally: the acoustic space of a dungeon, for example, is created for the modern audience through the sound of clanging iron bars, through the echoes of footsteps in cavernous stone prisons, and by the screaming of captives. The exploration of such themes as the “singing minstrel” or “chant” also emphasizes a masculine sound world at odds both with the presence of nuns

chanting in historical convents and with the presence of women’s vocality more generally in film. Haines notes exceptions to this singly gendered discourse, for example, remarking on the use of male and female voices in the performance of a Gloria chant in Franco Zeffirelli’s score to *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* (1973). But the masculinity of active musicianship in films on the Middle Ages is a topic that merits greater focus. After all, although historically there were female minstrels across Europe, composers’ perpetuation of the singing cowboy/singing (male) minstrel exemplum has continued to paint the past largely through a single-gendered lens.

As Haines himself points out in *Music in Films on the Middle Ages*, infinitely more people will engage with films referencing the Middle Ages (whether *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* [1991], *Shrek* [2001], or *Black Knight* [2001]) than will ever pick up a book on the period’s music. Haines’s stimulating and elegantly written study may well convince a few more individuals of the merits of researching the historical basis of film music. It presents a persuasive, richly detailed, and thoughtful exploration of the tropes of cinematic music.

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