

Introduction

David Lindley and Bill Barclay

Music has played a vital part in theatrical entertainment since the very beginnings of drama. The theatre of Shakespeare's own time was no exception, and music has continued to make a highly significant contribution to the performance of his plays up to the present day. Exactly what sort of contribution, however, has been dictated by a variety of factors: by the number and range of musicians available; by the changing architecture of theatres themselves; by the historical evolution of musical styles; by the changing expectations of audiences; and latterly through the influences of film and television, and of sophisticated technology. It is the aim of this collection of essays to explore the nature and implication of these developments from the time of the plays' composition through to contemporary performance both on film and in the theatre.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries competition and rivalry between the outdoor, amphitheatre playhouses and their mostly adult actors, and the more select and expensive indoor theatres, where companies of boy actors performed, was an important stimulus to musical activity. Adult actors were, as William Lyons's essay demonstrates, often versatile musicians, and probably played a range of instruments not dissimilar to those of the civic bands, the waits, who themselves might be employed in the theatres on an occasional basis. The boys' companies, initially at least made up of choristers, and performing less frequently than their adult competitors, offered more extensive musical fare. The practical necessities of the indoor theatres dictated that there needed to be breaks at the ends of each act to attend to the candles, and these breaks were covered by music; but the boys also seem to have offered a pre-show concert of some elaboration, as well as offering rather more songs as part of the plays' entertainment. It may be that the flurry of songs in Shakespeare's turn-of-the-century comedies reflects an attempt to compete with the more music-heavy offerings of the 'little eyases' (as Hamlet calls them), but in any event,

after the King's Men took over the Blackfriars hall theatre in 1608 the musical practices at both kinds of theatre, as Simon Smith and Lucy Munro argue, gradually converged.

There are a number of ways in which the issues raised in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reverberate right up to the present day. In the first place, theatrical competition has always been a spur to innovatory performance practice, and the increasing musical elaboration of the post-Restoration theatre reflects the competition between the two principal theatrical companies as Katherine Lowerre's detailed study of the years 1695–1705 indicates.¹ In the later eighteenth century, as theatres were enlarged, similar rivalries were an important stimulus to the staging of ever-more extensive musical processions, as Michael Burden demonstrates. In the nineteenth century there was continued reliance on the crowded stages and extended musical interludes that Val Brodie's essay describes.

Secondly, the questions of who, exactly, played the music and of where they were situated in the theatre, is an open one in the seventeenth century, and remains significant in considering the way music functions in Shakespearean performance throughout the centuries. In the Jacobean and Caroline theatre the musicians would not have been numerous. Any notion of an 'orchestra' lay in the future, and only in the Royal Music was it possible to collect together a sizeable amalgamation of the different groups of instrumentalists. The forty-two voices and instruments that played for Campion's *Lord Hay's Masque* of 1607, or the sixty or so musicians that Bulstrode Whitlocke managed to put together for Shirley's *Triumph of Peace*, presented by the Inns of Court to Charles and Henrietta Maria in 1634, could not be imitated in the public theatre. Yet, though the range of instruments in the children's theatres was initially more extensive than that to be found in the adult amphitheatres, after 1608 there was a more varied instrumental palette across the theatrical world, as William Lyons makes clear.

After the Restoration the makeup of the theatre band changed, with increased reliance on strings, and the number of players grew. Curtis Price suggests that between twelve and eighteen players made up the usual theatre band in the Restoration – though it might on occasion have grown to as many as thirty musicians.² This remained the standard

¹ K Lowerre, *Music and Musicians on the London Stage, 1695–1705* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

² C. A. Price, *Music in the Restoration Theatre* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 81–2.

Introduction

3

ensemble for smaller theatres, but in the latter part of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, the predominance of operatic entertainment at the principal theatres, and the expansion of processions, tableaux and interludes in the performances, called for larger instrumental resources, so that one might end up with substantial forces both in an orchestra pit and simultaneously on stage.³ Henry Irving's orchestra in the late nineteenth century consisted of thirty to thirty-five players.⁴ An important question then concerns the location of these the musicians. Simon Smith shows that the old assumption that musicians in the seventeenth century were confined to a music-room above the stage is a simplification of theatrical reality, but nonetheless, the fact that musicians could be curtained off, separated physically from the action they accompanied, marked an important moment of change.

During the Restoration, Curtis Price suggests, musicians might still have occupied boxes at the side of the proscenium arch, but increasingly were placed in the pit, immediately in front of the thrust stage that was still part of standard theatre architecture.⁵ There, sitting facing the stage, they would have been visible to the audience. As the century progressed, and into the nineteenth century, so the orchestra pit, sometimes extending below the stage and largely out of sight of the audience, became conventional. The physical and visual separation of instrumentalists from the stage action is significant for the understanding of the ways in which music might work in the theatre. From the sixteenth century onwards the expectation of music before the play and between the acts embodied a distinction between music which is part of the action of the play itself – what film criticism calls 'diegetic' music – and music which is simply part of the experience of going to the theatre. For much of this time it was not required that such music – properly called 'incidental' – should connect directly to the action of the play that it introduced and interleaved. In the eighteenth century and beyond entr'actes might be occupied by substantial musical compositions, or by songs or dances with no relevance to the play. John Marston, however, writing for the boys' companies in the early seventeenth century, seems already to have wanted the 'act music' to provide some kind of affective continuity with the action that it followed or preceded, and over time composers increasingly attempted in their overtures and entr'actes to comment on, or prepare for the drama itself.

³ See M. Burden's essay below.

⁴ M. Pisani, *Music of the Melodramatic Theatre in Nineteenth-Century London and New York* (University of Iowa Press, 2014), 253.

⁵ Price, 81–7.

Even more significant to the experience of the plays in the theatre, however, is the extension of the term ‘incidental music’ to the provision of musical underscore not explicitly called for in the action of the drama, nor heard by the onstage actors, but intended solely to work its emotional affect upon the audience. It is a matter of some dispute as to when, exactly, underscoring of this sort began. In Shakespeare’s plays, though he calls on occasion for music to play under dialogue – Sneak’s Noise accompanying the melancholy dialogue of Falstaff and Mistress Quickly in 2 *Henry IV*, or the solitary instrumentalist playing outside Richard II’s prison cell, for example – it seems always to be assumed that the actors as well as the audience can hear the music. The same, by and large, is true of the Restoration and early eighteenth-century theatre, where, though there was ever more pressure on playwrights to make opportunity for song and for instrumental sound, almost always some pretext is given in the action of the play itself for its introduction.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, as Michael Pisani’s study amply demonstrates, the practice begins of giving emotional shape to action with underscore that deployed often short fragments of music to support or intensify the emotional affect of the action. Found in its most full-blown form in melodrama and various popular forms of theatre, it rapidly reached the ‘high-art’ end of the market, and was pervasive in Shakespearean theatre at the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. Pisani quotes a critic as late as 1910 asserting that ‘[A] running accompaniment of music, half-heard, half-guessed, that moves to the mood of the play . . . may do much toward keeping the audience in tune with the emotional significance of the action.’⁶ Not everyone agreed – an anonymous reviewer of Beerbohm Tree’s *Tempest* complained that ‘[A]t the rare moments when Shakespeare’s lines emerge from the prevailing racket, they drag, they limp, . . . as [the actors] always speak to a musical accompaniment, generally slow, it is surprising if they make a single speech intelligible.’⁷ This comment testifies to the way that actors increasingly played off the underscore in the delivery of their speeches. Paradoxically, then, the music that existed entirely outside the world of the drama increasingly dictated both the presentation of that world and the audience’s response to it.

⁶ Pisani, 310.

⁷ D. Lindley, “‘Sounds and Sweet Airs’: Music in Shakespearean Performance History”, *Shakespeare Survey*, 64 (2011), 62–3.

In the twentieth century, the nature of theatrical music changed under two different pressures. In the first place, the growth of the early music movement complemented the interest in Shakespearean stage practice evidenced, for example, in the experiments of William Poel. He turned to the musical pioneer Arnold Dolmetsch to provide the scores for his productions, using a small band playing music of the period on recorder, viol and harpsichord, or else musical pastiche of its style.⁸ As the essays by Elizabeth Kenny and Claire van Kampen show, exploration of the possibilities of using period music in contemporary productions continues, even if underpinned by a more self-conscious awareness of the theoretical problems in re-creating what would once have been called ‘authentic’ performance practices.

Music, indeed, occupies an especially problematic space in terms of the representation of historical periods. In the Victorian era, though enormous efforts might be made to achieve ‘authenticity’ in the detail of costumes and setting, music only rarely gestured towards a period style. The same is often true in more recent times, where the precise historical location of the visual elements of a production is not often matched by similar musical fidelity.

The main pressures towards the reduction in size of the instrumental band in the twentieth century, however, came from simple economics on the one hand, and the growth of electronic and then digital means of presenting music in the theatre on the other. When the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (as it then was) experimented with recorded music in the 1940s they simply recorded new scores by Lennox Berkeley and others, and played them through what turned out to be an inadequate speaker system. The music was itself being deployed in an entirely traditional manner. Technology has improved, and we will return to the implications of digital media later, but the ease of deploying music from across the entire historical and stylistic spectrum means that it is now easily possible to yoke together music of many kinds in a ‘compilation score’. Such scores are not, in fact, new. Throughout stage history music of different periods and styles could be pressed into service, as Val Brodie’s essay demonstrates, but a purposeful mash-up of different types of music characterises many modern productions and is discussed in relation to the practice of the theatre company Propeller, in Carol Rutter and Jonny Trenchard’s essay, and extended in Adam Hansen’s exploration of the place of popular music

⁸ See Marion O’Connor, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society* (Cambridge: Chadwick-Healey, 1987).

in contemporary productions. Film, of course, has always used both through-composed scores by a single composer and compilations which exploit the cultural resonances of different musical genres and styles, and Shakespearean film has been no exception – as the essays by Peter Holland and Ramona Wray demonstrate.

The overlap between theatrical and cinematic practice has been of fundamental importance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. So, for example, in 1957 Peter Brook declared that:

It is no longer the ideal to go to an eminent composer . . . and ask him to write a score to accompany a play . . . A good incidental score nowadays is more a matter of timbre and tone colour than of harmony or even of rhythm; it has to appeal to a mind which has at least one and three-quarter ears fully occupied with following the dramatic narrative; it is, in fact, quarter-ear music.⁹

This view overlaps with the notion one frequently finds in film music criticism, that the best music is that which is not memorable in itself and is scarcely consciously recognised by the audience. Hence the disappearance of musicians from view in theatrical performance, either in a retreat to recorded sound, or else by the physical concealment of musicians which reached its symbolic apogee in arrangements like that of the ‘Bandbox’ at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, where musicians sat in a studio connected only electronically with the stage. Such separation suited the assumptions about music’s place as emotional encouragement; heard but not seen.

In recent years, this tendency for theatre music to aspire to the condition of the cinema has been reversed. A production of *The Winter’s Tale* at Stratford in 2009 illustrated this tendency, but also some of the conceptual problems which attend it. Here musicians were not only brought onstage in the sheep-shearing scenes, but named as ‘characters’ and given a line or two of invented dialogue. While this was straightforwardly acceptable in the scenes of merrymaking, later these same still-visible musicians played what was clearly ‘non-diegetic’ music to accompany the action. As a result their status became somewhat confusing – were they, as actors, responding to the action they witnessed before them, or were they reverting to their cinematic function of conditioning our response, telling us musically how to react to the scene? Their onstage presence highlighted their ambiguous nature in a way that only live theatre can.

⁹ *Sunday Times*, 22 September 1957.



Illustration 1 Musicians in *The Winter's Tale*, Act 4 (RSC, 2009) Photograph by Alessandra Evangelista, ©Royal Shakespeare Company

We will return to current practice shortly, but if thus far we have been considering in the main instrumental music, some of the same ambivalence which attended the *Winter's Tale* musicians in 2009 may be said to surround the singer of songs in Shakespearean drama throughout its history. W. H. Auden's distinction between performed and impromptu song remains a useful one, distinguishing the character who sings because it is his (or more rarely her) profession or place to do so, from the character who bursts into song as an expression of their personal feelings at a particular moment.¹⁰ In the former case the singer must be reasonably adept (even if gentlemen such as Amiens in *As You Like It* and Balthazar in *Much Ado About Nothing* make fashionably modest disclaimers of their abilities – in contrast to Feste who asserts that he 'take[s] pleasure in singing' (2.4.67)). In the latter case, they need not. Two interesting borderline examples are the subjects of the essays by Linda Phyllis Austern and Paul Faber. Merrythought, a central figure in Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, is an impromptu singer *par excellence*, but a performance in which he did not at least sing moderately well would be a very long haul for the audience. Shakespeare's Ophelia begins the

¹⁰ W. H. Auden, 'Music in Shakespeare', in *The Dyer's Hand* (London: Faber, 1962), 511, 522.

tradition of female madness being demonstrated through distracted singing, but during the theatrical history of the play she has at times sung her songs with some skill – the First Quarto, after all, has her play upon a lute – while, especially in more recent performances informed by naturalistic acting styles, she has barely sung her words at all. These two ‘borderline’ cases expose the tension between singer-as-character and singer-as-performer.

That tension, of course, informs an audience’s relationship with any acted part. As spectators and listeners, we are both immersing ourselves in the world actors are creating, and simultaneously observing, and taking self-conscious pleasure in, their skill in taking us into that world; but the tension is more particularly marked by the action of singing. Song occupies a peculiarly liminal space in theatrical entertainment. As Mark Booth observes, ‘[A] song, set in a play, but set out of the play too by its music, facilitates our indulgence in feelings that may be undercut before and after the music plays.’¹¹ As song settings became more elaborate, so the question of the relationship between actor-as-character and actor/singer-as-performer becomes ever more problematic.¹² How, exactly, music generates emotional response is a matter of much debate, but undoubtedly part of its effect in Early Modern theatre was generated by the way in which songs were frequently borrowed from, or alluded to, the tunes and words made popular by their circulation in ballads. The complexity of response this might generate is the subject of Linda Austern’s essay. But though it would seem likely that most of the songs in Shakespeare’s plays were written to fit existing tunes, in his late plays, and in the revivals which followed in the years before the Civil War, composers might provide new and fashionable settings for the songs. Robert Johnson’s settings of songs in *Cymbeline*, *Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest* may or may not have been used in their first stagings, but they mark out the direction in which song settings were to go in the centuries that followed. There is an important distinction to be made between the responses of an audience who know the tune they hear, but perhaps not the words, and the situation of a modern audience in particular, for whom the words of a Shakespeare song are probably well-known, but who might delight in the novelty of the fresh setting that contemporary performance demands. It is, of course, also true that the pleasure of recognition and familiarity were generally available to audiences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when settings of the songs by Arne and others had a remarkable tenacity on the stage.

¹¹ M. W. Booth, *The Experience of Songs* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 15.

¹² See Elizabeth Kenny’s essay, 124–5 below.

Introduction

9

Songs were, from their beginning, in important respects eminently detachable from the particular context in which they are first found. Tiffany Stern has argued that the lyrics of songs were separated from the playbook, and not necessarily available to the printers of the first editions of the plays – hence the number of ‘blank songs’ in published plays, where there is an instruction for a song to be provided, but no lyrics are given.¹³ Equally, however, dramatists may not have worried too much about precisely what song was inserted, accepting any generally appropriate selection from the singing actor’s repertoire. But be that as it may, there is no doubt that soon after first performances new songs were being created and dovetailed into existing scripts. So, for example, ‘Take, O take those lips away’ in *Measure for Measure* (4.1.1ff.) is an importation into a version of the play revised after Shakespeare’s death, as is almost certainly the case with the Hecate scenes and songs in *Macbeth*.¹⁴

After the Restoration the addition of new songs, or borrowings of songs from one play into another became the norm, satisfying the tastes of a theatre audience for whom an evening’s entertainment was made up of a varied programme of dramatic, musical and other genres. So, for example, the ‘Cuckoo Song’, a setting of the first stanza of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*’s Epilogue, found its way into *As You Like It*, where it was allocated, according to the singing abilities of the actresses, to either Celia or Rosalind. It was Thomas Arne’s setting of the song that achieved this fame, and it continued to be used for at least a hundred years after its composition. As John Cunningham’s essay demonstrates, Arne was particularly successful in his settings of Shakespeare, not least because he carefully controlled the publication of his songs, reaching out beyond the theatre to a domestic market. Though Arne’s songs are, as it were, framed off from the action that might surround them, they are, in general, not particularly demanding of their singers. (Part of the reason, no doubt, for their popularity in the theatre for nearly two hundred years.) By contrast the young Thomas Linley, composing the music for a Sheridan revival of *The Tempest* at Drury Lane in 1777, though he took over some of Arne’s airs, provided for his father’s new protégé, Miss Field, acting the part of Ariel, extended arias that require great singerly expertise, with a wide vocal

¹³ T. Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), Ch. 5.

¹⁴ D. Lindley, ‘Music in the English Theatre of 1616’, in T. Y. Tan, P. Edmondson and S-P Wang, eds., *1616: Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu’s China* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), 226–8.

range and many dazzling melismata.¹⁵ New songs, with words probably by Sheridan, were inserted, so that Charles Burney described the production as ‘more a musical masque than opera or play’.¹⁶ If Linley’s settings mark a high point in the vocal elaboration of Shakespeare’s songs, the possibility of treating any song as an occasion for a big ‘production number’ is one which contemporary performances, for all that they are much less ready to insert new material than their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors, cannot always resist. *As You Like It*, for example, has seen frequent amplifications of ‘It was a lover and his lass’, and the reintroduction of a musical epilogue at Shakespeare’s Globe, drawing on the Elizabethan practice of the concluding jig, has been imitated elsewhere.¹⁷

A particularly important strand in the essays which follow is the series we have headed ‘In Practice’. Throughout the history of Shakespearean performance music has often been in the hands of orchestra leaders, who might assemble scores from stock material, adding pieces of their own composition as required. Some theatre composers, such as Thomas Arne or Stephen Storace in the eighteenth century, were among the most important musicians of their day. Increasingly in the latter part of the nineteenth-century theatres recruited eminent composers to provide music for individual productions – Arthur Sullivan or Edward German, for example. In the twentieth century composers well known in other fields might provide music for the theatre – Lennox Berkeley and Harrison Birtwistle are two such. Evidencing this trend as alive and well, recent years have seen three notable new scores for different productions of *As You Like It* by a trio of well-known figures from popular culture: the actor/comedian and bluegrass connoisseur, Steve Martin (Shakespeare in the Park, New York City, 2012), and pop icons Laura Marling (RSC, 2013), and Johnny Flynn (Shakespeare’s Globe, 2015). There have also been composers doubling as musical directors for leading Shakespearean companies, such as Guy Woolfenden and Stephen Warbeck in Stratford, Todd Barton at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and both Claire van Kampen and Bill Barclay at Shakespeare’s Globe. Four essays printed here explore the diverse relationships that exist between composers and the theatrical productions or films for which they write. In many ways these relationships are not profoundly different from that between Thomas Linley the

¹⁵ Can be heard in the recording by The Parley of Instruments, dir. Paul Nicholson on Helios CDH55256.

¹⁶ Quoted in Neighbarger. ¹⁷ See Claire van Kampen’s essay, 53, below.