

PART XXVI

SHAKESPEARE AND THE PERFORMING ARTS

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The subject of “Shakespeare and the Performing Arts” is not a matter of one-directional relationships: Shakespeare into opera, Shakespeare into ballet, Shakespeare into musical comedy, Shakespeare into symphonic music, and so forth. Rather, each of these performance modes demonstrates how performance in an artistic venue is implicated in performance as a factor in social and political life. Shakespeare’s oeuvre has become a communal, transcultural, and transhistorical artistic monument, inspiring a reverence summed up in the term “bardolatry.”

After four centuries of adaptations, the name “Shakespeare” calls up a host of interpenetrating works, multiple creations and recreations that may be taken as tributes to “the Bard” but also as attempts at supplanting the cultural oppression of “the canon.” Versions of Shakespeare’s plays devised for multiple forms of the performing arts – not only theater but film, television, video, radio, music, and dance – all involve some sort of “intermedial” transposition. Performance criticism relies on the idea of text as process, as an interweaving of variable elements, and expresses a postmodern desire to replace the logocentric idea of theater with one in which performance becomes the site of cultural and aesthetic contestation. In the same line, poststructuralist criticism has called attention to radically destabilizing contingencies of performance, which make theatrical meaning a participatory act.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Performing, performance studies, and performativity
- Adaptation versus appropriation
- Multiple cultures, multiple performance modes
- Languages of performance
- Performance across media
- Television
- Film
- Music
- Dance
- Jazz, rock, and popular rhythms

254. OPERA

William Germano, Cooper Union, United States

Shakespeare and opera may appear to stand at opposite ends of the theatrical spectrum. One is taken as the quintessential art of the dramatic spoken word, the other a complex musical-theatrical art form that, across its period and national variants, depends on the subordination of speech to music. That simple dichotomy ignores both the inherent and the technologically acquired affinities between Shakespeare’s dramas and opera. Each has long functioned as a sign of high culture; each explores the dilemma of the individual caught up in strong passions. Opera is given its distinctive texture through arias, theatrical moments that map almost directly onto the soliloquys and semiautonomous speeches of Shakespearean drama. The aurality of Shakespeare’s verse might even be regarded as a continuous musical condition, a form of verbal equivalent to opera’s persistent musical environment.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Opera as adaptation
- Librettos and translation
- The seventeenth century
- The English masque

- “Semi-opera”
- The eighteenth century
- The Romantic movement
- Shakespeare and Verdi
- Twentieth- and twenty-first-century opera

255. BALLET

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The frequency with which Shakespeare’s ballets are performed around the globe in our times – by both well-known and emerging choreographers, set to historic and newly composed scores, and mostly full-length productions but at times short thematic pieces – signals a tradition that dates back to the earliest days of ballet theater in the seventeenth century. The intensity and tenacity of this tradition can be explained in part by certain common roots that the two stage genres share, and by the subsequent ease with which, over time, characteristics of the one could be adapted to the conventions of the other.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Forms of attention
- Stage conventions
- Transitions from Shakespeare’s plays to ballet
- The politics of Shakespearean ballet
- Sustaining Soviet politics in *Romeo and Juliet* (1940)
- Undermining and interrogating Soviet politics in *Hamlet* (1991)
- Multiculturalism in Shakespearean ballet
- Coordinated diversity
- Female identity in Shakespearean ballet
- Female sexuality in Shakespearean ballet
- Male identity in Shakespearean ballet
- Homosexuality in Shakespearean ballet

256. MUSICAL COMEDY

Tetsuo Kishi, Kyoto University, Japan

Differences between today’s audiences and Shakespeare’s original audiences have troubled modern directors of Shakespeare, who often shift the time, the place, or both of a particular Shakespearean play, with some help from visual elements such as costumes, props, and scenery. The addition of music is another possibility for updating. Creators of Shakespeare-as-musical-comedy have to solve two problems. First, to what extent should they retain Shakespeare’s language? Second, what kind of music should they provide? This chapter explores the options.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- *Merry Wives – The Musical*
- Incorporating familiar songs: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
- Incorporating familiar songs: *Return to the Forbidden Planet*
- Writing new songs: *The Boys from Syracuse*
- Writing new songs: *Oh, Brother!*
- Rock musicals: *Your Own Thing*
- Rock musicals: *Two Gentlemen of Verona*
- Masterpieces: *West Side Story*
- Masterpieces: *Kiss Me, Kate*

257. SYMPHONIC MUSIC

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The history of symphonic settings of Shakespeare is inextricable from the general history of concert music in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the development of its most complex and intellectually substantial structuring principle, the sonata form. Generically, such Shakespeare-inspired works might be either multimovement symphonies or single-movement works, such as concert overtures or the more or less programmatic kind of piece that Liszt called a “symphonic poem,” Richard Strauss a “tone poem,” and Elgar a “symphonic study.” Sometimes a literary inspiration such as a play by Shakespeare appears little more than a commercially appealing veneer for what is essentially an abstract exploration of musical form, but in the finest examples the synergy between art forms was intense and productive.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- The irruption of Shakespearean narrative into music
- Sonata form
- The tripartite structure of sonata form
- Composer/dramatist/philosopher: Beethoven and the sonata
- Post-Beethovenian Shakespearean sonata form
- Three instances of “utopian” tragedy
- Dvořák’s *Othello*
- Tchaikovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet*
- Elgar’s *Falstaff*

258. PANTOMIME

John O’Brien, University of Virginia, United States

The phrase “Shakespeare and Pantomime” names an opposition, a confrontation between high culture and low culture, Englishness and foreignness, the literary and the popular, that began in earnest in the middle of the eighteenth century. That is when pantomime emerged as a wildly popular form of entertainment in London and drew from high-culture apologists a counterattack that frequently enlisted Shakespeare as an ally. Shakespeare and Harlequin were cast as opposites, and that is where they remain today. It would be more accurate, however, to see the two figures as two channels through which the vast stock of performed stories, scenarios, actions, gestures, and speech were translated into the modern period.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- The beginnings
- The structure of pantomime
- Shakespeare, pantomime, continental repertoire
- Differences in transmission
- The term *commedia dell’arte*
- The term *pantomime*
- From ancient myths to Roman dancers
- Shakespeare and pantomime: from opposition to similarity

259. PUPPETRY

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In *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit* (1592), Shakespeare is attacked not only as an “upstart crow” but as a puppet who speaks other people’s lines. Puppetry was well known in early modern England as a mode of popular performance, thriving alongside the more celebrated achievements of the drama itself. But Robert Greene’s image of Shakespeare as puppet also seems to overflow any conceivable estimation of his text’s intentions, to indicate how the puppet often conveys an irresistible transgressive and metaphoric force. The puppet presents itself, here and elsewhere, as a convenient figure of subordination and control, and as a rubric of social lowness and popular culture, yet also, at the same time, as a paradigm of performance and histrionic impersonation at their most powerful, a kind of figure of figuration.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Early modern puppet theater
- Players, poets, and puppets in the early modern period
- Drolleries
- “Seeing the puppets” in Shakespeare’s text
- Puppet Shakespeare

260. JAZZ

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The musicality of Shakespeare’s language has inspired a fascinating range of creativity in diverse musical genres and hybrids. These include art song, folk song, opera, music hall and popular song, and last, but by no means least, jazz. Recent scholars have described a shift in our understanding of Shakespeare as enduring cultural phenomenon: from popular cultural participant to highbrow literary icon and back to contemporary pop “culture chameleon.” This chapter charts the triple confluence of Shakespeare, jazz, and popular culture in the twentieth century, with special attention to Johnny Dankworth’s and Cleo Laine’s singular contributions to Shakespearean song and sonnet-setting.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Development of jazz
- Development of “jazz Shakespeare”
- The 1974 “Will Power” event
- Jazz “jouissance”
- “Such Sweet Thunder” and “Timon of Athens”
- Cleo Laine and Johnny Dankworth
- Laine, Dankworth, and the sonnets
- Ambivalence and dualism
- The alchemy of music and poetry
- “Start quoting him now”