In her study on androgyny and “the boy heroine,” Phyllis Rackin has written that “Shakespeare refuses to dissolve the difference between the sex of the boy actor and that of the heroine he plays; and he uses his boy heroines’ sexual ambiguity not only to complicate his plots but also to resolve them.”1 In *As You Like It*, the fact that Ganymede is in fact female resolves the problem of Phebe’s attraction to Rosalind, allowing the play to end with the marriages of four couples. Rackin further notes that the identities of the female characters “become provisionally real,” requiring the existence of a suitable male substitute in order to return to the sex assigned to the role. However, Rosalind’s identity as a boy is fleeting—she is rarely playing Ganymede for more than a moment in Orlando’s presence before she returns to her true persona. In addition, her masculine guise is not particularly strong, and Phebe’s romantic interest in her complicates the scenario only slightly beyond the relationships of the three primary couples (Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, and Touchstone and Audrey). The audience is never actually asked to believe in Rosalind as Ganymede, but in Rosalind as Ganymede as Rosalind.

In Kenneth Branagh’s 2006 film adaptation of the play, made for HBO, Rosalind’s disguise is particularly subtle and marked as much by musical as visual signifiers.2 In most discussions of iconicity and performance, visual performance plays a primary role. In this analysis, however, I consider in what ways music works in tandem with clothing and other embodied aspects of performance to contribute to Rosalind’s iconicity in Branagh’s production of *As You Like It*. The unconventional setting of this production—“a fantasy of Japan,” according to the film’s titles—allows for unique musical means for the film experiant to know Rosalind’s developing character. The feminine, sheltered, Western Rosalind of the court and the slightly (and always only briefly) androgynous but more independent and worldly Rosalind of the forest are delineated by the use of different musical modes and instruments that while understated and often very similar in range are easy to hear even for experiants with no special musical knowledge. In this way, we see the ways that Rosalind’s iconicity integrates gender as well as national and racial performance through music.

The score for this *As You Like It*, which is set in an English enclave in nineteenth-century Japan, is by longtime Branagh collaborator Patrick Doyle, who also appears in a brief cameo, as he usually does in Branagh productions; here he plays Amiens the musician. The cast includes a number of Branagh alumni, including Brian Blessed as both Dukes, Adrian Lester as Oliver de Boys, and Richard Briers as Adam, as well as Bryce Dallas Howard as Rosalind, Romola Garai as Celia, David Oyelowo as Orlando, Alfred Molina as Touchstone, and Kevin Kline as Jaques. The film opens in a traditional Japanese home, where English lords are entertained by Japanese musicians and actors performing a Noh play. Ninjas—perhaps the most fantastical element of the entire production—attack the court. In a few brief mo-
ments, the dastardly Duke Frederick has overthrown his brother and sends him out into the Forest of Arden, which The New York Times identified as the “moderately Asian-looking Wakehurst Place in West Sussex, England.” Celia and Rosalind, along with the fool Touchstone, leave the niceties of the house for the well-groomed forest, where the remainder of the film is located.

Branagh’s adaptation of the play as a “fantasy of Japan” is apparently meant to indicate that it is a fantasy viewed and experienced through Western eyes, both those of the film’s primarily non-Japanese characters, who as members of the English trading colony live in a protected enclave set aside for foreigners, and those of the experiants who view and hear the film. There is no question that the setting is problematic in its reductive treatment of Japanese culture, but by couching it in the terms of an escapist vision, Branagh manages to mitigate some of the issues surrounding the mostly non-Asian cast and the characters’ appropriations of select Japanese cultural practices and traditions. Positioning most of his cast as Western merchants also helps account for the use of non-Asian actors among the court roles. Asian actors play Phebe, Silvius, and William, true natives of the forest of Arden who always appear dressed in traditional Japanese peasant clothing, in contrast to the Western clothes of the members of the court. However, Corin and Audrey are white, and are costumed in Western garb without comment or explanatory material.

Unsurprisingly, Branagh’s casting and directorial decisions received mixed reviews: some critics derided Branagh’s decision to place the action of the play in this setting, calling it a “culture-clash gimmick” and writing that the “setting is a distracting plot device,” while others welcomed the change of scene from the more common English and French settings of the play. Maureen Ryan of the Chicago Tribune felt that the lush setting was “a visual treat” and praised the “beautifully minimalist Asian flavor; even the forest scenes are reminiscent of the gardens of Kyoto”; Matthew Gilbert of The Boston Globe wrote that the choice of Japan “adds an exotic and picturesque flair, as the movie opens during a Noh performance, Orlando goes mano á mano with a sumo wrestler, and Orlando’s love notes to Rosalind are written in Japanese calligraphy.” In addition to the items on Gilbert’s list, the film exploits public desire and appreciation for exoticism in several ways: at court, some ladies are dressed in kimono, and Duke Ferdinand is first shown wearing traditional black Japanese battle armor, masked and encased in a shell of lacquered wood. Additionally, he is repeatedly filmed from below, which in combination with the costume creates a visual “ghost” of both Darth Vader and Blessed’s performance as the Ghost in Branagh’s 1996 Hamlet—a fearsome enemy indeed. The carefully sculpted garden used as the Forest of Arden includes Japanese lanterns and Shinto arches, and Jaques meditates in a Zen garden. Touchstone and other members of Duke Senior’s court practice tai chi, and Amiens plays the koto, a plucked string instrument.

However complex the implications of the setting are, the concept of a fantasy Japan does provide Doyle with the opportunity to use a number of Eastern instruments in the score, including the koto, finger cymbals, taiko drums, and gongs, as well as several different musical modes, departing from the Western tonal harmonic language used in the majority of films. Reviewer Christopher Coleman notes that the film’s dramatic introduction uses a rich palette of indigenous sounds: “Early in
the soundtrack we hear a stronger Japanese influence than we do at its conclusion. Track 1: ‘Kabuki Attack’ is clearly the most ‘Japanese’ of all the music—depicting a Kabuki performance before the royal Duke’s court, we hear the flute accompanied by harp, finger cymbals, koto and cello.” Doyle aurally establishes the film’s location immediately: the experiant understands through these sounds and the visuals of the Noh play and the ninja attack that the action will unfold in Japan. After this scene, however, Doyle is tasked with signifying the Englishness of the play’s main characters, and the use of Japanese instruments, save the bells, which have a rather universal sound, and the koto, a plucked string instrument, falls away. Doyle returns to his usual medium of a Western orchestra and uses the Japanese instruments only as incidental color for the bulk of the film’s music.

However, there is considerable nuance in this coloring, which can be heard in Doyle’s application of instruments and modalities throughout the score, particularly in creating a musical character for Rosalind. Both the flute and the violin, associated at the beginning of Act 2 with Rosalind, are featured solo instruments throughout the film. Frequently accorded the topmost lines of Doyle’s set pieces, they are easily heard against the accompaniment of the orchestra. The flute is used in conjunction with a Western orchestra and clearly indicates Rosalind’s role first as a beloved daughter and later as a young, independent-minded Englishwoman. Indeed, as the dazed Duke Senior walks into the forest looking at the picture of his daughter, it is the flute that accompanies him and indicates that his thoughts are on her rather than his own situation. At this point, Doyle’s score also establishes a typical musical gender convention for Rosalind by associating her femininity with the flute, which is generally accompanied by the orchestra. As the film progresses, Doyle makes subtle differences in the scoring, transferring Rosalind’s five-note motif to the violin. The violin, in contrast to the flute, is often accompanied by the koto. The shift from the soft, orchestra-supported flute to the louder violin, accompanied by only one other instrument and thus heard as a more independent line, is a musical means of representing Rosalind as she becomes more independent and worldly, transformed through her experience of living, however superficially, as a man. Although much of the film is unscored in order to allow the text to take precedence, the use of music in scenes depicting Rosalind serves as both a mirror and a guide to her persona and state of mind at any given time.

The kinds of harmony associated with each of the two solo instruments are also telling. The first morning in the forest is accompanied by pastoral music in the Dorian mode (a scale often used in English folk music and based on the pattern whole step—half step—whole step—half step—whole step—half step—whole step) scored for flute and horn, reminiscent of traditional European art-music markers of the rural life, in which pipe, horn, and drum signify the fields and the forest, the hunt and the rustic life. As the trio of Celia, Rosalind, and Touchstone make their way into the unfamiliar but well-groomed forest and are presented with the figures of Silvius in his Japanese garb and other obvious non-Westerners, the violin enters, and Doyle shifts briefly from the Dorian mode of the pastoral to a pentatonic scale (a five-note scale, or five notes bridging the octave, e.g., C—D—E—G—A), long associated in Western music with the exotic Orient. The pentatonic,
frequently used to indicate the Other both as non-Westerner and as female, is used particularly when identities are mistaken and fantastical “topsy-turvydom” (as Gilbert and Sullivan would term it) is in play, while musical pastoralism reminds the experiant of the civility and Westernness—indeed, Englishness—of the Duke’s court, even in exile. Doyle’s pentatonic melodies are easily translated into and harmonized by traditional Western tonality, and are more flavorings that, like the koto, provide a brief, mostly superficial taste of alterity without alienating audiences. In the first scene (2.6) showing Duke Senior and his men roughing it in the forest, they are still maintaining a very court-like existence, indicated by the men’s activities and the music. Here the goings-on, scenery, and music are redolent of the English countryside and the luxurious lifestyle that that implies: no one is hungry, the weather is pleasant, and the Duke’s courtiers talk to one another in small groups. Although Amiens plays the native koto, the tune he performs is the traditional English “Under the Greenwood Tree.” The song text, with its insistence that the Duke and his men have “no enemy / But winter and rough weather” (2.5.7), mitigates the seriousness of their plight, and is used by Branagh and Doyle to invoke the otherwise pleasant aspects of the exile. The tune is not altered to fit the native pentatonic mode, and instead remains a familiar song played on a vaguely unfamiliar looking instrument that nonetheless sounds relatively like the lute or any other plucked strings from the West. This limited exoticization of the music that appears in the play further reminds the experiant that regardless of the geographical setting, the action takes place among Englishmen and -women, and that their identity and cultural heritage are minimally affected by their surroundings. Because Doyle generally privileges tonal harmony and uses modality as coloring in the same way he privileges Western instruments and employs Japanese ones for effect, the score’s commentary is fairly subtle. Unfamiliar modalities always resolve tonally, indicating to the experiant that the characters are never in danger of losing their status, lives, or cultural heritage, and that a full and satisfying resolution can be found to any problem.

Once the primary setting and its aural aesthetics have been established, Doyle is able to freely make use of the flute and violin in his scoring of Rosalind’s narrative. While, as Amiens’s performance indicates, the modal and pentatonic soundscapes are used occasionally as contrasting musical elements for the remainder of the film, the greater and more interesting contrast is in the instruments assigned to Rosalind’s personas, which, while both high in pitch, are easily distinguished. The flute, first distinctly paired with Rosalind when it is used to accompany her father gazing upon her portrait, serves as the aural indicator for Rosalind’s court life, when her femininity was expected to be on display through dress, mannerisms, and speech. The violin, playing in a pentatonic mode, which Doyle uses to accompany Rosalind once she has taken on the identity of the youth Ganymede, signifies Ganymede’s somewhat freer and less constrained life in the forest. Yet the music does not indicate that Rosalind becomes a native of the forest, as she later claims; Doyle’s writing creates a more complex signification. The use of the violin is obviously pseudo-Asian, retaining the five-note motif assigned to Rosalind before she becomes Ganymede, and is representative not of authentic Japanese music but of how many Westerners heard and expressed Japanese music in early dealings with the country, as for example in Gilbert and
Sullivan’s own fantasy of Japan, *The Mikado*. Therefore, working with these negative indicators of authenticity, Doyle creates in the violin a musical signifier of Rosalind’s pseudo-male self, and later, Rosalind’s self that has been altered by her stint as Ganymede. In short, Doyle, cognizant of Britain’s musical reception of Eastern music, offers a suitably inauthentic version of it for the inauthenticity of Rosalind’s façade while still indicating the changes she undergoes during her life as Ganymede. At the same time, the use of the violin, an instrument capable of greater volume than the flute, further mirrors Rosalind’s increased agency when she is in male guise.

At the end of the film, Rosalind’s theme is scored for both instruments, indicating that although she has become more independent and capable of solving knotty problems such as those created by the four sets of lovers through her experience away from court, she nonetheless respects much of that institution’s rules and is happy to return to it. In marrying Orlando and seeing to the various matches of Celia, Touchstone, and Phebe, she acts as the arbiter of social normativity and heteronormativity, and the film indicates that with Duke Senior restored, the couples will return to their previous, likewise “normal” places in society; the final scenes show the new couples moving their wedding dance from the open air of the forest to indoors at the Duke’s home.

The transition from flute to violin and thence to a commingled use as Rosalind’s musical signifier is neither immediate nor unmitigated. At times, the flute is recalled during forest scenes to indicate Rosalind’s emotions as stemming from her court life or to emphasize her gender identity at a particular point in time. As a whole, the use of music to signify Rosalind’s dual genders and her developing self echoes her speech to Orlando in 3.2, in which she characterizes effeminate behavior as something shared between women and young men. That she is musically portrayed by two treble instruments furthers this view of the effeminate as a trait shared by both of Rosalind’s personas over the course of the play. Doyle’s theme for Rosalind, presented in the flute and violin, adhere precisely to what early modern music scholar Linda Austern identifies as “the early modern construction of Woman [. . . . ] light, vain, and delicate.”

Following the attack on Duke Senior’s home, Celia and Rosalind create their new identities and leave for the Forest of Arden. It is with this shift from the court to the rural forest that Doyle begins to score Rosalind’s two identities. For several acts, Rosalind is mostly accompanied by the flute; she is in the company of Celia and Touchstone, and her identity to her compatriots is, of course, her own. The music that accompanies the two ladies of the court and their fool is, appropriately, that of the English court. In 3.2, as Celia tells Rosalind that the poetry she has found on the forest’s trees is by Orlando, the flute, playing Rosalind’s five-note motif, accompanies her delight. The harmonic language behind the flute is modal and recalls the music of the first morning in the forest, when Rosalind was fresh from her first meeting with Orlando and giddy with excitement. However, when Orlando and Jaques enter, the flute fades away. Rosalind approaches Orlando and Jaques as Ganymede, and the violin enters with the same theme carried earlier by the flute, alerting the experiant that Rosalind is now in her guise as a man. The modality that accompanied the flute is likewise replaced by the less typically Western pentatonic scale, suggestively backing up Rosalind’s claim that she is a “native of this place” (3.2.344).
As Rosalind and Celia set up house in the shepherd’s hut and Rosalind becomes more comfortable in her role as Ganymede, her music also begins to indicate not only her current identity but also how her gender is understood by other characters. Doyle uses the violin to indicate the superficial success of Rosalind’s male persona in 3.5 when the truly native Phoebe falls in love with Ganymede. Similarly, when Orlando thinks of Rosalind after hearing the news of Celia’s engagement, the music includes both the inverse (upside-down version) of Rosalind’s theme and its usual form played simultaneously, signifying the topsy-turvy situation Orlando finds himself part of in regard to the woman he loves and the ersatz woman playing her in the forest. The two mirrored versions of her theme signify Rosalind’s playing of herself through the intermediary persona of Ganymede. Even if the experiant does not recognize the inversion of Rosalind’s motif, the highly audible counterpoint of the two melodic lines suggests the complexities of identity and role-playing taking place.

At the cue “Fake Wedding” (4.1), Doyle creates the first instance of noticeable musical interaction, rather than alternation, between Rosalind’s two musical personas. As Rosalind, playing Ganymede, playing Rosalind, entreats Celia to be the priest for her “wedding” to Orlando, the violin and flute, accompanied by bells, enter together. In a cleverly designed overlap, the flute retains its earlier modal melody, indicating the presence of Rosalind the woman, and the violin plays its pentatonic line, representing Ganymede’s independence. Here Rosalind’s two roles are combined more than at any other point, and her musical cues mirror the action of the scene. The violin is layered above the flute in register; Rosalind is able to maintain the premise of being Ganymede over her true desires for Orlando, but just barely: the resulting harmonic tension is most audible when Rosalind, literally falling down with ecstasy and almost falling out of her Ganymede persona, is physically caught by Orlando and brought back to reality. There the flute falls silent, signifying that Rosalind will remain in her guise of a man, and indeed the violin continues, just as she continues playing her role of Ganymede. The unfulfilled desire expressed in the scene is also mirrored in the music, as the violin’s line ends the scene with a whole step that sounds, in the context of the previous supporting harmonies, as if it should harmonically resolve (arrive on a final consonance) by ascending a whole step and then another half step in a diatonic manner (moving from scale degrees 6 to 7 to 1). But because the line does not resolve diatonically as the harmony suggests that it should, the cadence instead feels unfinished, just as Orlando and Rosalind feel unsatisfied by the false nuptials to the point that both proclaim the need to end the role-playing. Orlando states that he “can no longer live by thinking,” and Rosalind agrees and promises to produce his beloved the following day (5.2.48). Aurally, the experiant hears that this union is not a true one, and that the lovers’ desires are not fully realized, however real the scene may feel. As Rosalind makes her promise to produce herself to Orlando the next day, the flute returns and stays with her as she murmurs with excitement to herself. Musically and textually, she is ready to discard her male persona.

It is only at the end of the film, when the final pairings of characters are made, that the musical tension of the “Fake Wedding” cue is resolved. The wedding scene opens with the primary theme in the violin accompanied by the koto. Over the course of the scene, Doyle then moves the theme to the flute and trades it back to the
violin again as the couples and crowd gather, and as Orlando does not immediately see Rosalind and grows confused as to what is about to occur. When Rosalind finally appears, she is dressed as a woman but in kimono, in contrast to her previous Western dresses, her masculine persona, and Western male garb. The flute, as would be expected, accompanies her arrival, but as she explains her actions, the violin accompanies her words, once again musically confirming that the flute’s modal theme signifies Rosalind’s origins, and that her identity as Ganymede was a variation thereof, adjusted to fit the situation. The flute and violin play together following her explanation of the events that have occurred, twining the modal and pentatonic melodies together and ending on the same final pitch in the more typically Western Dorian mode, signifying Rosalind’s permanent return to herself, albeit with a small infusion of the East, represented by her Japanese dress. This conclusion to the contrasting modalities reaffirms Rosalind’s heritage as non-native and as English, while the ultimate use of the flute rather than the violin confirms her female gender identity. The song and dance which follow and end the film are decidedly of the rustic, pastoral British variety, and could well have come straight from English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams’s folksong collections. The song further identifies all of those present—not just Rosalind—as English or under significant English influence. As the wedding party returns to the Duke’s home, leaving the forest behind, the musical elements of exoticism, such as the pentatonic scale and indigenous Japanese instruments present during their exile, are diminished. By the time the group begins to dance indoors within the English community’s compound, their presence has disappeared completely. All that remains to suggest the forest adventure are the women’s kimonos. Musically, visually, and in terms of status and privilege, Rosalind has experienced a different kind of life while in the forest, but as suggested here, she ultimately seems to take little of her experience with her when she leaves. Duke Senior’s restoration equates with the restoration of all of his court, and marriage to nobility means that Celia and Rosalind will once again be expected to behave in a certain manner, one that does not include dressing in drag or playing at shepherdesses. That the wedding festivities find Rosalind and Celia in kimono hints at the women’s appreciation for the culture they briefly encountered in the forest, but, as noted above, they come into contact with a very limited number of actual natives “of this place”; rather, like many tourists who only superficially engage with a culture, they borrow foreign aesthetics that please them, bringing them without context into their own cultures. Doyle’s score confirms this reading of the film: the relative lack of Japanese instruments throughout indicates the novelty with which they are treated, and the complete absence of Japanese music reveals the dearth of true intercultural exchange taking place in the film; again, the music supports the concept of a fantasy of Japan, not an encounter with the real nation or its peoples. Likewise, the use of Western instruments and English modality to represent Rosalind signifies her disengagement with the culture outside of her courtly circle; pentatonicism, symbolizing her contact with the East, is always dominated by or transformed into pastoral modality or tonality. The score is honest: these English merchants, while geographically far from home, remain unshakably close to their roots, brushing away elements of their host country as easily as they return to their enclave at the end of the film.
Doyle’s score also provides forthright commentary on the nature of Rosalind. In this adaptation, she never takes her male alter ego particularly seriously, even though it is proposed as a way of ensuring safer travel for herself and Celia in the forest. Posing as Ganymede allows Rosalind to speak more freely both as a man and as a youth playing a fickle woman, and to control her own life and actions in the forest. However, we see little of her apart from her wooing of Orlando, and in this context, as Rackin notes, Rosalind never actually suppresses any of her feminine attributes. Instead, she camps up the role of a woman by being more demanding of Orlando than she might as herself in order to test him and to prolong their game. Doyle aptly captures this in the use of similarly pitched instruments that differ in timbre, and while the gendering of Rosalind’s material through these instruments whose ranges match the high female voice is perhaps predictable, it nonetheless indicates the lack of major differences between the two personas and Rosalind’s disinterest in creating any kind of verisimilitude in regard to Ganymede’s maleness. Perhaps most importantly, though, the instrumentation also allows the experiant to easily hear Rosalind’s five-note motif on top of the rest of the orchestration and harmony. Ultimately, the score’s motivic focus on Rosalind and its subtle mirroring of her narrative of gender identity and ethnic allegiance provide an aural guide to understanding her nature, perhaps not so changeable but, as Silvius remarks, “all made of fantasy, / All made of passion and all made of wishes, / All adoration, duty, and observance, / All humbleness, all patience and impatience, / All purity, all trial, all observance” (5.2 98-101). In Doyle’s score, the experiant hears the fantasy, passion, and wishes of and for the East, as well as the compliance with adoration, duty, and observance of the West.

Notes


3. I use the term “experiant” rather than the more traditional “audience member” or “viewer” because the implications of a visual-only experience limit the understanding that the media includes music in addition to visual elements; “experiant” also reinforces the concept that the aural elements of a production can be equally as important as the visual aspects.


11. William Shakespeare, As You Like It, ed. Juliet Dusinberre, Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), 201. All subsequent references to playtext are taken from this volume.


13. Ibid., 353.