



Shakespeare and Music: “Where should this music be? I’ th’ air or th’ earth?”

Supported by the RMA Shakespeare and Music Study Group

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When it comes to the use of, and references to, music, Shakespeare’s genius embraced two distinct conceptions: man-centred and God-centred – in other words a natural and a supernatural one. The intricate balance of theatrical devices in Shakespeare’s plays and his ability to turn music (or even its absence) into an essential part of his works have fascinated scholars and composers for centuries. Any Shakespeare-inspired music, whether symphonic/instrumental or meant for the stage, is in fact the remediation of a work that was already ‘pluri-medial’. Thus music becomes an organic part of the final artistic performance and contributes decisively to its impact and success.

This seminar explores both the role of music in Shakespeare’s plays and transmedial works inspired by Shakespeare. It concerns itself with how verbal significances become non-verbal in the case of instrumental music, and how music and words combine – in art song, opera and musicals – to yield a new refashioned work that is still Shakespeare and yet also something new.

We invite contributions from a variety of literary, musicological, anthropological, and cultural perspectives. Paper themes may include, but are not limited to:

Theoretical approaches to the musical adaptation of Shakespeare

The nature of music references and songs in Shakespeare’s works

The natural and supernatural in connection with the music in Shakespeare’s plays and with music inspired by Shakespeare

Politics and ethics in the musical adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare

Shakespeare and opera/stage music

The musical representation of gender, race, and class in Shakespeare-inspired music

Shakespeare and film music

Shakespeare’s impact on composers’ creative output

Shakespeare and musical nationalism

Shakespeare in non-classical music (jazz, musical theatre, pop)

Performing Shakespeare-inspired music

The afterlives of Shakespeare-inspired music

Keywords: Music, adaptation, remediation, opera, the supernatural