


RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Takarazuka Opera Company? On the Persistent Ties between the Takarazuka Revue and Opera

Tove Solander 

Gender Studies, University of Stockholm, Sweden
Email: tove.solander@gender.su.se

Abstract

Although the Takarazuka Revue is technically a musical company, its founder's ambition was to create a uniquely Japanese form of opera or operetta, merging elements from Western and Japanese forms. Like opera, and unlike musicals in general, trouser roles play a central part in the all-female Takarazuka Revue, and are typically cited as its main appeal. Research from a Japanese-studies perspective tends to discuss the Takarazuka Revue trouser roles, *otokoyaku*, as a gender-reversal of all-male kabuki, or put them in the context of androgynous or cross-dressing Japanese idols. This article addresses their connection to trouser roles in non-Japanese music theatre, specifically opera. It does so through three lenses: first, the Takarazuka Revue's opera loans and adaptations; second, the shared aesthetic appeal of trouser roles in these two theatre forms; and finally, the singing styles employed in the Takarazuka Revue, including their change over time and relation to classical singing.

Keywords: The Takarazuka Revue; Trouser roles; Otokoyaku; Music theatre; Musical; Japanese theatre

Despite a wealth of research on the Takarazuka Revue, including three English-language monographs in the last quarter of a century, surprisingly little has been written from a theatre studies perspective. The vast majority of previous research belongs to anthropology and related fields, and for this reason the focus has been on the Takarazuka Revue as a phenomenon in the context of Japanese society, on fan cultures and to some extent on the individual experiences of performers. When performances are discussed, it has mainly been in relation to their treatment of colonial and imperial themes. This article details the relationship between the Takarazuka Revue and opera, historically and into the present day, with a focus on what may broadly be called 'trouser roles' as an important commonality. I demonstrate that while the Takarazuka Revue might, from a stylistic point of view, gradually move further from opera and closer to contemporary forms of music theatre over the course of its history, the company still shows a strong interest in the worlds of opera and classical music as thematic and stylistic inspirations. Furthermore, while trouser roles in opera performance might be beginning to decline in favour of countertenors, the popularity of the Takarazuka Revue as a form of music theatre employing trouser roles shows no signs of abating. After a historical background introducing the Takarazuka Revue to unfamiliar readers, the article is divided into three main sections: discussion of the Takarazuka Revue's opera loans and adaptations; the shared appeal of

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otokoyaku, the specialised male-role players in the Takarazuka Revue, and trouser roles in opera, specifically for a female audience and online fandom; and the Takarazuka Revue singing styles, including their development over time and their relation to classical and popular techniques.

The Takarazuka Revue and its early ties to Western classical music

When Kobayashi Ichizou¹ laid the first foundation for the Takarazuka Revue in 1913, he called the sixteen girls aged 12–16 who he had recruited *Takarazuka Shoukantai*, ‘Takarazuka Chorus’, but before they had even made their stage debut the following year he renamed them *Takarazuka Shoujo Opera Youseikai*, ‘Takarazuka Girls’ Opera Training Group’, shortly changed again into *Takarazuka Shoujo Kageki*, ‘Takarazuka Girls’ Opera’. Inspired in part by a fusion of opera and *noh* he saw at the Imperial Theatre in 1912, Kobayashi aimed to create a uniquely Japanese music theatre form incorporating Western classical music. Believing that both kabuki and opera had become too elitist, Kobayashi wanted to offer a reasonably priced middlebrow people’s theatre attracting families. By hiring only girls or young women from middle-class families, he could maintain a respectable reputation, avoiding the stain associated with adult women performing in mixed companies or for an exclusively male audience, while at the same time keeping the costs down by constructing his business as an ‘amateur’ enterprise and his performers as ‘students’ (a technicality maintained to this day).² His choice of Western classical music or a fusion of Western and Japanese music performed on Western rather than traditional Japanese instruments also helped to maintain the respectable image, as this was the music of choice for middle-class families, where piano and voice lessons were coming into fashion.³

Initially, the small troupe performed fairy-tale operettas, singing in girlish soprano voices and accompanying their own performances. As the company grew larger, it soon became necessary to hire professional musicians, who were also involved in forming the first symphony orchestra in Japan.⁴ In the 1920s the influence from French revue and vaudeville grew stronger and more Western popular music was mixed into the repertoire. One example was the *schlager* by Franz Doelle, which under its Japanese name *Sumire no hana saku koro* has become the most iconic of the many nostalgic anthems performed in celebration of the revue and its history.

Following an embarrassing confusion related to the name of the company during their first international tour in 1938, where they were scheduled to perform at the National Opera in Berlin but were denied when it became clear that they were in fact not an opera but a revue company, the name was changed to *Takarazuka Kageki* in 1940.⁵

¹ When citing Japanese names, I follow the Japanese convention of family name preceding given name, except for authors in bibliographical references.

² Leonie R. Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics: Performing and Consuming Japan’s Takarazuka Revue* (Melbourne, 2008), 20–3, 28–9; Makiko Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue Since 1914: Modernity, Girls’ Culture, Japan Pop* (Leiden, 2012), 131–4.

³ Alison Tokita, ‘Takarazuka and the Musical *Modan* in the Hanshin Region 1914–1942’, in *Rethinking Japanese Modernism*, ed. Roy Starrs (Leiden, 2012), 408–27, at 415–18; Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue*, 71–3; Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 25–6.

⁴ Tokita, ‘Takarazuka and the Musical *Modan*’, 417–23.

⁵ For more details on this incident, see Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue*, 20. Even after the name change a similar misapprehension occurred when the Takarazuka Revue performed at the Metropolitan Opera in 1959 and was dismissed by critics as vaudeville failing to live up to the lofty presentation. Sang Mi Park, ‘Staging Japan: The Takarazuka Revue and Cultural Nationalism in the 1950s–60s’, *Asian Studies Review* 39/3 (2015), 357–74, at 364.

Although the Japanese word for opera, 'kageki', was retained, the official translation was changed to 'Takarazuka Revue'.⁶ The motivation for keeping the word 'kageki' might have been Kobayashi's ambition to create a Japanese equivalent to opera, not imitating opera but borrowing influences from opera, operetta and ballet as well as revues and musicals in combination with Japanese theatre forms such as kabuki, ignoring borders between high-brow and low-brow as well as between East and West. *Kageki* is also the name of one of the company's own magazines, founded in 1918 and evidencing the lofty ambitions of their early days with articles by artists and intellectuals on the future of Japanese performing arts.⁷

Today, the Takarazuka Revue is a revue and musical company employing almost 400 performers divided across five full-size troupes, performing in the Takarazuka Grand Theatre, the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre, and various smaller theatres, or on mainly domestic tours on a rotating schedule. There is also a much smaller troupe of 'superior members', senior performers with specialised skills in character acting, singing or Japanese dance. True to its original intentions, the company still employs only female performers, resulting in the unique situation of casting women in roles such as Bill Snibson in *Me and My Girl*, Sky Masterson in *Guys and Dolls* and Tony in *West Side Story*. Today, the performers are recruited at 15 to 18 years of age, and required to pass an entrance examination and attend the two-year course at the Takarazuka Music School before entering the company and performing on stage. Most performers retire after their first seven-year contract expires, or even earlier, while stars may stay on until their thirties and a few specialists even for life.

A typical Grand Theatre performance consists of a one-and-a-half-hour, one-act musical, the vast majority of which are original works staged only once, followed by an unrelated hour-long revue act. If the revue is in traditional Japanese style, it precedes the musical, which then has an added revue-style finale leading up to the iconic final parade down the grand stairs in strict pecking order with feathers on their backs. In a few cases the performances are two-act musicals, usually imported ones with an added finale. Most original Takarazuka two-act musicals are staged in smaller theatres and may feature up-and-coming stars in the lead roles. They also stage recitals ranging from the rare arena concert to the more common dinner show. Another important characteristic of the Takarazuka Revue is that the vast majority of staff are in-house, though foreign directors, choreographers and composers are occasionally hired, and the directors as a general rule are also the playwrights of their own works. Men form the vast majority of prestigious staff such as producers, directors and composers, and it has been a struggle for women to be accepted as directors in particular. Director Ueda Keiko, composer Yoshida Yuuko and conductor Misaki Megumi are female pioneers with prominent careers starting around the 1990s and spanning into the present; they are only slowly being followed by more women. Retired performers might become choreographers, consultants, instructors and teachers for the company, and there are also a few current performers on the company's board of directors.

Despite the fact that most English-language scholarship on the Takarazuka Revue focuses on the phenomenon of all-female casts portraying different genders on stage, I have found no previous research discussing their trouser roles as a parallel to opera.

⁶ The literal meaning of 'kageki' is 'music theatre', and the loan word 'opera' is often used to designate Western opera specifically.

⁷ Tokita, 'Takarazuka and the Musical *Modan*', 417. For more information on the early history of the Takarazuka Revue and its connections to Western classical music, see Lorie Brau, 'The Women's Theatre of Takarazuka', *TDR* 34/4 (1990), 79–95, at 83–4; Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 24–7; Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue*, 1–38; Tokita, 'Takarazuka and the Musical *Modan*'.

In the influential *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, Jennifer Robertson even states that she has deliberately ‘kept analogies between Takarazuka and its global counterparts to a minimum’.⁸ Makiko Yamanashi provides a useful theatre-history contextualisation, tracing the influences from Western music, revue, operetta and film as well as from kabuki and other Japanese forms, and argues that otokoyaku continue a pre-war style of elegant cross-dressing originating in the West, though largely abandoned there in favour of drag used as political parody.⁹ The literal meaning of *otokoyaku* is ‘male role’, while the female-role specialists are called *musumeyaku*, ‘daughter role’. The asymmetrical relation between the two terms reflects the asymmetrical relation between the two types of roles, where the otokoyaku are typically older and more experienced and receive more stage time and solos than their musumeyaku partners.¹⁰ Every Takarazuka performer must have an officially assigned stage gender, though it is technically possible to switch, and the assignment is mainly based on physical traits, including voice type. While it happens that otokoyaku play female roles, the reverse is much rarer and typically involves parody scenes or playing young boys.

Each of the five main troupes has its own (otokoyaku) ‘top star’ and ‘top musumeyaku’ automatically receiving the lead roles in all Grand Theatre performances during their reign (which typically only lasts a couple of years). This formalised ‘star system’ has been gradually established since the 1970s, possibly based on the model of J-pop talent agencies. Before then, Takarazuka Revue stars could have decades-long careers, co-existing with other stars and performing with different troupes. They always perform under their stage names, chosen before their stage debuts and approved by the company, and I will refer to the performers by stage name when mentioning individual performances in the following text.¹¹

Opera loans

As we have seen, Kobayashi aimed for the Takarazuka Revue to become a Japanese form of, or provide a Japanese alternative to, opera. However, after the early years the developments of the two music theatre forms became parallel, rather than directly intertwined. In 1914, Kobayashi hired composer and singer Andou Hiroshi, who wanted to make the Takarazuka Revue mixed-sex on the model of opera companies.¹² Russian soprano Olga Karaslowa and Austrian opera conductor and composer Joseph Laska were among the first teachers at the Takarazuka Music and Opera Academy, which opened in 1919 and was the predecessor of the current Takarazuka Music School.¹³ That the

⁸ Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, 1998), 24.

⁹ Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue*, 93–100. I am indebted to one of my anonymous reviewers for pointing out that Miyamoto Naomi has written in Japanese on the connection between otokoyaku and operatic trouser roles.

¹⁰ The symmetrical term *onnayaku*, literally ‘female role’, is also used, often to designate older roles or performers, but to avoid excess terminology I use ‘musumeyaku’ for all performers specialising in female roles.

¹¹ For more information on the history and organisation of the Takarazuka Revue, see Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue*; Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 17–50; Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 4–20; Zeke Berlin, ‘The Takarazuka Touch’, *Asian Theatre Journal* 8 (1991), 35–47; Brau, ‘The Women’s Theatre’. For specific information on Takarazuka Revue performers and performances, I also recommend the community-fed database TakaWiki at www.takawiki.com/tiki-index.php. While TakaWiki is not officially affiliated with or sanctioned by the company, and may contain errors and omissions, it is the most exhaustive information source on the Takarazuka Revue in English and quite possibly in any language.

¹² Claude Michel-Lesne, ‘La question de la mixité dans le théâtre Takarazuka: jeux d’ombre et de lumière’, *Cipango* 20 (2013), n.p., paragraphs 9–11. Michel-Lesne speculates that Andou might have introduced the idea of trouser roles from opera as a compromise.

¹³ Tokita, ‘Takarazuka and the Musical *Modan*’, 418.

vocal training of early Takarazuka Revue performers was sufficiently classical is indicated by the fact that musumeyaku Kusabue Yoshiko, who was with the company from 1926 to 1940, went on to become a soprano in the Fujiwara Opera Company (and also a film actress).¹⁴ More recently, top musumeyaku Kodama Ai (1980–90) took voice lessons from opera soprano Sasada Kazuko throughout her decade with the company.¹⁵ Otokoyaku Aomi Ren (1984–6) went on to study vocal music at the Royal Academy of Music, and Mitsuya Nao (1981–90) at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music; both returned to the Takarazuka Revue as voice coaches.¹⁶ Furthermore, top otokoyaku Yamato Yuuga (1995–2009) used her celebrity status to promote an interest in opera, and performed the spoken part Samiel in a 2018 Japanese production of Weber's *Der Freischütz*, while top otokoyaku Mori Keaki (1979–93) performed a male singing part in the 'innovation opera' *Sutoupa: Shinsotoba komachi* in 2019. Besides isolated examples such as these, the connection between the Takarazuka Revue and opera is not a direct one but rather one of inspiration and shared traits.

Like opera for much of its history, the Takarazuka Revue functions with in-house staff and performers, creating original works to suit the strengths of their stars and the tastes of their devoted audience. Although heavily influenced by French revue since the 1920s, they did not regularly stage foreign musicals until the late 1960s, and premiere productions of in-house original works still make up around 80 per cent of their repertoire. Therefore, although they produce works of music theatre that can technically be described as musicals, in which spoken dialogue is interspersed with occasional songs, they have developed their own distinctive style.

Like opera in its early history as court entertainment, and like traditional Japanese theatre forms, a Takarazuka Revue performance typically provides not just one work but a program offering both tragedy and comedy, high drama and light entertainment. This is especially apparent in the company's early history, when the program often consisted of several shorter musical plays or dance shows, but the norm is still to pair up a one-act musical with a revue or at the very least to add prologues and epilogues in revue style. These revue scenes can be compared to the ballets attached to baroque opera, and they sometimes employ ballet-style dancing, though only rarely in pointe shoes. Also, while the Takarazuka Revue often favours tragic endings in the style of the long-nineteenth-century opera repertoire rather than the baroque happy ending, there is a sort of *deus ex machina* wherein the performers are 'resuscitated' in the revue finale, often in a duet dance in white and smoke suggesting the dead lovers' reunion in heaven.

The Takarazuka Revue regularly uses classical music, mainly in its revues and mainly a common repertoire of 'classical hits', sometimes in up-tempo arrangements adding percussion, synthesisers and electric guitars in order to make the tunes more 'danceable'. For instance, the large-scale synchronised otokoyaku stair dance in tailcoats, included in the finale of most shows, is typically a bolero. In-house composers often incorporate and paraphrase Western classical music in their musical scores. The company employs two full-sized orchestras, one for each theatre, as well as big bands for the smaller shows.

Besides the music itself, the Takarazuka Revue also borrows plenty of themes from the world of classical music for its works. Classical composers and musicians are disproportionately popular as heroes in musicals. Some examples include: *Tengoku to jigoku: Offenbach monogatari* (1993, dir. Ueda Shinji), a meta-tale about a theatre company staging a play about Jacques Offenbach; *Nijinsky: kiseki no maishin* (2011, dir. Harada Ryou) about

¹⁴ Henceforth I give active years as a Takarazuka Revue performer in parentheses after stage names.

¹⁵ Kodama Ai, email to the author, 30 January 2020.

¹⁶ Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 202–3. More recently, musumeyaku Touka Yurino (2000–18) also studied voice at Osaka University of Arts after her retirement from the Takarazuka Revue.

the life of ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky and the people surrounding him; and *Tsubasa aru hitobito: Brahms to Clara Schumann* (2014, dir. Ueda Kumiko), about the love triangle between Clara Schumann, Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms.¹⁷ There are isolated revue scenes about musicians in which showgirls in black and white might represent piano keys. A notable example is the passionate love scene between Frédéric Chopin, portrayed by top otokoyaku Kuze Seika (1983–97), and George Sand, portrayed by second-ranked otokoyaku Makoto Tsubasa (1985–2001), in *Grandes Belles Folies* (1996, dir. Sakai Sumio).¹⁸ In *Ludwig II: Yume to kodoku no hate ni* (2000–1, dir. Ueda Keiko), top otokoyaku Aika Mire (1985–2001) plays the opera-obsessed Ludwig II of Bavaria while Hoshihara Misao (1972–2011) plays Richard Wagner, and Ayano Kanami (1997–2008) in the role of Ludwig's fiancée Sophie sings a few bars of 'Elsas Traum' from *Lohengrin*.

Furthermore, the Takarazuka Revue regularly adapts operas and operettas into musicals. I have discerned three waves of opera adaptations: pre-war, post-war, and turn of the twenty-first century. In the pre-war wave from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s, operas such as *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Carmen*, *La traviata*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot* were heavily condensed to make up one of up to six different acts. It appears that rearrangements of at least some of the more famous music from the operas were used for these adaptations, as Borodin is credited as composer and Takeuchi Heikichi as arranger for the 1926 'ballet' *Igor-kou*, and Arthur Groos mentions that 'several numbers of Puccini's opera [*Madama Butterfly*] are also rendered with unusual fidelity' in the 1931 *Chouchou-san*.¹⁹

The post-war wave, from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, was centred around new adaptations of *Carmen*, *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*.²⁰ It seems that at least some of these were reworked, prolonged versions of previous adaptations, though it is not within the scope of this article to assess to what extent they may have used the original opera music. The 1950s saw a series of lighter operas, operettas and operetta-style musicals with *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (*Hoffmann monogatari*), *La fille du régiment* (*Rentai no musume*), *Rose-Marie* (*Indian Love Call*) and *Die lustige Witwe* (*The Merry Widow*), which were likely adapted for their famous tunes rather than for their plots. The Takarazuka Revue's first Broadway musical, *Kismet*, in 1955 can also be added to this wave, as it rearranges music by Borodin, mainly from *Prince Igor*, which they had already adapted at least twice. The big star of the second wave was otokoyaku Kasugano Yachiyo (1928–2012), who played Don José in *Carmen* in 1946, Pinkerton in *Chouchou-san* (1946), Hoffmann in *Hoffmann monogatari* (1950), Calaf in *Turandot: Calaf-ouji no bouken* (1952), Haroon (likely their name for the Caliph) in *Kismet: Unmei* (1955) and Jim Kenyon in *Indian Love Call* (1956). The increasingly light opera repertoire during the 1950s marks the gradual

¹⁷ For the sake of clarity, I am normalising the spelling of foreign names and loan words in Japanese titles, that is, Offenbach not *offenbakku*, *grandes belles folies* not *gurando beru forii*.

¹⁸ Most Takarazuka Revue performances since 1995 are released on VHS or DVD, though there are cuts to the music due to copyright. Uncut and unreleased recordings may be aired on the company-owned TV channel Takarazuka Sky Stage, established in 2002. Performances from around 1975 onward have also been aired on other TV channels such as WOWOW and NHK. For the sake of brevity, I am not giving specific recording details for each performance mentioned.

¹⁹ Tsubouchi Shikou, 'The Takarazuka Concise *Madame Butterfly*', trans. Kyoko Selden and Lili Selden, ed. Arthur Groos, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 27 (2015), 63–80, at 64. I have been able to confirm Borodin as the composer for *Igor-kou* and other performance details regarding early performances thanks to the vintage program scans provided at Takarazuka Forever: The Sumire Collection at <http://takarazukaforever.weebly.com/>.

²⁰ In an article on the Japanese reception of *Madama Butterfly*, Groos briefly discusses the Takarazuka Revue's three versions including the 1953 original sequel *Chouchou-san sandaiki*. Arthur Groos, 'Return of the Native: Japan in *Madama Butterfly/Madama Butterfly* in Japan', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1 (1989), 167–94. See also Berlin, 'The Takarazuka Touch', 40–1, on the Takarazuka Revue's opera adaptations and collaborations.

transition to Broadway musicals as the main source of foreign inspiration. In the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, the only opera-related works were increasingly more fanciful versions of *Carmen*, such as *Carmen Caribbean* (1960) or *Shakunetsu no Caribbean* (1962), set in revolutionary Cuba, and the revue *Opera Tropical* (1983) loosely based on it; a new *Hoffmann monogatari* (1978) and the operetta *Véronique* (1978, 1998), the latter two in the much smaller Bow Hall theatre.

The third wave, beginning at the turn of the twenty-first century, was likely sparked by the success of a new *Carmen* adaptation, more faithful to Mérimée's novel than to Bizet's opera: *Gekijou: José to Carmen* (1999, dir. Shibata Yukihiro; restaged 2010, 2016). *Turandot* also saw another revival as *Hououden: Calaf to Turandot* (2002, dir. Kimura Shinji; restaged 2003, 2017), while *Madama Butterfly* seems to have been laid to rest for good in their repertoire. Director Kimura Shinji and composer Kai Masato, henceforth referred to as the Kimura-Kai team, produced a whole series of opera adaptations: besides *Hououden* and yet another *Carmen* (*Freedom: Mister Carmen*, 2000), there was also *Der Rosenkavalier* (*Liebessonate: Ai no sonata*, 2001), *Aida* (*Ouke ni sasagu uta: Opera 'Aida' yori*, 2003, restaged 2005, 2015, 2016, 2022), *Věc Makropulos* (*Fumetsu no toge*, 2003; restaged 2018) and *Il trovatore* (*Honoo ni kuchizuke wo*, 2005).²¹ A curious feature of the third wave of opera adaptations is that none of the famous opera music is used, although Kai Masato sometimes seems to aim for an opera ambience with big choruses and recitative-like sung dialogues. The star of the third wave is musumeyaku Hanafusa Mari (1991–2006), who had a longer top reign than any of the most popular otokoyaku since the establishment of the top-star system: twelve years as top musumeyaku in two different troupes, with five different otokoyaku partners. She played *Carmen* in *Gekijou*, *Turandot* in *Hououden* (twice) and *Leonora* in *Honoo ni kuchizuke wo*.

In a theatre company where most original works are only staged once, the major works of this third wave are hits that continue to be revived. On the heels of them, there is also a small new wave of operetta adaptations: *Gypsy danshaku: Der Zigeunerbaron* (2010), *The Merry Widow* (2013), and *Koumori* (2016), based on *Die Fledermaus*. These are all directed by Tani Masazumi, who specialises in adaptations rather than writing original screenplays; his previous works include Cole Porter's *Can-Can* (1996) and the most recent *Hoffmann monogatari* (2008). Unlike the opera adaptations, these use much of the original operetta music, selected and rearranged to suit the performers' skills.

The Takarazuka Revue is returning the long-nineteenth-century standard opera repertoire by composers such as Puccini and Verdi into musicals, which is unsurprising as they are mining Western culture for famous works to adapt. Margaret Reynolds calls Verdi and Puccini 'the two great champions of heterosexuality on the operatic stage' and connects this to the absence of trouser roles in their works.²² However, grand heterosexual romance, preferably ending in death, is exactly the theme for the Takarazuka Revue, and they have little need for specific trouser role repertoire. In light of this, *Der Rosenkavalier* is their most surprising loan, as Octavian is too childish for a typical Takarazuka Revue hero and the love triangle might seem too sordid without the opera music to sublimate it, although the double drag scene suits the company's sense of comedy.

More problematic in terms of adapting this long-nineteenth-century opera repertoire is the centrality of the soprano heroine. In Takarazuka Revue musicals the top otokoyaku

²¹ It is unclear to what extent the musical versions of *Věc Makropulos* or *Carmen* are directly inspired by the operas. The Takarazuka Revue has also made other musicals based on the same literary sources as operas, such as *Manon Lescaut*, *Pique Dame*, *Evgeny Onegin* and *Don Carlos*.

²² Margaret Reynolds, 'Ruggiero's Deceptions, Cherubino's Distractions', in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York, 1995), 132–51, at 142.

infallibly takes precedence over the top musumeyaku. There are various solutions to this dilemma. One is to tweak the material and pretend that the hero is the central figure, as suggested by the titles *Turandot: Calaf-ouji no bouken*, *Hououden: Calaf to Turandot*, *Gekijou: José to Carmen* and the 1971 *Carmen* adaptation *Don José no isshou*. Another is to cast otokoyaku stars in central female roles, as was the case with Koshiji Fubuki (1939–51) playing Carmen in 1949–50, Furusato Akemi (1942–59) playing Turandot in 1952, and Aran Kei (1991–2009) playing Aida in 2003 and 2005. Finally, a more radical solution was tried in a couple of opera adaptations created for smaller stages within the third wave, *Freedom: Mister Carmen* and *Fumetsu no toge*, based on *Věc Makropulos*. Both adaptations reverse the operas' gender roles and make the main character a man, creating a sort of 'homme fatal' suitable for exhibiting otokoyaku sex appeal.

The impetus for the third wave appears to be the exceptional status of top musumeyaku Hanafusa Mari, who premiered the title role in the Takarazuka Revue version of the musical *Elisabeth* (dir. Koike Shuuichirou) in 1996 and had already repeated it with a different cast in a new troupe in 1998. She also sang Puccini's aria 'O mio babbino caro', followed by an instrumental version of 'Nessun dorma', in the revue *Citrus no kaze* (1998–9, dir. Okada Keiji; restaged 2014, 2015, 2018).²³ Directors were likely looking through the opera repertoire in search of new vehicles for her skills. The first one, *Gekijou*, was a *Carmen* adaptation by Shibata Yukihiro, who often wrote complex femme fatale (anti-)heroines different from the typically younger and more innocent Takarazuka Revue heroines. Despite the subtitle putting José's name first, Carmen is arguably the central character in this adaptation. The fight causing José to arrest her has been politicised into a gang fight between gypsies and racist townspeople, and Carmen gets to speak about discrimination, eloquently explaining her 'wolf nature' and need for freedom to José.²⁴ She speaks and sings in a low voice and performs an impressive (approximation of) flamenco choreographed by Ran Konomi (1974–83), a former musumeyaku specialising in Spanish dance who continued to work for the Takarazuka Revue as a choreographer.

Gekijou was followed up by the *Turandot* adaptation *Hououden*, created for Hanafusa Mari and her fifth and last top otokoyaku partner Wao Youka (1988–2006), who played the double role of Carmen's husband Garcia and the author-narrator Mérimée in *Gekijou*. *Hououden* was directly inspired by a *Turandot* production running in Tokyo 1999–2001, directed and designed by dancer and choreographer Teshigawara Saburo. The musical is more visually stunning than the opera, lavish even by Takarazuka Revue standards. The Executioner played by Kotobuki Tsukasa (1990–present) is prominently featured, in frightening Chinese-opera-style makeup resembling that of metal bands. Turandot looks like the typical Takarazuka Revue version of a Chinese princess, in whiteface and elaborate head-dresses. She makes her first, spectacular entrance in a long train held up for view by six attendants, explaining her motivations in the song 'Turandot', which might be described as the equivalent of a bravura aria. It ranges from g to g^{#2} and consists of chanted parts in a low tessitura, where she gets to exhibit a commanding chest voice, mainly wordless coloratura on the high notes, and short responses from the choir. The entire piece is 'classical' (in the broader stylistic sense), and is clearly meant to underscore Turandot's impressiveness.²⁵ During it, Calaf stands transfixed by her majestic beauty, and when she leaves, he declares his decision to take on her quest.

²³ Although 'Nessun dorma' is not used in *Hououden*, otokoyaku Haruno Sumire (1991–2007) sings it in the original key, with microphones, in *I Got Music: Haruno Sumire in Concert* (2005, dir. Koike Shuuichirou).

²⁴ I opt to retain the term 'gypsy' as the portrayal follows the conventions of *Zigeunerromantik* and has little to do with Romani people.

²⁵ Hanafusa Mari, 'Turandot', *Rival and Villain: Takarazuka Cool Song Collection* (Takarazuka Creative Arts, 2011), CD.

Turandot is given a more prominent position than in Puccini's opera, where she only appears halfway in, and the most famous arias are given to Calaf and to Liù. There is, however, a similar contrast between the more conventionally melodic music for Calaf and the 'exotic' music for Turandot, as the Chinese court is surrounded with bombastic, classically inspired and vaguely 'Eastern'-sounding music, while Calaf and the people around him receive more generic pop musical songs. Calaf is polarised with Turandot by being portrayed as occidental, as his songs are in the style of Western musicals and he is fair with brown hair and light grey or blue contact lenses, emphasising his transfixed gaze at Turandot. In an erotic nightmare sequence, Turandot complains that she is hot and discovers to her horror that it is Calaf, initially hidden behind a Chinese mask, who burns her. This dance scene expressing the sadomasochistic dynamic between them prepares Turandot's reluctant change of heart and makes its ending more credible than the opera's.

The character of Barak has been modified from Calaf's old tutor in Gozzi's fable to another exiled prince and leader of a band of thieves to create a more romantic role for the second-ranked otokoyaku Mizu Natsuki (1993–2010). He is completely indifferent to Turandot, but not to Calaf. On the contrary, he is loyal to the point of death despite the absence of a prior connection between them and despite finding Calaf's self-destructive obsession with Turandot foolish. The suggestion of homosexuality introduced with the altered character of Barak might serve as a displaced version of the shadow of lesbianism surrounding Turandot, who would rather behead her suitors than marry. Patricia Juliana Smith argues: 'Dispossessed in the opera's libretto of the most salient aspect of lesbian identity, namely desire for another woman – or, for that matter, an appropriate woman to desire – her murderous hatred of men has become her defining trait.'²⁶ Curiously, *Hououden* retains both Liù, renamed Tamal, and the polar opposite character Adelma she is based on, and even has the vengeful Adelma whip the self-sacrificing Tamal. However, both these characters are posited on the side of Calaf and their various violent actions are carried out in relation to him, leaving Turandot alone. As in Puccini's opera, Turandot is moved to (heterosexual) 'love' by Tamal's sacrifice. This is very different from the 1952 *Turandot* (dir. Shirai Tetsuzou), where Turandot is *not* moved but banishes Calaf after discovering his name, whereupon Calaf kills himself for love of Turandot, and Adelma, played by musumeyaku star Asaji Shinobu (1938–54), kills herself for love of Calaf.²⁷

The Kimura-Kai team created another opera adaptation for Hanafusa Mari and Wao Youka: *Honoo ni kuchizuke wo*. Adapting *Il trovatore* for the plot and not the music might seem an odd choice, and this adaptation has seen no revivals so far. The new music written for it sounds a lot more like a contemporary pop musical than *Hououden*, but the leads still sing it in a quasi-classical way. Wao Youka in particular delivers her songs as though they were big tenor arias. Senior otokoyaku Itsuki Chihiro (1973–present) in the role of Azucena is perhaps the least classical-sounding in the cast. Stickland mentions her as an example of an otokoyaku who is sometimes assigned to sing female parts due to her large vocal range,²⁸ but here Azucena's big aria 'Stride la vampa' has been replaced with a recitative-like duet between her and Manrico where she employs a non-classical singing style in a low tessitura.

As with *Gekijou*, the gypsy theme from the opera has been politicised in *Honoo ni kuchizuke wo*. Manrico's men are a band of (oddly Caribbean-looking) gypsies who get brutally slaughtered while nuns look on, and the final scene shows Manrico crucified on an

²⁶ Patricia Juliana Smith, 'Gli Enigmi Sono Tre: The [D]evolution of Turandot, Lesbian Monster', in *En Travesti*, ed. Blackmer and Smith, 243–84, at 245.

²⁷ According to the English program cited in the TakaWiki entry for this production. See note 11.

²⁸ Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 120.

enormous, erected cannon. However, the religious persecution of gypsies only serves to further confuse an already confused plot. *Honoo ni kuchizuke wo* is most notable for a risqué scene where Leonora gets up from lovemaking in a night forest, seemingly naked under a blanket that she opens to let in the still-dressed Manrico. Takarazuka Revue performers are typically covered up, at least in flesh-coloured tights, so perhaps this unusual costuming choice is an allusion to the frequent nudity in contemporary opera stagings. The accompanying revue *Neo Voyage* (2005, dir. Miki Akio) picks up the classical theme with Hanafusa Mari as a siren and Wao Youka singing a few bars from 'E lucevan le stelle' in the original key in the finale.

The only third-wave opera adaptation for the Grand Stage written in two acts is *Ouke ni sasagu uta*, based on *Aida*. Again, the music is non-classical in style, though there are some opera-like elements such as choruses, and monotonous sung dialogue unusual for the Takarazuka Revue. The overall impression is that of a contemporary rock musical, where each character has an endlessly repeated theme song. The sets are unusually stylised and symmetrical, with diagonal stairs for the cast to parade up and down on; the makeup and costumes reflect a 1960s-Hollywood idea of ancient Egyptian fashion, which makes it look more than sound like a classic opera production.

This rather static two-act musical, heavy on singing and light on dancing, is a surprising choice for a cast lacking in strong singers. Top otokoyaku Kozuki Wataru (1989–2006) is much more prominent as a dancer: she was a perfect fit for the flashy Escamillo in *Gekijou*, and is not shown to best advantage burdened with Radames's oversized headgear and difficult vocal lines. Despite being popular enough to start her second top musumeyaku reign with a new partner in a new troupe, Dan Rei (1992–2005) was apparently not considered fit for the role of *Aida*. However, she gets the real diva role as the pharaoh's daughter and later new pharaoh Amneris, with over-the-top golden costumes and the catchiest theme song.²⁹ Otokoyaku Aran Kei, in the less interesting ingénue role of *Aida*, struggles both with acting the demure musumeyaku heroine, and with having to sing in a higher range than usual. Vocally, the most impressive member of the cast is senior otokoyaku Ebira Kaoru (1975–2017), in the role of pharaoh, who delivers her majestic opening song with a deeper, richer resonance. In terms of popularity, however, this must be considered another success for the Kimura-Kai team, as it sees its fourth restaging within the Takarazuka Revue in 2022, and has also been staged by the affiliated Toho musical company as *The Musical AIDA: Takarazuka kageki ouke ni sasagu uta yori* (2009).

It is remarkable that none of the famous opera arias used in other Takarazuka Revue productions are incorporated into the Kimura-Kai team's opera adaptations. Perhaps the team prioritised creating a sense of musical coherence similar to that of an opera. For example, *Fumetsu no toge* combines expressionist sets all in white with 1960s-flavour pop music into an aesthetically coherent whole. This is quite unusual for Takarazuka Revue original works, which often borrow and recycle various different songs to suit specific scenes. Typically, multiple in-house composers work on each musical, and Kai Masato's previous works also follow this pattern, while he is the sole composer in his collaborations with Kimura Shinji. This strengthens the suggestion that they were aiming for a more homogeneous, through-composed sound.

The trouser role connection

The most striking parallel between the Takarazuka Revue and opera is that they are forms of music theatre employing trouser roles, allowing women to portray all kinds of

²⁹ Dan Rei, 'Farao no musume dakara', *Rival and Villain: Takarazuka Cool Song Collection* (Takarazuka Creative Arts, 2011), CD.

historical heroes and antiheroes, and to romance other women on stage. They are also both heightened, stylised forms, and certain aspects of Takarazuka Revue acting and staging have more in common with opera than with musicals in general. While productions of spoken plays are often minimalist or contemporary-looking, opera is more frequently performed in lavish period costumes. Even when the look is updated, such as in *Regieoper* productions, it tends to stop short of the contemporary in a vague early twentieth-century ambience with fedoras, pinstripe suits and little black dresses, matching a typical Takarazuka Revue aesthetic. The Takarazuka Revue as a rule avoids contemporary Japanese settings, and its supposedly contemporary Western settings tend to look like an anachronistic fantasy land.³⁰ The company describes itself as a 'dream world', and research on it often also emphasises its extravagant non-realism.

The heightened artifice and lavish spectacle of the Takarazuka Revue might attract lovers of camp for the same reasons that they have been drawn to opera, according to scholars such as Wayne Koestenbaum and Margaret Reynolds.³¹ Their descriptions of the camp allure of opera match popular descriptions of the Takarazuka Revue as quaintly anachronistic, nostalgic and resolutely non-naturalistic in that young Japanese women play characters of any gender, age or ethnicity. Lorie Brau describes the Takarazuka Revue as an 'insiders' theatre' in the Japanese tradition of *noh* and *kabuki*, where the audience derives pleasure from familiarity with the actors and forms rather than from carefully constructed plots; Yamanashi makes a similar analysis of it as 'cult theatre' drawing on familiar formulas and mannerisms.³² The same argument can be made for contemporary opera culture at places such as the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, wherein opera aficionados return to watch their favourite singers perform their favourite works with already familiar plots.

Likewise, the *otokoyaku* might have an appeal for a mainly female audience similar to that of the trouser roles in opera. During the first wave of queer musicology, this lesbian appeal was described in confessional tones by authors such as Hélène Cixous and Terry Castle. Cixous writes in *Tancredi Continues* that Rossini 'makes it a condition of the body that for a man to love a woman the way Tancredi loves Clorinda or Amenaide, he must be a woman – I mean, Tancredi'.³³ Reynolds writes of the opera, 'where else can you see two women making love in a public place?'³⁴ Similarly, Castle describes the opera house as one of the few places where it has been socially acceptable for women to swoon over other women in 'sapphic' diva-worship.³⁵ While lesbian representation in mainstream media has increased since these texts were written, the continued importance of trouser roles in opera is attested to by the online communities around blogs such as Queer Lorgnette.³⁶ In the online opera fandom you will find new coinages such

³⁰ There are some rare exceptions to the rule, but these are adaptations of popular works such as films or novels, which I argue add a further distancing layer to the non-realist aesthetics.

³¹ See Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (1993; rpt. Boston, 2001), 147; Reynolds, 'Ruggiero's Deceptions', 132.

³² Brau, 'The Women's Theatre', 87; Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue*, 111.

³³ Hélène Cixous, 'Tancredi Continues', trans. Deborah Jenson, in *En Travesti*, ed. Blackmer and Smith, 152–68, at 154.

³⁴ Reynolds, 'Ruggiero's Deceptions', 133.

³⁵ Terry Castle, 'In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender: A Musical Emanation', in *En Travesti*, ed. Blackmer and Smith, 20–58, at 21. She even mentions the Takarazuka Revue in a footnote as a parallel form of ardent same-sex performer worship: see pp. 34 and 53 note 45. She and Koestenbaum both discuss the homosocial and sometimes homoerotic bonds between budding and established opera divas, a phenomenon reflected in the Takarazuka Revue, where performers more often than not start out as fans. See Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat*, 98–100; Castle, 'In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender', 25–6.

³⁶ Queer Lorgnette, at <https://qlorgnette.wordpress.com/>. There is an explanation of the term 'white shirts' as inspired by Vesselina Kasarova's performance as Sesto in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* (Salzburg Festival, 2003).

as ‘mezzosexual’, for the irresistible attraction (regardless of sexual identity) to lower-voiced female opera singers, often performing trouser roles; and ‘white shirts’, for said singers’ ability to carry a man’s shirt with or without suit, necktie, ruffle, breeches and so on. Besides their visual appeal, these fans cherish female opera singers for their ‘butch’ vocal mannerisms, gender-transcending register breaks and dark, masculine or baritone-sounding chest notes.³⁷ As I detail in the following section, the attractions of the otokoyaku include similar vocal stylings.

Some darlings of this community are mezzo-sopranos Vesselina Kasarova, notable for bad-boy sex appeal à la Marlon Brando in unbuttoned shirts and vests, and Sarah Connolly, notable for butch swagger in uniforms and other period costumes. The trouser role aesthetic has much in common with the otokoyaku one. While otokoyaku typically cover their arms and legs, pad out their shoulders and waists and conceal their breasts, they might still tease with tight trousers and open collars, unbuttoning their cuffs to roll up their sleeves, untying their ties, and throwing off their jackets. For instance, the black tailcoat striptease choreographed by Hayama Kiyomi and performed by Shibuki Jun (1986–2004) in the revue *Jazzmania* (2001, dir. Miki Akio; restaged 2002) resembles the one Vesselina Kasarova performs while singing the bravura aria ‘L’amour viens rendre à mon âme’ in Gluck’s *Orphée et Eurydice* (Bayerische Staatsoper, 2004).

If you are looking for correspondences to Sarah Connolly’s Caesar in silver-streaked wig, high boots and oversized uniform coat in Handel’s *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Glyndebourne, 2005; restaged 2018), you may find them in the Takarazuka Revue’s many Shakespeare adaptations: there is Takashio Tomoe’s (1972–87) dashing Mark Antony wooing Cleopatra in *Shinku naru umi ni inori wo* (1986, dir. Shibata Yukihiko; restaged 1987), and Todoroki Yuu’s (1985–2021) rock-star Caesar surrounded by groupies in *Akatsuki no Roma* (2006, dir. Kimura Shinji). Similarly, Asaji Saki’s (1983–98) devilishly decadent yet angel-faced Nero in red curls and golden laurels in *Koutei* (1998, dir. Ueda Shinji) resonates with Connolly’s hot-headed and hot-blooded version of the teenage emperor in Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea* (Liceu, 2010). This is just to mention a few; like opera, the Takarazuka Revue gives ample opportunities for women to admire other women playing princes, knights and swashbucklers wielding capes and swords.

Similar to the fandom around trouser roles in opera, the Western, English-language online Takarazuka Revue fandom consists largely of women under the LGBTQ umbrella attracted to the concept of otokoyaku and to the idea of an all-female music theatre. To what extent the attraction for the intended Japanese audience could be described as lesbian is a contested issue within the scholarship on the Takarazuka Revue.³⁸ What remains uncontested is that the audience is largely made up of women, and that otokoyaku are far more popular than musumeyaku. Previous research describes the specifically Japanese appeal of the otokoyaku as that of the bishounen (beautiful youth). Historically this describes a boy or very young man with forelocks and unshaved head, perceived as desirable to older men as well as women. For instance, he could be a kabuki actor specialised in female parts. Today ‘bishounen’ refers mainly to a conventional style of drawing androgynous youths in girls’ manga, especially in the BL (boys’ love) genre portraying male homosexual relationships for a female audience, and to artists and celebrities presenting themselves in this style. The Takarazuka Revue otokoyaku exists in a relationship of mutual influence to the manga bishounen; both are posited as preferable

³⁷ See Castle, ‘In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender’, 38–9; Elizabeth Wood, ‘Sapphones’, in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas (New York, 1994), 27–66, at 30–3; Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat*, 137, 146, 166–7.

³⁸ For a range of views, see Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 185–6, 211–12; Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 129–32, 211; Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue*, xxiii, 153.

to 'real men' as objects of desire and preferable to 'real women' as objects of identification for their predominantly female audience.³⁹ The typical Takarazuka Revue hero is no weak, helpless or innocent boy, but an adult man in or approaching his thirties, but he still shares bishounen features with his brothers in manga: a smooth, beardless face with big eyes and long lashes; long and slender limbs. Though heroes based on famous historical persons might wear their characteristic facial hair, or heroes followed for extended periods of time could don facial hair to indicate maturing into middle age, these instances are rare. Rhett Butler in the Revue's version of *Gone with the Wind* is exceptional for being a frequent lead role whose performer sports a moustache, ever since Haruna Yuri (1963–88) performed the part in 1977.⁴⁰

Of course, the valorisation of an androgynously beautiful youth is not unique to Japanese culture. It is shared by Greek antiquity and Renaissance romances, which provide the material for much of the high-voiced hero repertoire in opera. In Handel's *Alcina*, Bradamante can easily pass for her brother Ricciardo. Baroque opera heroes portrayed by castrati or female singers were young enough to be beardless and high-voiced, and this was the ideal for romantic heroes in particular, while strictly martial heroes or unsuccessful lovers might have lower voices and be sung by uncastrated men.⁴¹ My point is that Takarazuka Revue otokoyaku draw on similar aesthetic codes for portraying heroes as attractively young, slender and smooth-faced.⁴² It is important to recall that this is simply the norm for male lead roles within these genres, and that they are fully heroic, martially as well as romantically.

With the development of the heroic tenor in Romantic opera, high-voiced heroic male roles gradually yielded to less heroic pageboy types. While these boys might not technically be younger than the medieval knights and ancient Greek heroes populating baroque opera, their immaturity and their high-pitched, prepubescent voices began to mark them as comical or endearing supporting characters, while tenors replaced them as the leading men. Eventually the audience grew so unaccustomed to seeing and hearing women in male roles that when baroque opera was coming back into the repertoire in the twentieth century, the high-voiced male parts were transposed for tenors, baritones, and basses,

³⁹ See Mark J. McLelland, 'The Love Between "Beautiful Boys" in Japanese Women's Comics', *Journal of Gender Studies* 9 (2000), 13–25; James Welker, 'Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent: "Boys' Love" as Girls' Love in *Shōjo Manga*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31 (2006), 841–70; Leslie Winston, 'Seeing Double: The Feminism of Ambiguity in the Art of Takabatake Kashō', in *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, ed. Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano and James Welker (Honolulu, 2018), 133–53.

⁴⁰ Haruna was emulating Clark Gable's iconic look, while the Takarazuka Revue Scarlett O'Hara borrows Vivien Leigh's mid-part and dark instead of red hair. The Revue imitates other famous movie stars, such as James Dean in *Dean* (1981–2, dir. Okada Keiji; restaged 1991–2, 1998). Holledge and Tompkins write: 'In the Takarazuka version of *East of Eden*, the otokoyaku plays James Dean, not Steinbeck's character; when the Revue presents *Gone with the Wind*, Rhett Butler disappears within the impersonation of Clark Gable.' Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins, *Women's Intercultural Performance* (London, 2000), 127–34, at 130. The Takarazuka Revue version of *Gone with the Wind* – *Kaze to tomo ni sarinu* – has been staged twenty times in at least three different versions, all directed by Ueda Shinji.

⁴¹ See Roger Freitas, 'The Eroticism of Emasculation: Confronting the Baroque Body of the Castrato', *The Journal of Musicology* 20 (2003), 196–249. While heroes (as well as heroines) in Italian baroque opera were preferably cast with castrati, male supporting roles could be composed for female singers. This was the case with Goffredo in *Rinaldo*, Medoro in *Orlando*, Polinesso in *Ariodante* and Arsamene in *Serse*, all by Handel. These original trouser roles from the era of the castrati are somewhat less heroic, frequently villainous, but certainly not more immature than the castrato roles.

⁴² Similarly, the lover-hero in Chinese opera is beautiful and beardless and has a high-pitched or 'breaking' voice, and is portrayed either by male or female performers in different regional traditions. The parallel to trouser roles in Chinese opera remains unexplored in research on the Takarazuka Revue, although Teri J. Silvio briefly mentions influence from the Takarazuka Revue in an article on Taiwanese *opeila*. See Teri J. Silvio, 'Tai/kuso/camp: "New Opeila" and the Structure of Sensibility', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10 (2009), 341–60.

although this practice inevitably created problems with harmonisation. After a period of historically informed productions casting these roles mainly with mezzo-sopranos – a resurgence and welcome expansion of the trouser role – the current trend seems to be to choose countertenors for high-voiced male parts whenever possible, although this concern with gender verisimilitude is alien to the baroque opera sensibility.⁴³ The disappointed trouser role aficionado might be tempted to turn to the Takarazuka Revue, where women still play every role.

Singing styles and voice ranges

How does Takarazuka Revue singing compare with that of opera? As scholarship on the Takarazuka Revue from a theatre studies perspective is already scant, there is very little on the musical or vocal aspect of their performances. Leonie R. Stickland devotes a couple of pages of *Gender Gymnastics: Performing and Consuming Japan's Takarazuka Revue* to 'voice kata' ('kata' can be translated as 'form'), discussing the speaking and singing voices of otokoyaku and musumeyaku.⁴⁴ Tokita's 'Takarazuka and the Musical *Modan* in the Hanshin Region 1914–1942' is concerned only with the Takarazuka Revue's early contribution to the cultivation of Western classical music in Japan, and seems to perceive the important influences from French revue and Western popular music from the 1920s onwards as the beginning of a decline. Tokita writes that 'our image of Takarazuka music now is over-amplified, over-produced vibrato, a somehow Japanese version of the Broadway musical'.⁴⁵

The Takarazuka Revue has changed during its over 100-year history, and it is by definition a musical and revue company and not an opera or operetta company. However, I would argue that the company has not severed its ties to classical music as completely as Tokita's offhand remark suggests. Naturally, Takarazuka Revue performers are not trained as classical singers. They are musical artists who need a strong all-around skill set in singing, dancing and acting. Their formal education is only two years, though some of them might have taken voice lessons before entering Takarazuka Music School, and they are offered free lessons in various song and dance styles while they are employed by the company.⁴⁶

So, what do otokoyaku actually sound like? In an oft-cited non-scholarly article, Jane Singer claims that they 'sing in hearty baritones'.⁴⁷ With regards to their speaking voices, Judith Pascoe similarly mentions that one can 'identify retired *otokoyaku* by means of the residual baritone'.⁴⁸ According to Yamanashi, otokoyaku with naturally high voices 'train for years to extend their voice range before achieving their own characteristic voices, husky or velvet'.⁴⁹ Going into more technical detail, Holledge and Tompkins write that the otokoyaku's 'vocal delivery relies on an artificially lowered larynx, slight huskiness, and maximum chest reverberation'.⁵⁰ My own survey of otokoyaku songs written in the 1970s to the 1990s by composers such as Terada Takio, Takahashi Kuni and Yoshida Yuuko suggests that otokoyaku sing in what can most closely be described as a tenor

⁴³ See Reynolds, 'Ruggiero's Deceptions'; Joke Dame, 'Unveiled Voices: Sexual Difference and the Castrato', in *Queering the Pitch*, ed. Brett, Wood and Thomas, 139–54; Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington, 2006), 3–5, 33–6, 42–4.

⁴⁴ Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 119–20.

⁴⁵ Tokita, 'Takarazuka and the Musical *Modan*', 416.

⁴⁶ See Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 71, on these classes.

⁴⁷ Jane Singer, 'The Dream World of Takarazuka', *Japan Quarterly* 43/2 (1996), 162–81, at 162.

⁴⁸ Judith Pascoe, *On the Bullet Train with Emily Brontë: Wuthering Heights in Japan* (Ann Arbor, 2017), 37.

⁴⁹ Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue*, 101.

⁵⁰ Holledge and Tompkins, *Women's Intercultural Performance*, 128.

range, though their bottom range has the limitation of a contralto, around E flat below middle C. Otokoyaku vocal lines are sometimes notated in treble clef and sometimes in tenor vocal clef, with or without octave markings. The otokoyaku analogue to the ‘tenor high C’ seems to be B flat above middle C, which is often used as a climactic high note, though it sometimes happens that they reach the ‘high C’.⁵¹ Like the heldentenor, contemporary otokoyaku blast out their high notes in chest voice, which puts a similar limitation on their upper range.⁵² As the tenor range typically corresponds to the lowest possible range of a woman’s voice, her timbre will be different, deeper- or darker-sounding than a male tenor’s, and this might explain why the otokoyaku voice has been described as a ‘baritone’.

According to one of Singer’s informants, otokoyaku sang in *uragoe* (falsetto or head voice) until around 1960, when they switched to *jigoe* (‘natural’ or chest voice). The *uragoe* was originally necessary because, before the introduction of microphones in 1934, a woman’s low chest voice would not carry to the back of the theatre.⁵³ The small selection of older recordings included on Takarazuka Revue compilation CDs partly confirm and partly complicate this statement. Indeed, pre-1960s otokoyaku do not try to darken or ‘masculinise’ their singing voices and might sound like classical contraltos, mezzo-sopranos or, more rarely, sopranos, similar to contemporary musumeyaku. As early as in the 1940s, however, otokoyaku such as Koshiji Fubuki (later a famous chanson singer) might sing mainly in chest voice to suit jazz and other popular genres. Akashi Teruko (1946–62) sang in a higher, classical-sounding voice in her solo songs, and in a lower jazzy voice to provide contrast with musumeyaku Hama Yuuko (1953–61) in a duet. Kasugano Yachiyo, who had an exceptionally long career and stayed with the company until her passing, sang within the normal otokoyaku range on later recordings at least since the 1960s, though her voice still showed traces of a more classical head-voice resonance. The difference is one of timbre rather than range: while in the 1940s and 1950s otokoyaku did not usually sing in high soprano voices, they still cultivated a classical-sounding head voice, which was suppressed from the 1960s onward.

It is undeniable that otokoyaku stars of the 1960s to 1970s such as Uchinoe Noboru (1959–67) and Maho Shibuki (1952–75) introduced a newly hoarse and husky pop sound. When combined with the still classical-sounding soprano voices of musumeyaku such as Kamo Sakura (1955–71) and Hatsukaze Jun (1961–76), they provided maximum vocal gender difference. However, there are also 1960s and 1970s recordings of musumeyaku Kisaragi Miyako (1953–72), former musumeyaku Asaoka Yukiji (1952–55) and Fukamidori Natsuyo (1935–55) singing chanson in low chest voices, suggesting that the shift in otokoyaku singing style reflected a more general change in taste around this time.⁵⁴ Although it is difficult to determine what is the cause and what the effect, the company had begun to use disco hits, power ballads and the like, for which the earlier operetta-inspired singing style would not fit. Furthermore, the Takarazuka Revue started regularly staging foreign musicals in the late 1960s, with *Oklahoma!* (1967, dir. Gemze de

⁵¹ These observations are based on my personal collection of Takarazuka Revue vocal scores, which I also checked against available recordings to confirm that they were performed in the same keys as noted in several subsequent performances with different performers.

⁵² See André, *Voicing Gender*, 42–4 on the gradual shift from head to chest voice as ideal for these heroic high notes in *bel canto*.

⁵³ Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 119.

⁵⁴ Fukamidori Natsuyo was a chanson specialist who also taught otokoyaku after retiring as a Takarazuka Revue performer. The following recordings were consulted for this overview: *Ai! All His Dreams: Terada Takio Takarazuka kageki sakuhinshuu* (Takarazuka Creative Arts, 1996), CD; *Takarazuka Best Selection 90* (Takarazuka Creative Arts, 2004), CD; *Takarazuka Best Selection 100* (Takarazuka Creative Arts, 2014), CD; and *Koshiji Fubuki ni sasagu* (Universal, 2016), CD. The Takarazuka Revue compilations give the original performance year of musicals and a generic copyright year, but no recording dates.

Lappe; restaged 1984 and 2006), *West Side Story* (1968–9, dir. Jerome Robbins and Sammy Bayes; restaged 1998, 1999 and 2018) and *Carousel* (1969, dir. Edward Roll; restaged 1984), and might have adjusted the otokoyaku singing style to stay as close as possible to the original scores written for male voices.⁵⁵ One might assume that otokoyaku started singing in chest voices to sound more ‘masculine’, but this idea is complicated by the fact that the shift in vocal style coincided with a visual shift from the ‘classic’ otokoyaku such as Kasugano Yachiyo to the new ‘androgynous’ otokoyaku such as Anna Jun (1965–78) or Daichi Mao (1973–85).⁵⁶ I assert that both of these seemingly paradoxical shifts were part of the company’s attempts to renew their appeal at a time when they were losing popularity, and that the change in singing was first and foremost a response to audience demand for pop-style voices.

The otokoyaku voice is thrown into relief by the typical musumeyaku singing style, although there is a tendency within the existing scholarship to oversimplify the differences. According to Robertson, ‘many otokoyaku have naturally low – as opposed to a musumeyaku’s unnaturally high – voices’, while Stickland claims that musumeyaku ‘must usually sing in an extra high register to compensate for the limitations of their male-role counterparts’.⁵⁷ I would argue that this is only partially true. Musumeyaku are certainly expected to be able to produce high notes with a ‘soprano sound’, and generic musumeyaku choruses are in a high tessitura. In revue theme songs and similar, otokoyaku and musumeyaku often sing the same melody in octaves, forcing the musumeyaku into a high soprano tessitura. However, when musumeyaku have their own solos, they often sing in a lower range, more typical of popular singing and corresponding to a contralto or mezzo-soprano tessitura. Thus, the gendered difference in voice range between musumeyaku and otokoyaku is usually closer to that between a soprano and a trouser role mezzo-soprano or contralto in opera than to the soprano–tenor octave gap. Since otokoyaku stopped singing in a classical-sounding head voice, the musumeyaku and otokoyaku ranges largely overlap, and the gender difference is mainly one of timbre, with otokoyaku singing in a lower-sounding chest voice and musumeyaku in a higher-sounding head voice. Musumeyaku might even be encouraged to aim for a ‘sweet’, childish-sounding, breathy or reedy tone, and any vocal strain or poor intonation would be the result of a lack of proper resonance and support rather than an unreasonably high range.⁵⁸ As they are typically promoted faster than otokoyaku, there might also be a corresponding lack of training, experience and voice maturation, though some musumeyaku sing in fuller, richer, more mature-sounding voices.⁵⁹

When asked in a podcast video interview how the Takarazuka Revue has changed since she left the company, former musumeyaku and current voice coach Eri Chiaki (1993–2010) suggested that the music has become more complex and difficult to sing, and that the musumeyaku singing style has completely changed from the classically influenced style

⁵⁵ These are often cited as the Takarazuka Revue’s first imported Broadway musicals, but as previously mentioned they staged *Kismet* in 1955 and *Rose-Marie*, as *Indian Love Call*, in 1956. However, these were likely more loosely adapted and not controlled by foreign directors or choreographers. They also emulate operettas, making them suitable for the earlier, more classical singing style.

⁵⁶ Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 78–82.

⁵⁷ Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 13; Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 120.

⁵⁸ During a live session in the small chanson bar *Bon-Bon* in Tokyo in the spring of 2020, Kodama Ai demonstrated how she had been taught to sing low notes in a ‘cute’ musumeyaku-like way.

⁵⁹ There is also a classical musumeyaku mode of speech very close to the cliché opera diva speaking in the mask. While this might once have been the norm for musumeyaku speech, it is no longer used for younger or more contemporary characters, who instead speak in ‘cute’ high-pitched voices or in a more ‘natural’ and relaxed range. It is, however, still used for historical Japanese settings and for aristocratic ladies overall, such as Marie Antoinette in *The Rose of Versailles*.

to a style influenced by musicals.⁶⁰ Although the Takarazuka Revue has been staging Broadway musicals such as *Guys & Dolls* (1984–5, dir. Sakai Sumio; restaged 2002, 2015) and *Singin' in the Rain* (*Ame ni utaeba* 2003, dir. Nakamura Kazunori; restaged 2008, 2018) for half of its 100-year history, Eri was referring to a more recent wave of influence that could be said to originate with the success of the French pop musical *Roméo et Juliette* (2010, dir. Koike Shuuichirou; restaged 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2021). This and other French imports fit in with a more youthful pop idol style lately adopted by the company. Although the Takarazuka Revue mainly relies on in-house composers, it hired French musical writer Dove Attia to compose for *Casanova* (2019, dir. Ikuta Hirokazu), after staging three of his musicals within a few years. Another influence for the adoption of a foreign musical singing style is Frank Wildhorn, who composed *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (2008, dir. Koike Shuuichirou; restaged 2010 and 2017). Wildhorn is also the sole composer for the Takarazuka Revue original productions *Never Say Goodbye: Aru ai no kiseki* (2006, dir. Koike Shuuichirou; restaged 2022) and *Hikari furu michi: kakumeika, Maximilien Robespierre* (2017–8, dir. Ikuta Hirokazu).⁶¹ After staying below a tenth of the total repertoire for decades, the proportion of imported musicals closed in on a fifth during the late 2010s. Although the trend appears to be abating (perhaps due to Covid-related budget cuts), in-house composers are increasingly imitating the style of the more recent imports.

The turn towards a less-classical singing style is only a burgeoning trend, and musumeyaku are still expected to be able to produce classical-sounding high notes when singing the wide repertoire of nostalgic Takarazuka Revue anthems. As a result, many of them have two different voices: a quasi-classical one and a pop musical belt resembling the contemporary version of the otokoyaku chest voice. For instance, top musumeyaku Maaya Kiho (2012–21), one of their more accomplished singers recently, uses a belting sound to suit songs written in that style, for example, in *Hikari furu michi*, but can also fire off high notes like an operetta soprano when required, for example, in *On the Twentieth Century, Nijusseikigou ni notte* (2019, dir. Harada Ryou).⁶²

Eri Chiaki cites *Elisabeth* as an example of the foreign musical style influencing the Takarazuka Revue. *Elisabeth* is the Takarazuka Revue's single most popular imported musical, staged ten times since 1996, always directed by Koike Shuuichirou. Even before the first full Takarazuka Revue production, some of its songs were used in the musical *Lost Angel* (1993, dir. Koike Shuuichirou) and the revue *Exotical* (1995, dir. Sakai Sumio). However, the foreign influence on the Takarazuka Revue was not immediate, as Eri Chiaki is mainly referring to changes in the decade since she left the company. Rather, the Takarazuka Revue has adapted *Elisabeth* to suit their style, with collaboration from the original writer Michael Kunze and composer Sylvester Levay. Typically, the musumeyaku playing the title role have used a semi-classical vocal production rather than the belting techniques of European productions. *Elisabeth*'s big song 'Watashi dake ni' ('Ich gehör nur mir') has been raised a semitone, changing the climactic final high note from ab^2 to a^2 , though the tessitura is mainly low.⁶³

⁶⁰ Takarazuka Revue Fan Podcast, 'Special #13: Interview with Eri Chiaki', *caithon.net* (11 September 2018), <https://caithon.net/takarazukapodcast/2018/09/11/special-13-interview-with-eri-chiaki/>.

⁶¹ There is an earlier original musical based on *The Scarlet Pimpernel, Beni hakobe* (1979, dir. Shibata Yukihiko; restaged 1995). The Takarazuka Revue also staged numerous different adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* throughout its history. A noteworthy one is *Romeo to Juliet '99* (1999, dir. Ueda Keiko), part of the Bow Hall Shakespeare series, which employs classical-sounding music, ballet-style dancing and an elaborate visual style mainly in black-and-white using religious iconography.

⁶² For copyright reasons a full video of *Nijusseikigou ni notte* has not been released. I watched the 2pm performance on 29 March and the 11am performance on 31 March 2019 at Tokyu Theater Orb in Tokyo.

⁶³ The key change might be because their first *Elisabeth*, Hanafusa Mari, who went on to play the role in productions by the Toho musical company, could not produce a good note on g^{\flat} . The lowest note in the above-mentioned song 'Turandot' written for her is g .

With regards to Der Tod, the top otokoyaku role, his 'Saigo no dansu' ('Der letzte Tanz') has been raised a minor third and the lowest note modified from c to g, which makes f the new bottom note. It remains reasonably within a tenor range, with room for upward improvisations at the end. Ichiro Maki (1982–96), the original Takarazuka Revue Der Tod, is famous for her singing and has rich, deep low notes with a wide, slow vibrato that could be compared to a bass-baritone voice. She produces a clear, resonant, operatic g^b^2 before climbing down to g^b and landing on g^b^1 .⁶⁴ Shizuki Asato (1987–2000), also admired for her singing in a rock and gospel style with wailing and growling, hits the g^b^2 in a voice resembling the falsetto of metal singers, while less accomplished singers playing the part simplify it to only the downward run from g^b^1 to g^b . 'Kitsch', a semi-spoken song performed by the second- or third-ranked otokoyaku in the role of Luigi Lucheni, retains its original key within a limited tenor range.⁶⁵

The role of Sophie is also worth mentioning, as it provides an opportunity for classical singing in a contralto range. It is typically performed by a senior musumeyaku though it has also been performed by otokoyaku Natsumi You (1976–present) and Mirai Yuuki (1993–2010). Natsumi You is still with the company as an actor and is rarely given song solos; as Sophie she displays a surprisingly beautiful contralto colour. Mirai Yuuki, on the other hand, was one of the company's song specialists with a range from powerful low notes suitable for blues and gospel to more classical-sounding high notes.⁶⁶ Among musumeyaku, accomplished singer Izumo Aya (1983–2008) performed the role twice. Stickland mentions her vocal range, enabling her to sing both the otokoyaku and the musumeyaku parts in a comical duet in the revue *Papalagi* (1993, dir. Kusano Akira).⁶⁷ In the Christmas show *Action!* (1995, dir. Miki Akio) she performed a comical yet impressive rendition of Schubert's 'Ave Maria' in German, exaggeratedly rolling her 'r' sounds. She retired from the Takarazuka Revue with another role requiring a semi-operatic singing style, Maria in *Me and My Girl*, the Revue's second most popular imported musical, performed nine times since 1987.

Senior song specialists such as Izumo Aya and Mirai Yuuki are allowed to transcend the more typical gendered ranges and timbres employed by the Takarazuka Revue. Senior musumeyaku Miho Keiko (1989–present), arguably the most prominent song specialist in the Revue at present, is capable of producing operatic notes in head voice but usually sings in a lower range, employing soul- or rock-style wailing and roaring techniques. Compared with the darker and huskier chanson voices preferred earlier in the company's history, her voice has a smoother, more nasal sound closer to contemporary musical belters, and increasingly common among otokoyaku as well as musumeyaku within the last decade. I find it symptomatic of the more general trend in Takarazuka Revue singing styles that she replaced Yashiro Kou (1968–2008) in the superior troupe. Yashiro Kou started out as an otokoyaku and even though she switched to musumeyaku after a few years she never adjusted her singing voice from the otokoyaku range. She has a deep, rich and grainy voice suitable for jazz, blues and chanson, similar to otokoyaku singers of her generation. Another watershed moment in the vocal history of Takarazuka is the recent retirement of senior otokoyaku star Todoroki Yuu, whose darkly husky and hollow booming voice is unmatched among contemporary otokoyaku.⁶⁸ Although many

⁶⁴ She retired from the Takarazuka Revue with this role and later went on to play Elisabeth in Toho productions.

⁶⁵ *Elisabeth Special Selection Album* (Takarazuka Creative Arts, 2014), CD.

⁶⁶ The affiliated Toho musical company employs many former Takarazuka Revue stars but casts male artists in the male parts. In their productions of *Elisabeth*, Sophie is often played by former otokoyaku.

⁶⁷ Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics*, 120.

⁶⁸ After retiring from her top-star position in one of the regular troupes in 2002, Todoroki Yuu held a unique position as star of the superior troupe, and crowned her career with roles such as Oedipus Rex, Doctor Zhivago and Che Guevara.

otokoyaku still produce a darkened, guttural, recognizable ‘otokoyaku sound’, most of what might be referred to as ‘grain’ has disappeared from their voices since the twentieth century. When combined with the new musical-inspired musumeyaku sound, the result is that the vocal gender difference between otokoyaku and musumeyaku is diminishing and they are once again beginning to sound alike, this time as two mid-range belted mixed voices, instead of the two soprano voices of the first half-century of the Takarazuka Revue’s history.

To sum up, the Takarazuka Revue has developed its own ‘sound’, with vocal conventions influenced by various styles such as operetta, chanson, jazz, pop and musicals, and performers capable of performing in multiple different styles. Although otokoyaku have used belting techniques since the 1960s in the sense that they are pushing up in their chest voices rather than switching into the head voice, the resulting sound has often been more like the ‘classical belting’ of a tenor or baritone. The typical musumeyaku sound has long been at least quasi-classical in sound, and only in the last decade or two have top musumeyaku begun to use a pop- or musical-style voice production regularly. Even at their most classical-sounding, Takarazuka Revue singers do not have the full legato, sustained vibrato or volume of opera singing, and of course they use microphones. However, there is still a marked difference between the head-voice resonance and vibrato of the Revue’s classical-style singers and the musical mannerisms of its pop-style singers, such as belting or adding a fabricated vibrato only at the end of phrases. In this sense, the traditional Takarazuka Revue sound rather resembles that of quasi- or semi-classical crooners and warblers in early to mid-twentieth-century popular music.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Throughout this article I have argued for the connection between the Takarazuka Revue and opera. While connections to other music theatre forms such as kabuki, Parisian revue and Western musicals have been explored to some extent in previous research, the connection to opera is mainly alluded to in accounts of the company’s early history. As I hope to have shown, the ties to opera are more persistent than that. Although the music style of the Takarazuka Revue has never been strictly classical, it was an important part of the original concept to use Western classical music to impart an air of modernity. Tastes change, and classical music has been complemented by tango, chanson, jazz, pop, rock and modern musicals. However, even as singing styles have been adjusted to accommodate these new genres, the Takarazuka Revue has retained its distinct flavour. An all-female music theatre company featuring trouser roles as its major selling point and creating the vast majority of its stage productions in-house, it resists assimilation into the mainstream form of musicals. Rather than the music as such, it is the atmosphere that resonates with opera: the grand gestures, the grand romances, the lavish costumes and sets. Where else can you witness women serenading other women in velvety voices, dancing with other women in crisp black tailcoats, or rescuing other women in swordfights?

This article is only a preliminary study of opera connections and influences in the repertoire, gender roles and singing styles of the Takarazuka Revue. Much research remains to be done on the specifics of vocal techniques and voice instruction historically, and in the context of other music theatre forms. I have also not touched upon the influence of traditional Japanese singing styles on the Takarazuka Revue, or the extent to which the

⁶⁹ For more on this middlebrow genre, which corresponds nicely to the middlebrow aspirations of the Takarazuka Revue, see John Howland, ‘The Classy Populuxe Songbook’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 73/2 (2020), 348–58.

Revue has in turn influenced the performance practice of Japanese folk or fusion music during its century-long history. Additionally, there is room for further research on the Takarazuka Revue's many opera adaptations, for instance the extent to which these adaptations reference or adapt the original opera music. The compositional style of the company's in-house composers and the specifics of writing for otokoyaku and musumeyaku voices might provide another fruitful topic for musicological research on the Takarazuka Revue.

Tove Solander finished her PhD in English Literature from Umeå University in 2013 with the dissertation "'Creating the Senses": Sensation in the Work of Shelley Jackson', after earning her MA in Women's Studies at the University of York and Uppsala University. Her previous scholarly publications in English and Swedish in journals such as *Somatechnics* cover topics of embodiment and sense impressions in relation to literary texts, as well as queer and feminist methodologies within literary studies. She studies Japanese and has studied classical singing for three years at college-preparatory level. Currently she works as a lecturer in Gender Studies at Stockholm University.

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