

Introduction

Spectators come to the theater to hear the subtext. They can read the text at home.

Konstantin Stanislavski,
quoted in Moore 1988 (1960):28

When [Takarazuka] “stars” embody song-and-dance artifacts from America, they preserve the surface but change the context. . . . Old schmaltz become new and transcends its banality. . . . You don’t notice the spin you spin with. You can only see theirs. They can only see yours.

Carr 1989:48

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I first saw them on Japanese television in 1976: tall, handsome women with short, slick hair and husky voices—cool, confident, and dashing in their chic suits.¹ They were the players of men’s roles in the all-female Takarazuka Revue (figure 1). Intrigued by these most unsterotypical women, I began to collect sundry information on Takarazuka and its cross-dressed stars, and gradually, I became aware of the high profile the Revue had occupied in Japanese popular culture ever since its inaugural performance in 1914. Revue posters brighten the interiors of trains and railroad stations; its shows and stars are featured in popular magazines; the splashy trailers for the latest Takarazuka spectacle appear regularly on television; and the actors are frequent guests on talk and game shows.

The Golden Wings (*Habatake ōgon no tsubasa yo*) was my initiation into the rococo world of the Takarazuka Revue. The musical opened in Tokyo in April 1985, after a two-month run at the Revue’s home theater in Takarazuka city near Osaka. It was billed as the “*sayonara* performance” of Asami Rei, a leading “man” who was retiring that month after fifteen years with the company to pursue a career in the wider world of show business. Set in northern Italy in the thirteenth century, *The Golden Wings* revolves around the antics of a ruthless lord,

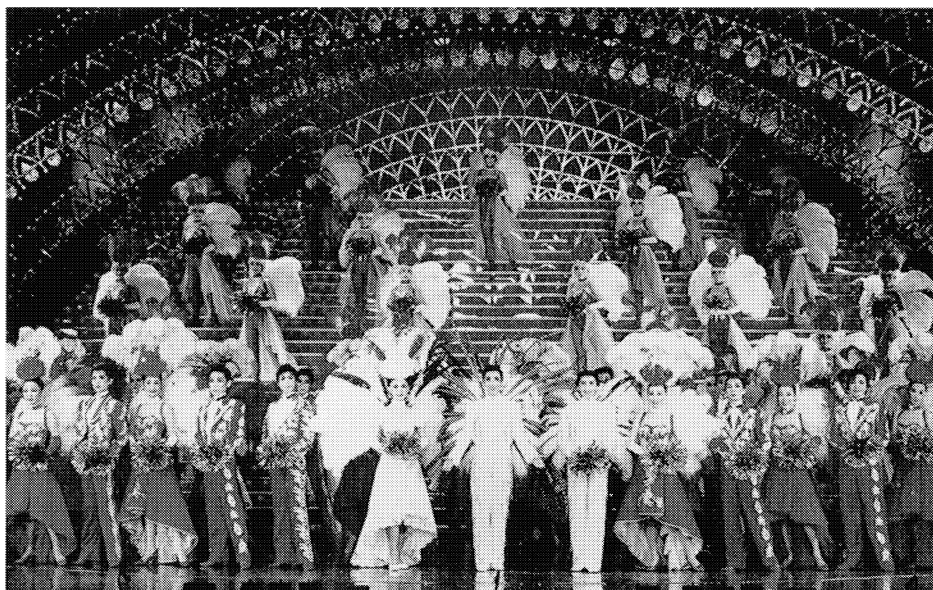


Figure 1. Takarazuka today: The Snow Troupe in the finale of *La Passion* (*Ra passhon*, 1989). The beplumed cast—the leading actors are wearing white—stand in front of and on the Revue's trademark giant, illuminated staircase. From Hashimoto (1994:138).

Vittorio Ala d'Oro, "who is in truth a peace-loving man" (*Habatake ōgon no tsubasa yo*, 1985:49). He forces his deceased rival's daughter Clarice into marriage and then attempts to seduce (or rape?) her on their wedding night—earlier that day, she had tried to stab him. The seduction scene was executed onstage in a bizarre way: as Vittorio climbed into Clarice's canopy bed, the stage blackened and an illuminated, rotating mirror ball splattered the audience with colorful dots. As the dots swirled around the auditorium, the anxious woman's feverish thoughts were "heard" over the loudspeakers: "Stop it! Stop it! I don't want to think about anything anymore. I don't want to feel anything. . . . Ahh, that's so cool and nice. Someone's cool hands are gently caressing my forehead. Who is it? Whose are they, those gentle hands" (38). A frisson pulsed through the audience. Clarice subsequently falls in love with Vittorio, and, dodging assassination attempts and other nefarious intrigues, they live happily ever after (figure 2).

I was hooked—not by the retrograde, if steamy, sexual politics of



Figure 2. *The Golden Wings*. Asami Rei as Vittorio Ala d'Oro and Ichiro Maki as Clarice. From Hashimoto (1994:130).

the story, but by the mostly female audience whose intense absorption in the wrenching action onstage made the auditorium sizzle with eroticized energy. During the intermission, I chatted with the “old girl” fans sitting next to me and exchanged comments with other spectators milling about the refreshment stands, all of whom had expert

opinions about Asami Rei, *The Golden Wings*, and the Revue in general. I bought all the official fan magazines and photograph albums on display in the main lobby, and after the show, I tucked myself into the crowd of fans waiting for their favorite actors to emerge from the dressing room before vanishing into the mysterious night. My first impressions of the Takarazuka Revue convinced me that there was a very interesting story to be found behind the glitter in the complex relationships interweaving the actors, the fans, the administration, and other parties, including media critics. An exploration and analysis of these intricate relationships forms one of the repeating, looping themes of my book, which is thus not a sustained piece of theater criticism.

In the following brief history of the Takarazuka Revue I emphasize those features central to my general subject of sexual politics and popular culture in modern Japan. This introduction to the theater frames and contextualizes a summary of the chapters.

REVIEWING THE REVUE

The all-female Takarazuka Revue (Takarazuka kagekidan) was founded in 1913 in the hot springs resort of Takarazuka by Kobayashi Ichizō (1873–1957), the Hankyū railroad and department store tycoon, impresario, and two-time cabinet minister.² Kobayashi was motivated to create an all-female revue in part as a novel solution to his financial woes. Two years earlier in the village of Takarazuka, west of Osaka, he had opened and then quickly closed a spa that included Japan's first indoor swimming pool. He was keen to develop the area to increase traffic on the new railroad line he had established. The spa, a Victorian-orientalist structure named Paradise (Paradaisu), attracted few guests. Kobayashi's failure to proscribe mixed bathing and the lack of heaters to warm the icy water contributed to its lack of success. Following the precedent set by the Mitsukoshi Dry Goods Store (now Department Store) in Osaka, which had established a Western-style band of boy sopranos and instrumentalists in 1911 to entertain customers, Kobayashi recruited twenty girls, trained them to sing and dance, gave them each a stage name, and scheduled their first public performance in April 1914 (Kobayashi 1961b:445–52).³ Converting the pool into the Paradise Theater “made good business sense,” and the Revue was promoted as “wholesome family entertainment.” Orig-

nally called the Takarazuka Choir (Takarazuka shōkantai), Kobayashi changed the name within five months to the Takarazuka Girls' Opera Training Association (Takarazuka shōjokageki yōseikai).⁴ This modification, and specifically the addition of *shōjo* (girl), set the enduring public image of the Revue, even though *shōjo* was removed when the name was changed one last time in 1940. Since the 1920s, the Revue's actors have been called "Takarasiennes" (*Takarajiennu*), after Parisiennes, in recognition of the early influence of the French revue. They include *otokoyaku*, who play the roles of men, and *musumeyaku*, who play the roles of women. Approximately 700 people at present enable Takarazuka to function. These include 350–400 performers and 300 specialists, including producers, directors, writers, costumers, set designers, instructors, and two thirty-five-piece orchestras.

The 3,000-seat Takarazuka Grand Theater was completed in 1924, the largest Japanese theater of its kind at the time.⁵ It remains one component of an expansive entertainment complex—the name was changed from Paradise to Familyland (Fuamirirando) in 1960—that comprises a library, theater arts museum, botanical garden, entomology museum, amusement park, and zoo noted for its white tiger, together with the spa. A similarly large theater was opened in Tokyo in 1934. In 1919 Kobayashi established the forerunner of the present-day Takarazuka Music Academy. Originally an integral part of the Revue, whose actors were Academy students, the two were divided into autonomous institutions in 1939. Kobayashi required that all Takarasiennes must be graduates of the two-year Academy.⁶ Today, with two huge theaters in Takarazuka and Tokyo and regularly scheduled regional and international tours, not to mention television and radio broadcasts, the Revue remains one of the most widely recognized and watched of the so-called theaters for the masses (*taishū engeki*) that were created in the early twentieth century.

The widespread popularity and social impact of the Revue is evident in the hundreds of articles that have appeared in a wide range of publications since its founding. Kobayashi, with his entrepreneurial zeal, and the flashy revue theaters that mushroomed in the late teens and early 1920s in Japan were representative of the volatile, Janus-faced culture of consumption described so richly by Edward Seidensticker (1990) and Miriam Silverberg (1990, 1991, 1992, 1993). The emergence of "a middle-class culture organized around new conceptions of family life and leisure activities" clashed with the ex-

pansion and politicization of the Japanese industrial workforce (Silverberg 1990:225; see also Gordon 1991). My focus will be the ambivalence that characterized the discourse of gender and sexuality then and continues to the present day, revealed in public debates about the meaning and significance of women—as revue actors, as fans, as delinquents, as wives and mothers, as workers, as consumers.

Takarazuka spawned over a dozen copycat all-female revues in the 1920s, as reported in the mainstream press (“Karakuri no ōi shōjokagekidan” 1925; “Nisemono Takarazuka kageki” 1923). The Tokyo Girls’ Revue (Tōkyō shōjokagekidan), established in 1917, was modeled after Takarazuka and plagiarized from the premier revue (Ōzasa 1986:73; Aoyagi 1924:26–28). Most notable was the Shōchiku Revue founded in 1928 in Asakusa, a major working-class theater district in Tokyo, which quickly became Takarazuka’s main rival in every respect. An Osaka branch of the Shōchiku Revue had been founded eight years earlier in 1920 to compete with Takarazuka on the older troupe’s home turf; it broke with the Tokyo company after World War II. Both were formally disbanded in 1990, although special performances are scheduled occasionally.⁷ From the start, the Shōchiku Revue was cast as the opposite of Takarazuka. For example, while Takarazuka productions were stereotyped as naive and romantic, the Shōchiku actors performed allegedly more mature and erotic revues. Fans partial to one revue rarely attended performances staged by the rival troupe. Moreover, after the Tokyo Takarazuka Theater was established in 1934, their regional and class distinctions were emphasized. Takarazuka was cast as an “uptown” theater attractive to girls from wealthy households, and Shōchiku as a “lowtown” theater appealing to a blue-collar clientele. Other, much smaller, Tokyo revues included the Casino Follies (opened in 1929) in Asakusa and the Moulin Rouge (opened in 1931) in Shinjuku, a student and intellectual center at the time (see Seidensticker 1990:68–87). The Nichigeki Dancing Team was established under Shōchiku’s auspices in 1936 as a revue more overtly erotic than either Shōchiku or Takarazuka (“Adeyū NDT ‘hanseiki’” 1977). These theaters and cabarets, along with cafés and coffee shops, were known generically as “revues,” although theater critics drew distinctions between grand revues, operetta revues, variety shows, and grand operettas (Ashihara E. 1936:6). Practically speaking, the Takarazuka Revue was an eclectic mix of all these types.

Takarazuka productions include Japanese-style classical dramas and historical subjects, such as the *Tale of Genji*; European-style and Broadway-based performances, such as *Mon Paris* and *West Side Story*; and folk dances from all over the world. Kobayashi, a prolific essayist, wrote many of the earliest scripts under the pen name Ikeda Hatao. The first stage shows were based on folktales and children's stories, and reviewers found them to be above all "cute" (*kawaii*) (e.g., Nishimura 1916). Within five years, Takarazuka was producing more mature musicals with a romantic twist. *Parisette*, staged in 1930, a year after the first Western talkie was shown in Japan,⁸ marked the Revue's transition to a modern and erotic style that, with the exception of the martial dramas of the late 1930s and early 1940s, has persisted to the present day. From this production onward, the actors ceased to apply the traditional whiteface (*oshiroi*), wearing instead modern greasepaint that accentuated their own features, distinguished skin colors, and demarcated more clearly a character's gender and ethnicity (figure 3). Most Takarazuka performances today consist of a musical drama, followed by a revue with quick changes of scene and subject, and ending in a finale featuring the Revue's trademark—the entire cast cascades down a giant illuminated staircase in glittering tuxedos and gowns, from which sprout huge ostrich plumes, for a final bow (see figure 1). Generally speaking, with the exception of wartime revues, contemporary Japan and Japanese were not and are not now represented on the Takarazuka stage, which instead offers audiences a chance to dream of other lives in other worlds.

THE CALL OF DUTY

The Takarazuka Revue was among the modern theaters that marked the return of women to a major public stage after being banned from public (i.e., Kabuki) performances in 1629 by the Confucian-oriented Tokugawa Shogunate.⁹ At the time the Revue was founded, actresses (*joyū*) were still publicly denounced as "defiled women" who led profligate lives. For example, Mori Ritsuko (1890–1961), one of the best known Shinpa (New School) actresses, was erased from the graduation register of the girls' school she had attended when the administrators discovered that she had pursued a career in theater (Ozaki 1986:14–15).¹⁰ Theater critics proclaimed the new coinage *joyū*, with its connotations of superiority and excellence, preferable to the older

Figure 3. The early Revue with and without whiteface. Right, a scene from *Five Daughters* (*Gonin musume*, 1920) with the childlike actors in whiteface. Opposite, in 1930 the application of whiteface was discontinued, and the Revue's cast appeared more adult, as evident in the scene from *Rosarita* (*Rosariita*, 1936). From *The Takarazuka: Takarazuka kageki 80shūnen kinen* (1994:84) and Hagiwara (1954:13).



term *onnayakusha*, with its historical connotations of itinerant actresses who were associated with unlicensed prostitution (Asagawa 1921). It seems that Kobayashi founded the Takarazuka Music Academy not only to train students in the Western and Japanese theatrical arts, but also to reassure parents that their daughters were under the constant supervision of Academy officials who took responsibility for preventing the young women from falling into a decadent lifestyle (see his essay on the lifestyle of actresses in Kobayashi 1961a:370–73).

The Academy solicits applications from females between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. Although those in the first group of performers were barely in their teens, the average age of entry-level students was soon increased and today most applicants are nineteen years old. As required, they are either junior high or high school graduates, or they are enrolled in high school. Academy officials continue to claim that the young women are from “good families,” and although detailed information about their socioeconomic status is kept confidential, “good” is widely understood as “affluent.” Students and Academy of-



ficials alike acknowledge that without the generous support of their parents, the aspiring Takarasiennes would be unable to attend the private singing and dance lessons necessary to keep them competitive.¹¹ According to statistical data provided to me by the principal's office, 75 percent of the students recruited between 1983 and 1987 reside in Tokyo, Osaka, and Hyōgo prefectures. That percentage has shrunk to about 50 percent today (*Fushigi no kuni no Takarazuka* 1993:101). Graduation from the Academy marks a Takarasienne's public debut as a specialist in one gender and enables her to perform onstage as a bona fide member of one of the five troupes constituting the Revue.

The five troupes are Flower (*hana*), Moon (*tsuki*), Snow (*yuki*), Star (*hoshi*), and Sky (*sora*). The Flower and Moon Troupes, established in 1921, are the oldest. The Snow Troupe was formed in 1924, and the Star Troupe in 1933. Each of these troupes possesses a distinctive character: the Flower Troupe is known for its florid but elegant style; the Moon Troupe for its exquisite charm; the Snow Troupe for its restrained grace; and the Star Troupe for its showiness (Hashimoto 1984:48; Ta-

kagi Shirō 1976:65–67). Dividing the actors into troupes and sometimes rotating them helped organize the growing number of applicants and meet the growing demand for Takarazuka performances.¹² This demand prompted the company to create a fifth troupe, whose name, Sky (*sora*), was selected from those submitted in a public competition in the fall of 1996. The new troupe debuted in Hong Kong in January 1998 and in March at the main theater. A third Takarazuka Theater is reportedly under construction near Tokyo Disneyland, and the art deco Tokyo Takarazuka Theater will be replaced by a futuristic high rise scheduled to open in January 2001 (“Takarazuka ni dai 5 no kumi” 1997; “Takarazuka to Get New Tokyo Theater” 1996).¹³

Each troupe is overseen by a (male) member of the Revue administration appointed to that post. The internal hierarchy consists of a troupe manager (*kumichō*) and a vice-manager (*fukukumichō*), drawn from the ranks of the senior actors, and several chairpersons (*zachō*) who include the leading romantic man (*nimaimē*),¹⁴ the leading woman (*musumeyaku*), the leading comic man (*sanmaimē*), and the supporting actors (*wakiyaku*). Each troupe has a leading man and woman, often paired as a “golden combination” (*goruden combi*), making it easier to satisfy more fans and their diverse tastes than if only one leading star or couple represented the Revue as a whole.

The Takarazuka Music Academy presently provides a two-year curriculum designed to teach the students ensemble playing and to equip them with the skills necessary to play a variety of roles. Forty hours a week during the first year are devoted to lessons in voice, musical instruments, music history, Japanese, Western, and modern dance, acting and theater theory, cultural history, and etiquette. The second-year curriculum is essentially the same (Ueda 1986 [1976]:48). During a three-month-long field trip in 1987, I was invited to attend several classes and to join the students for their weekly tea ceremony lesson at a nearby tea house. The young women are also drilled in the proper manner of walking and bowing by local Self-Defense Force personnel, whose presence helps clinch the overwhelmingly martial tenor of everyday life in the Academy.

The Academy, widely acknowledged as one of the best performing arts schools in Japan, is very competitive: of the 734 applicants in 1985, only 42 (or one in 17.5) were accepted. Since then, the number of applications has nearly tripled; consequently, the chance of acceptance was far lower in 1993, when 1,839 young women applied for

40 openings—one place for every 46 applicants (*Fushigi no kuni no Takarazuka* 1993:102). Aspiring students are judged on the basis of their overall physique and musical talents, in addition to their academic achievements. Rumors that some parents buy their daughter's enrollment are commonplace. The annual tuition averages nearly 300,000 yen (about \$3,000 at the current exchange rate), and the students must themselves purchase the school's gray, military-style uniform (Ueda 1986 [1976]:33). The switch from *hakama*, Japanese formal wear, to Western, military-style outfits was made in 1939.

Most of the students live with one or two roommates in the Violet (*sumire*) Dormitories,¹⁵ where the administration seeks to socialize the young women into a life of discipline and hierarchical relationships. All of the residents are required to clean the dorms, but the first-year or junior (*kōhai*) students are also responsible for cleaning the classrooms and rehearsal studios under the watchful eyes of the second-year or senior (*senpai*) students. The cleaning is done by hand without the benefit of vacuum cleaners, for Academy officials are convinced that a labor-intensive cleaning regimen builds character, ensures humility, and boosts stamina in their young charges.¹⁶ The junior-senior relationships formed at this time are maintained throughout and even beyond the young women's tenure in the Takarazuka Revue. A 10:00 P.M. curfew is strictly maintained, and first-year students are not allowed to venture outside the campus itself. Males are scrupulously forbidden from the premises with the exception of fathers and brothers, who, like all guests, are limited to the lobbies (Ueda 1986 [1976]:118–19). Although the attrition rate is not publicized, a number of students drop out midway through the spartan regimen. Many of the young women continue to live in the dormitory after they join the Revue proper, although some—leading Takarasiennes in particular—are able to maintain their own apartments and houses, sometimes with the financial support of affluent fans.

GENDERING PERFORMANCE

Upon their successful application to the Takarazuka Music Academy, the student actors are assigned what I refer to as their “secondary” genders. Unlike “primary” gender, which is assigned at birth on the basis of an infant's genitalia, secondary gender is based on both physical (but not genital) and sociopsychological criteria: namely, height,