
About the Cover



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The general caption for our cover image, appearing among other royalty-free stock photos at 123RF.com, is ‘Unidentified musicians in medieval clothes play ancient musical instruments at festival Iron hailstones.’ We know there was an ‘Iron Hailstones’ festival on 6 August 2011 in Izborsk in the Pskov area of Russia, but it is unclear if this shot dates precisely from that festival. Numerous photos of bagpipers at festivals grace this site and others, suggesting perhaps that the bagpipe is the chosen instrument for many amateurs who get a kick out of dressing up medieval in public. The instrument is part of the costume, as in Carolyn Dinshaw’s image in *How Soon is Now?* of the ‘Young man in bathrobe with recorder’ who ‘threw on a bathrobe because he wanted to go to a fair’ (Dinshaw, 2012, x).

There are many jokes about how badly pipers play, or more politely, how difficult it is to play the bagpipes well: ‘Q. How do you get two bagpipes to play



a perfect unison? A. Shoot one,' or 'Q. What's the definition of a minor second? A. Two bagpipes playing in unison' (Bagpipe Jokes, n.d.). Bagpipes, like Scottish kilts, are the butt of many jokes, some with sexual overtones. The bagpipes of Chaucer's Miller are commonly discussed in terms of their phallic imagery rather than out of interest in their music.

The young man in the photo that is the cover of this *postmedieval* issue is wearing sunglasses, highlighting the trans-temporal contradictions of his modern/medieval status. In his defiance of fixed categories, he is a cousin of the ape-doctors, snail-knights, and fiddle-playing cats of medieval manuscript marginalia. This is a medievalism laughing at itself, dressing up to have fun, unconcerned about decorum of person, time, or place – for example, the notion that a monk would skip chanting in the cloister to play profane music at a fair. Nevertheless, our piper's demeanour as musician is serious. He is absorbed in his task, workmanlike. The photographer has captured him on the inbreath, cheeks sucked in, keeping pressure on the bag to sustain a distinctive sound that medieval and modern listeners alike would recognise.

Beyond these specifics our image works also as a generic illustration of a practical medievalism which takes a musical turn. We know nothing of the music he plays, but he represents for us a tribute to those who enrich contemporary music-making and contemporary life with echoes of the imagined medieval.

References

- Unidentified Musicians in Medieval Clothes Play Ancient Musical Instruments at Festival Iron Hailstones. *123RF.com*. https://www.123rf.com/photo_25683716_unidentified-musicians-in-medieval-clothes-play-ancient-musical-instruments-at-festival-iron-hailstones.html
- Dinshaw, C. *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.
- Bagpipe Jokes. *Jokes4us.com*. <http://www.jokes4us.com/miscellaneousjokes/musicjokes/bagpipejokes.html>

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