Feste's songs

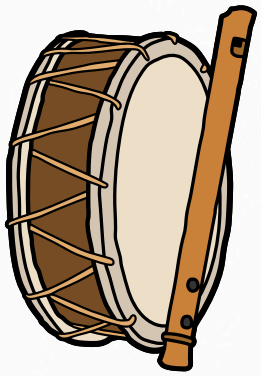
In Shakespeare's time, plays often included at least one song. As in films nowadays, the songs and music in Shakespeare's plays not only provide entertainment but also help set the mood. In 'Twelfth Night', music reflects the characters' thoughts and feelings but also adds comedy.

Feste, the clown in 'Twelfth Night' is very talented as he can sing, play instruments and use word play and riddles to entertain others in the play. He is employed by the lady Olivia to entertain her household with witty comments and songs, but he also travels to Duke Orsino's court to sing there when requested. When asked to sing by Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Feste asks them if they would rather hear a song about love or "good life", to suit their mood. Another time he sings a mournful song for the melancholy Orsino on request.

This was typical of professional musicians from Shakespeare's time, who would often be called upon to play at different venues, including in the homes of the gentry and possibly to provide theatrical music in the playhouses. The musicians had to be ready to play a range of music.



Feste has five songs in 'Twelfth Night'. Sadly we do not know what the tunes of all the songs would have been when the play was originally performed or exactly which instruments the music would have been played on.



We do know, however, that Feste, the clown, plays a tabor, because in the play, Viola asks him

"Dost thou live by thy tabor?"

[Act 3, Scene 1]

A tabor is a type of hand-held drum and usually played either with the hand or two drumsticks. The word "tabor" originates from the Latin word for drum. He also plays the pipe.

Some of the songs sung by Feste were written to make the audience laugh while other songs are sad and contrast with the comedy in the play.

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Music

Feste's five songs are:

- 'O Mistress Mine' (Act 2, Scene 3) - a cheery song about falling for a sweetheart.
- 'Come Away Death' (Act 2, Scene 4) - a sad song about a lover who dies of a broken heart.
- 'Hey Robin, Jolly Robin' (Act 4, Scene 2) - a song, interrupted by Malvolio, about a love that is not returned.
- 'I am Gone Sir' (Act 4, Scene 2) - a playful song used to tease Malvolio.
- 'When That I Was and a Little Tiny Boy' (Act 5, Scene 1) - the final song closing the play with each verse describing the stages of life.

Feste's role as fool would have fitted well with the profession of a travelling musician. He would have been familiar to Shakespeare's audience as a professional merrymaker, and his character is used in 'Twelfth Night' to liven things up.



Activity

Write a song for Feste to sing in court.

What sort of song will it be?

Will it be happy, sad or funny?

Will it tell a story or be about someone or something?

Will it teach your audience about life, love or something else?

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