

[SoBe Arts' Shakespeare Puts On Renaissance Airs](#)

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Thomas Morley (1557-1602).

Starting Friday, Carson Kievman's [SoBe Institute of the Arts plunges audiences into the world of Shakespeare](#), and not incidentally, the world of English Renaissance music.

Kievman's production of the Bard's *Twelfth Night* previews March 18 at the newly rehabbed Little Stage Theater, then runs for three consecutive weekends, closing April 4. But this Friday, Robert Chumbley of the SoBe Institute faculty hosts a free event with the SoBe Arts Chamber Ensemble that will explore the music of the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

I was pleased to learn that the production of *Twelfth Night* will feature period music by composers such as Thomas Weelkes, which I'm sure will make the play much more coherent. It brings up an interesting sidelight of theater: So many Shakespeare plays with

music have been done with either too little attention or too much of the wrong kind of attention paid to the music.

In the former, I've seen versions of Shakespeare in which actors ad lib tuneless melodies to the words of the songs, and these were songs that were well-known to Shakespeare's audiences (I doubt he wrote any of them; I think they were well-known ditties of the day). Or in other cases, there will be some new music to go with the lyrics, mostly somewhat folk-sounding, but not very persuasive.

Some of the plays had songs specifically written for them by some of the ablest composers of the day, and if no music is known for some of the lyrics, something from that rich trove of song can surely be found. The music of the English Renaissance has its own specific flavor and style, and it reflects the words and actions of the play in a way that no modern music truly can.

I think that's true largely because of the rhythms; it seems to me that the syncopations of Renaissance songs must somehow echo or complement the sound of the language as it was spoken in Shakespeare's day. We don't know quite what that was, and most modern performances of these plays are acted with the dialogue as though it were straight text, though in many cases (*Richard II*, for instance), it's verse, and must have sounded as such when first performed.

It's all one piece, really, song to word to action, and in a play like *Twelfth Night*, which has the love of music as a key element of the play's mental world (starting with its very opening words), it's important to pursue the actual music of the time so we can get a better idea not just of how it sounded, but how the play itself sounds.

[Here is a link to *Now Is the Month of Maying*, a madrigal by Thomas Morley, to get us all in the mood for Shakespeare.](#)

To buy tickets for SoBe's Shakespeare fest ([which range from \\$12.50-\\$25](#)), [click here](#).