

Jonson, Music and the Boundaries of Playing

Where does an early modern play begin and end? The outdoor theater resonated with sounds, jests and jigs that were ambiguously related to plays; the indoor theater was home to choristers who sang before a play and between acts. Music made audiences and playwrights aware of the fluid transition between what surrounded a play and what was incorporated within its *muthos*.

For Ben Jonson, music challenges the self-sufficiency of a play, whether performed onstage or printed as a dramatic “work.” Jonson flirts with the determining influence of boy singers in the Induction to *Cynthia’s Revels*, establishes sound as the cornerstone of communal engagement in *Epicoene*, and lauds Alfonso Ferrabosco for his musical contributions to the courtly masque. Through Jonson’s treatment of music, we can appreciate how the boundaries of early modern playing remained up for grabs, well into the seventeenth century.