

Apr 12th, 3:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Shakespeare's Philosophy of Music

Emily Sulka

Cedarville University, esulka@cedarville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/research_scholarship_symposium



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Musicology Commons](#)

Sulka, Emily, "Shakespeare's Philosophy of Music" (2017). *The Research and Scholarship Symposium*. 21.
http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/research_scholarship_symposium/2017/podium_presentations/21

This Podium Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Cedarville, a service of the Centennial Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Research and Scholarship Symposium by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.



Research & Scholarship SYMPOSIUM

Shakespeare's Philosophy of Music

Shakespeare is one of the most widely read figures in literature, but his use of music is not usually touched on in literary discussions of his works. In this paper, I discuss how Shakespeare portrays music within the context of his plays, both through dialogue and songs performed within each work. In Shakespeare's time, Boethius' philosophy of the music of the spheres was still highly popular. This was the idea that the arrangement of the cosmos mirrored musical proportions. As a result, every aspect of the universe was believed to be highly ordered, and this idea is prominent throughout Shakespeare's works, from *Hamlet* to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. To make this clear to the reader, I discuss dialogue symmetry weaved throughout *The Merchant of Venice*, clear allusions to the music of the spheres in *Pericles*, and the use of music as a signifier of the strange and mysterious – from madness to love – in numerous works, always relating these topics back to the philosophy of the music of the spheres. In order to compile this information and make it clear, I researched the philosophy of music during Shakespeare's era. I also researched how he uses music thematically to emphasize different characters' struggles as well as plot details. After examining his plays as well as the other sources available on the subject, it is clear that Shakespeare was highly influenced by the philosophical and practical ideas regarding music of his time, specifically the theory of the music of the spheres.